



COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION
HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE

**Audit Report
on the
University of Venda**

Report of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) to the University of Venda

Executive Summary

May 2011

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Acronyms

ADCRE	Advanced Certificate in Remedial Education
AEMIS	Automated Emergency Management Information System
ALC	Academic Liaison Committee
APC	Academic Planning Committee
ASAUV	Academic Staff Association of the University of Venda
CE	Community Engagement
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHETL	Centre for Higher Education, Training and Learning
CREST	Centre for Research in Science and Technology
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
ECS	English Communication Skills
EMC	Executive Management Committee
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
IOP	Institutional Operating Plan
IPQA	Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance
MSTE	Mathematics, Science and Technology Education
NEHAWU	National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NRF	National Research Foundation
PPR	Programme Portfolio Review
PGDS	Provincial Growth and Development Strategy
PQM	Programme Qualification Mix
PWC	Price Waterhouse Coopers

QAP	Quality Assurance and Promotion
RPC	Research and Publications Committee
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SACPLAN	South African Council of Town Planners
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SANTED	South African-Norway Tertiary Education Development Programme
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAQI	South African Quality Institute
SASCS	Student Academic Support and Counselling Services
SENEX	Executive Committee of Senate
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SMC	Senior Management Committee
SRA	Student Representative Assembly
SRC	Students' Representative Council
TSQ	Tracer Study Questionnaires
UBE	UNIVEN Business Enterprise
UNIVEN	University of Venda
VC	Vice-Chancellor

OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Introduction

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) which was constituted as the Quality Council for Higher Education in terms of the Higher Education Amendment Act of 2008 and the National Qualifications Act of 2008, has a statutory responsibility to conduct institutional audits of higher education institutions.

The Audit of the University of Venda (herein after referred to as UNIVEN) was conducted by the HEQC in terms of its mandate. This document reports on the audit process and findings based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), appendices and other documents provided by UNIVEN; supplementary documentation requested from the University, and interviews and observations made during the audit visit that took place between 6 and 10 September 2010. The Panel also consulted the Institutional Profile of the University of Venda prepared by the Advice and Monitoring Directorate of the CHE.

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 2005 the University was informed about its participation in the institutional audit. At the request of the University, the date was changed to September 2010. In 2009, the Executive Director secured the consent of the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbatia, and the senior management team at UNIVEN that the University would participate in an institutional audit in September 2010.

The University of Venda consequently developed an institutional audit project plan that was approved by Senate, and established a project management team responsible for the implementation of the project plan. In May 2007 the preparations for the audit were suspended, owing to an institutional crisis (SER: 6). In 2009, the Vice-Chancellor assigned the coordination of the audit to the DVC Academic, working in close collaboration with the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance Directorate. Subsequently, a project manager was appointed in January 2010, and six task teams were also formed. At that stage, UNIVEN conducted its institutional self-evaluation and produced a Self-Evaluation Report and supporting documents that were submitted to HEQC as scheduled in June 2010.

At the request of the CHE, and with the approval of the Vice-Chancellor, 15 senior managers and senior academics were trained in preparing for an institutional audit. In addition, three senior managers participated in other HEQC institutional audit panels with the DVC Academic participating in one as a chairperson. The training afforded UNIVEN valuable experience and insight that greatly assisted with the preparations for its institution's audit (SER: 7).

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 University of Venda and Appendix D contains the audit visit schedule.

The HEQC constituted an Audit Panel consisting of senior academics and senior administrators from the Higher Education sector, all of whom had taken part either in previous audits or in HEQC audit preparation workshops. An Audit Portfolio meeting was convened in Pretoria on 21–22 July 2010 during which the Audit Panel considered the SER and identified additional documents to be requested from the University of Venda prior to the audit visit.

The audit officer and the audit administrator undertook a preparatory visit to the University of Venda on 27 July 2010. 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 UNIVEN.

A sub-Panel consisting of Prof Moses Mbewe, Mr Nico Stofberg, Dr Llewellyn MacMaster, Prof Nobesuthu Sokhela, Prof Rod Bally, Dr Manyane Makua, and Dr Tembeka Mpako-Ntusi, supported by the following HEQC staff, Ms Belinda Wort, Mr Emmanuel Matsebatlela and Ms Ziyanda Ngxabazi, carried out a campus visit to the University on 12 August 2010.

The audit visit took place from 6 –10 September 2010. The Audit Panel conducted interviews with a wide range of UNIVEN staff, students and other stakeholders (See Appendix D: Audit visit Schedule). The interviews were completed on 9 September and verbal feedback was given to the Vice-Chancellor and his team on 10 September 2010.

Open sessions were also available for any staff members, students or members of the community to meet the audit Panel and make submissions. Some individuals of the University community made use of the opportunity. In all, the audit Panel interviewed a total of 415 individuals during the audit visit including:

- Council members
- The Vice-Chancellor and members of the executive management team;
- Members of Senate and committees;
- Deans of schools and heads of department;
- Academic and academic support staff;
- Professional and administrative staff;
- Undergraduate and postgraduate students;
- Representatives of staff unions and associations;
- Representatives of the SRA;
- Civic and community representatives; and
- Alumni.

This report reflects the audit process and findings based on the SER provided by UNIVEN, the presentation of the Institutional Profile by the Advice and Monitoring Directorate of the CHE, supplementary documentation requested from the University, and interviews and observations made during the audit visit. Every effort has been made to understand the complex nature of the context in which UNIVEN operates as well as the quality arrangements at the University at the time of the audit visit, and to base the Panel's findings on the documentation submitted, the interviews held and the observations made.

It is expected that UNIVEN 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 University of Venda. The HEQC expects UNIVEN to submit an improvement plan based on the Audit Report five months after the publication of the Audit Report.

The HEQC would like to thank UNIVEN for the highly co-operative manner in which it participated in the audit process. The HEQC also expresses its appreciation for the openness and confidence demonstrated by the Vice-Chancellor and his management team in allowing the audit Panel to conduct its work. Efficient preparation by UNIVEN resulted in a trouble-free audit that enabled the auditors to focus their attention on the main purposes of the audit. The hospitality and assistance of UNIVEN staff is greatly appreciated. Prof Xikombiso Mbhenyane, the Project Manager, Mr Reuben Mukhavhuli, and their team, are thanked for the preparation of the documentation and their efforts made in the organisation of the audit visit.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Brief Overview of the University of Venda

1. In 2002, the University of Venda was part of a government-led restructuring of the higher education system by which it was identified to become a comprehensive university; that is, a university offering general formative, professional and vocational qualifications.
2. The University of Venda (UNIVEN) is one of two rural institutions providing higher education for the people of the Limpopo Province. Since its days as a homeland university, the University has expanded its student enrolments to such an extent that its carrying capacity has come increasingly under pressure.
3. Currently, UNIVEN has over 11000 enrolled students distributed across eight schools. These schools offer qualifications from certificates and undergraduate degrees to postgraduate qualifications. Student enrolment patterns indicate that UNIVEN is predominantly an undergraduate higher education institution. The academic, administrative and support tasks necessary for the functioning of the University are carried by 710 staff members, comprising 343 academics and 367 administration and service staff.

Institutional Mission and Identity

4. The mission and vision, as presented in the 2009–2013 Strategic Plan, indicate UNIVEN's willingness and commitment "to be at the centre of tertiary education for rural and regional development in Southern Africa" and to be "a comprehensive institution that offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in fields of study which

are responsive to the developmental needs of the Southern African region, using appropriate learning methodologies and research” (SER: 30).

5. The realisation of UNIVEN’s mission and vision as translated in the Strategic Plan is not without problems. For example, since its rural character is determined by its location, the Institution has selected agriculture as one of its niche areas that is aligned to provincial developmental priorities. This has been translated into the development of a PQM focused on agriculture, rural development and poverty alleviation, and environmental studies.
6. There are, in the Panel’s view, two issues that need further reflection on the part of the University. First, is the contradiction between this PQM and the profile of UNIVEN’s student enrolments where the difficulty to attract staff and students to agriculture and other rural-related programmes undermines the realisation of this focus. Reversing the historical enrolment trends, as well as resourcing the agriculture programmes appropriately, will require substantive financial investment, but also must include a focused strategy to attract students to a field of study that is apparently not very popular. The Institution has taken some steps to address this challenge, but more will need to be done to give effect to this aspect of the University of Venda’s mission.
7. The second issue is broader and has to do with the role of other schools in making UNIVEN “a university at the centre of tertiary education for rural and regional development in Southern Africa”. While the Panel heard of some ideas in this regard they seem to be isolated and driven by individual initiatives. What this mean for the humanities, business, law and, the natural sciences, is a question that the Panel considers senior management has to answer if the University’s willingness to differentiate itself is to be translated into concrete approaches across academic programmes and research areas.

Recommendation 1

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda improve alignment of its programme offerings and research agendas in the schools with the mission, to make distinct the Institution’s place in the higher education system and its contribution to the development agenda of local and regional communities.

8. The comprehensive character of the Institution presents a different set of challenges. Unlike other HEIs, the comprehensive status of UNIVEN does not derive from a merger with a technikon, but arises from a change in the Institution’s academic offerings. The Panel also heard from academics that the conceptualisation of this change, its resourcing, the organisational and academic implications, including the impact on an already overburdened staff, do not seem to have been discussed at Senate or at the school level. The Panel heard of academics’ resistance to this change not only because of its practical consequences, but also because the introduction of diploma and certificate

level programmes is regarded as lessening the status of the University. This creates a problematic situation and the Panel encourages the University's leadership to frankly engage with these concerns as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 2

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda initiate an institution-wide dialogue about the nature of a comprehensive university and the implications that it has for its academic profile, and the profile of students attracted to the University, in order to clarify misconceptions and ensure that there is sufficient common understanding of the University's identity.

9. The Strategic Plan includes "ensuring institutional sustainability" among its objectives. The Panel concurs with the Institution that this is of vital importance for its future success. One aspect of this sustainability is related to funding and finances. There is, however, another aspect of the institutional sustainability that requires comment, that is, UNIVEN's ability to be recognised as a university, nationally and internationally. This is an aspect of sustainability, which the Institution includes in its notion of transformation and yet is inadequately addressed in the Strategic Plan and in the general institutional discourse. Consequently, the University is encouraged to explore who the most appropriate international partners of UNIVEN would be, given its location, vision and goals.
10. The Panel concurs with senior management that UNIVEN's mission and vision create a strategic niche for the Institution which distinguishes it from other universities in the higher education environment. The Panel noted during interviews that there is an overall endorsement of the vision, mission and values of the Institution among management, staff and students, accompanied by a remarkable commitment on the part of academic staff towards its realisation.

Transformation, Institutional Culture and Equity

11. The SER and interviews with the University leadership indicated that UNIVEN has developed a complex and sophisticated understanding of transformation. This understanding has four main components: the transformation of UNIVEN into a sustainable university able to deliver on its mandate; the conversion of the curriculum along the lines of the comprehensive character of the University; the transformation of the quality of the student experience (at academic, and particularly at the extra-curricular level) – subsumed in this are equity and redress issues as they refer to student success, throughputs and graduations; and finally, issues of institutional culture (Strategic Plan and SER: 31-33).
12. While the Panel understands and supports UNIVEN's commitment to provide access to higher education for the Limpopo youth, and to students from other provinces, the University needs to be able, in terms of infrastructural and human resources, to provide

not simply physical access to the campus but access to a sound student experience. The student to staff ratios are much higher than the DHET norm of 20:1. This has important consequences for the provision of quality teaching and learning.

13. Under these circumstances, equity and transformation at UNIVEN are clearly linked to the University's capacity to provide staff and students with an enabling environment where physical access leads not simply to success (students passing their course and graduating) but epistemological access, that is, competent student participation in the discourses and practices of their disciplines. The Panel acknowledges the commitment and dedication of the University's staff in ensuring the success of students, evident in the number of hours of extra work they are prepared to do to support students.
14. The plight caused by heavy academic staff workloads is aggravated by the serious shortage of adequate administrative support in the schools. This concern was raised by staff at all levels during the interviews, from the executive to senior management and academics. This situation is untenable as it has an impact on the quality of actual teaching and the ability of deans, heads of departments, lecturers and supervisors to discharge their primary responsibilities.

Recommendation 3

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda urgently prioritise increasing the administrative support to academic departments so that academic staff are better able to discharge their academic responsibilities, and establish fair and transparent resource allocation systems for administration and academic units.

15. In relation to staff equity, the majority of academic staff is black and, contrary to other institutions in the country, 92% of academic staff are below the age of 59, and only 7, 4% are between the ages of 60 and 69 years. In terms of qualifications, almost half of the academic staff holds a master's degree with just above 32% holding doctorates (SER: 22). While this is a comparatively high proportion of staff with postgraduate qualifications for a comprehensive university, it will be important for the University to consider how, with a staff complement with these numbers of qualifications, it can contribute to increased research productivity and enhanced curricula.
16. An analysis of the table provided in the SER in relation to academic staff attrition shows that over a period of four years the University lost 100 staff members to resignations (SER: 21). Given the challenges discussed above, the University faces considerable risks. The Panel was informed that often well qualified staff leave for better posts at other institutions. The University is encouraged to strategically manage the staff recruitment and retention push and pull factors.
17. The Panel heard about and observed that there are serious manifestations of xenophobia and sexism at the University. In relation to the former, interviews with staff and the staff unions pointed to tensions between local and foreign personnel emanating

from differentials in their employment benefits, but also the perception of pre-eminence given to foreign academics in high-level appointments. The Panel is aware that the University is addressing the issue of staff benefits (2008 Annual Report: 10).

18. The issue of the appointment of foreign nationals to senior academic positions in a context in which the University is not managing to attract local staff also needs to be addressed as part of UNIVEN's orientation towards the African continent and to internationalisation; and cannot be undermined by an institutional culture that is not tolerant of diversity. The Panel also heard about the difficulties that South African non-Venda staff have experienced at the University. These are serious issues that must be addressed in the context where the cultural and intellectual mark of a university as an institution of higher learning is precisely its universality.
19. The Panel encourages the University to investigate the extent of xenophobia and intolerance between local and foreign staff and urgently develop appropriate interventions to create an environment in which tolerance and appreciation of diversity are regarded as essential values by the University community. Given the role of internationalisation and linkages in the strategic plan of the University, UNIVEN cannot afford to leave unattended a situation which might jeopardise the achievement of its status as an internationally-oriented university.
20. A second area of concern revolves around manifestations of sexism at the University. The existence of a strong patriarchal culture was brought to the attention of the Panel by women academics and female students interviewed in the course of the audit visit, and it was also mentioned as a concern by the unions. The Panel is of the view that this aspect of the Institutional culture needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. While the Panel is aware of the decisive action taken by the University management in reported cases of sexual harassment, sexism has many manifestations and all of them act as obstacles in the development of women's careers.

Recommendation 4

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda investigate the extent and impact of xenophobia, sexism and all manifestations of intolerance among staff and students in order to establish an institutional culture based on democratic values and respect for human rights as it impacts on educational quality.

21. The Panel learned from presentations and through interviews that lack of water and electricity are constant features of campus life as the municipal water supply is turned off at noon daily. This does not only create unhealthy conditions and presents other serious risks on campus, but also conspires against the creation of a space conducive to the development of academic life. The Panel acknowledges the University's efforts in managing these constraints and recognises that the power and water utility problems fall outside of the university's control.

22. The Panel heard from management and students about overcrowded residences. Close to 6 000 students are accommodated in residences that were originally designed for just over 2 000 students. This is a matter of grave concern as fundamental infrastructure, such as sewerage, is bound to collapse under such pressure. Also, overcrowded residences are not conducive to the creation of an appropriate learning environment. This is a complaint the Panel heard from many students.
23. The issue of adequate availability of bandwidth, although not of the University's making, is a matter of serious concern as lack of sufficient bandwidth is not only an obstacle for the adequate provision in the core functions, but it also constitutes an obstacle to the introduction of technology that might be able to address some of the educational problems faced by the University such as overcrowded lecture halls.
24. Notwithstanding the challenges that the University is facing, the Panel noted with appreciation all the work on infrastructure currently underway and congratulates the University on its comprehensive long-term master plan for the development of infrastructure on the campus and it recognises and appreciates the ongoing efforts to address the power and water supply constraints on campus. The Panel also positively recognises the commitment of the University to provide access to disabled students, even if it also acknowledges the difficulties found in the actual provision of specialised facilities.

Commendation 1

The HEQC commends the University of Venda for its well-developed long term University infrastructure master plan.

Institutional Planning, Resource Allocation and Quality Management

25. UNIVEN has a functioning corporate governance system with a Council that is aware of its statutory responsibilities and which includes oversight of the management of the University. The Panel found the Council attuned to the problems of the University and is aware of the main obstacles and risks faced by UNIVEN as it implements its mission and vision. The Panel concurs with Council that one of the University's most serious problems is the difficulty in attracting appropriate academic staff.

Commendation 2

The HEQC commends the University of Venda for a balanced and constructive relationship with its Council which allows management to manage and the Council to discharge its governance and fiduciary role appropriately.

26. The Senate at UNIVEN appears to operate in a relatively weak manner. Some Council and management members perceive Senate as not being sufficiently decisive, while deans and senior academics agree in characterising Senate as weak in terms of both decision- making power and in intellectual engagement with academic issues.

Attendance at meetings, as well as the quality of the discussions, as reflected in the minutes, suggests some level of apathy. The Panel is concerned that the deans, who are meant to be key role players in the academic project of the University, consider that Senate does not provide adequate leadership on academic matters.

27. The lack of robust debate was attributed by some to be a result of the clash between a managerial approach and the desire by academics for intellectual engagement on issues. These tensions are present at most higher education institutions and the Panel is not surprised to find this at UNIVEN. However, the Panel would like to remind management that the urgency to establish systems of accountability in administrative and academic processes, or even the implementation of change management processes, cannot replace the necessity of engagement and deliberation by academics. Similarly, academics should be reminded that in a mass higher education system focused on access and success, issues of individual and collective accountability are as much a part of a work ethic as is good teaching.

Recommendation 5

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda review the efficiency and effectiveness of Senate that includes critically assessing the composition and terms of reference of the committees of Senate, the reasons for lack of attendance at Senate meetings and the perceived weakness both in decision making and intellectual engagement with academic issues.

28. The role of the Institutional Forum (IF) at UNIVEN also appears to be in a precarious position with its members feeling that its agenda is dictated by management. The Panel heard that the IF does not have regular meetings, but responds in an ad hoc manner to the demands and requirements of management. While the Panel is not surprised by the concerns raised by IF members, it is the University's responsibility to ensure the good functioning of this governance structure.
29. The University of Venda, in line with the provisions of the Higher Education Act of 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997), recognises the role played by student governance within the University. In 1999 the University decided to democratise the decision-making process within the then Student Representative Council (SRC) by introducing the Student Representative Assembly (SRA). This approach guarantees that even the smallest student organisation is able to participate in student affairs (SER: 12).
30. The Panel gathered from interviews that since its introduction, the SRA system has been successful, and has played a positive role in the stability of the University by considerably reducing the incidence of conflict between management and students.
31. The Panel is, however, concerned about the large allocation of the SRA budget, particularly for a financially constrained institution like UNIVEN, and the lack of

involvement of University officials in monitoring and controlling the expenditure of, and accountability for, such resources. In this regard, the Panel urges the University to separate the sports budget, and other such items that belong to the student affairs administration, from the SRA budget and particularly, to separate students from the administration of the on-campus bar. The Panel heard during interviews that some steps are being taken in this direction and strongly supports senior management efforts in this regard.

Recommendation 6

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda review aspects of the functioning of the Student Representative Assembly, including the criteria for eligibility into and privileges derived from holding office in this structure; the size of the budget of the Student Representative Assembly and the systems of monitoring and accountability of student expenditure; the establishment of a clear separation between the functions and roles of the Director of Student Affairs in relation to the Student representative Assembly budgets and activities.

32. UNIVEN acknowledges the role and importance of organised labour hence it has recognition agreements with staff formations as well as the University of Venda Joint Staff Structure which is a vehicle through which all the staff members meet as equals to discuss matters of common interest, such as approaches to collective bargaining or engagement with management on staff or union concerns.
33. A process of internal restructuring and institutional transformation has reconfigured the academic management of the University from faculties to schools, each headed by a dean who takes responsibility for the management of the school. The eight schools have their own school boards that work with Senate in taking responsibility for the University's academic governance. Among the problems the Panel identified in relation to the school model are the lack of sufficient disciplinary coherence and expertise at department level, and the lack of critical mass in terms of numbers of staff in some departments. Lack of intervention in this area could have a serious impact on the quality of the University's graduates. In the Panel's view this issue requires focused attention on the part of University leadership.
34. The Panel gained the impression that, generally, the University has committed and active deans. However, the position of dean is not only undermined by lack of administrative support but also by the lack of authority to make decisions and to be accountable for resource allocation, particularly in relation to staff posts. This issue seems to be a serious source of frustration in the context of the difficulties experienced by the Institution to attract academic staff.

Recommendation 7

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda assesses the effectiveness of its school model in terms of disciplinary coherence, administrative, financial and academic viability with a view to protect the quality of academic programmes and the Institutional reputation.

35. The need to allocate funds according to strategic priorities is often hampered by resource constraints. The net effect seems to be that some core teaching and learning activities are derailed as a result of funding cuts. This has led some staff to conclude that the academic project is being shaped by the financial agenda rather than the other way around. The Panel encourages the University's leadership to address this perception as a matter of priority, including staff concerns, noting the context of the overall financial constraints of the University.
36. The quality assurance function has until recently been located in the Unit for Quality Assurance and Promotion (QAP) which was established in 2003 in order to profile quality across the functions of the University. Recently, the QAP Unit merged with the Institutional Planning Unit and it is now called the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance Directorate (IPQA) that reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor. The IPQA requires a number of pre-conditions to be in place before it can deliver on its mandate. These include: (i) a clear conceptualisation of the role of the unit, (ii) appropriate access to good quality institutional data, and (iii) technical and analytical capacity to use quantitative and qualitative data for institutional research, quality assurance and planning purposes. The Panel is not persuaded that these elements are yet in place.
37. While the Panel has no difficulty with bringing together planning and quality, it must be done within a clear conceptual framework that explains to members of the unit, and to academic staff, how quality and planning function together and how both relate to the Strategic Plan. The Panel has neither seen a document dealing with this, nor heard a cogent articulation of these issues.
38. In relation to access to data, the Panel is particularly concerned about the general integrity of the University data. The University recently appointed staff in the area of management information and HEMIS and it is hoped that this will have a positive effect. However, the Panel is of the view that more must be done in the area of institutional research and planning in order to have an adequate overview of the state of the quality of provision at department and school level, and be able to design appropriate interventions timeously. If this is not addressed, the ability of IPQA to discharge its function will be seriously jeopardised.

Recommendation 8

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda address the conceptualisation of planning and quality underpinning the work of the Institutional Planning and Quality

Assurance Directorate, including the technical and human resources available to it, in order to ensure that the responsible staff have sufficient knowledge, training, capacity and seniority to interact appropriately with senior academics to discharge their responsibilities.

39. The DVC Academic is responsible for the strategic leadership of the Quality Assurance Board (QAB), although it is not clear how it relates to the IPQA committee. Most QA policies and processes seem to be fairly new and it is difficult to comment on their efficacy. While the Panel recognises the functional link between quality and planning, it stresses two points. First, that for quality assurance to be effective it has to be strongly linked to the teaching and learning portfolio and this needs to be kept in mind in the operationalisation of this unit. Secondly, that the effectiveness of a quality assurance unit depends greatly on an understanding of quality beyond its technical aspects, where it assists academics to engage with curriculum and teaching and learning practices.
40. The Panel has learnt that the University has been remiss in the application and implementation, within the IT system, of the rules pertaining to pre-requisites and co-requisites for module registration. This has grave consequences in terms of academic progression and the quality of the learning experience afforded to students. At the same time the lack of enforcement of academic rules give students a false sense of their responsibilities in relation to passing their modules.

Recommendation 9

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda give focused attention to consistency and transparency in the application of academic rules in order to safeguard the academic integrity of its qualifications.

41. Even though IPQA had been running workshops in the schools, it is not clear whether the principles of quality have been thoroughly understood and embedded at school level. The Panel noted that a range of policies have emerged from this Directorate. The University is urged to build on the consensus and momentum generated by the preparations for the institutional audit in order to ensure that quality assurance is not just a mechanical exercise to comply with external or professional body criteria and expectations, but constitutes a serious process of reflection and continuous improvement of the quality of academic programmes, including teaching and learning, research and community engagement at departmental and school levels.
42. In the documentation provided there is evidence of numerous useful attempts at benchmarking through conducting visits to other institutions, both nationally and internationally, and comparing UNIVEN's current standards and practices with good practice in the higher education sector (SER: 44). The Panel acknowledges the effort made in the area of benchmarking. However, there is little evidence of the University being able to use the lessons learnt from other universities even though those visits

usually culminated in detailed reports and recommendations. Nevertheless, there is some evidence of the impact of benchmarking efforts in the establishment of the Community Engagement Directorate in 2009 and the Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning in 2010.

43. UNIVEN conducted an impact study to assess the suitability of UNIVEN's programmes for employment opportunities. The results yielded information on how the University could improve the quality of its graduates, and make the University's PQM relevant and responsive to the needs of business and industry. However, there is as yet no evidence of implementation of such feedback into the PQM or programme content.
44. UNIVEN has developed some user surveys including student satisfaction, graduate tracking, and employer satisfaction surveys. These are fairly recent and were implemented at school level. Interviews with staff and students suggest that the student satisfaction surveys have not been taken seriously by staff or students, and as a result, have not been implemented consistently across all schools. The University is encouraged to consider assigning the responsibility for conducting and analysing of teaching and learning-related surveys to a central unit which should be responsible for the development and implementation of such surveys, including the necessary preparation of staff and students to participate in them.

Recommendation 10

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda review its approach and use of benchmarking, surveys and performance management to ensure that the operationalisation of these activities directly serve the advancement of the mission strategic priorities.

Teaching and Learning

45. The University has a Teaching and Learning Policy and a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Policy which were both approved by Council on 18 September 2009. Interviews with a range of academics indicated that at department level there is no awareness of either policy or of its implications for practice. It is clear to the Panel that the policies have not yet been implemented. This was confirmed by the DVC Academic who reported that she personally presented some of the policies at school board meetings, but that the necessary implementation training workshops are yet to take place.
46. UNIVEN faces a number of serious problems in the area of teaching and learning, including dealing with under-prepared students, high student to staff ratios, lack of space and educational infrastructure. In addition, the University offers too many programmes given academic staff capacity. All of these combined factors, including other internal and external factors, result in low success rates, unsatisfactory learning experiences for the students and, generally, puts at risk the quality of programmes.

47. Academics complained about the lack of adequate lecture and laboratory venues to accommodate student numbers, not to mention insufficient office space for academic staff, and the inconsistent availability of bandwidth.
48. The Panel is pleased to see a remarkable commitment on the part of staff and senior management to provide students with an opportunity to succeed in higher education. While the Panel finds this commendable, the good and sustainable functioning of the University cannot depend on the long-term demands made on staff. Moreover, there is a limit to what good will and dedication can achieve in the context of a lack of fundamental infrastructure and educational resources.
49. While the Panel heard from academics and senior management that UNIVEN graduates are comparable to other graduates in the higher education system, employers had mixed views. Most of them commented on graduates' lack of communication skills, lack of exposure to the workplace, and graduates not being sufficiently up-to-date in their field of knowledge. External examiners also commented on the isolation of UNIVEN academics from current discipline discourses, a problem that stems from a lack of access to journals and insufficient conference attendance.
50. The Panel also noted a lack of support for academics to professionalise their teaching, or a sufficient focus on teaching and learning in the criteria for promotion. In a university facing such a range of challenges, it is perhaps not surprising that the Panel found little evidence of ongoing discussions and initiatives on new approaches to, and innovations in, teaching and learning.
51. The plan for the new Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL) coordinated by the Office of the Vice-Chancellor is intended to be implemented in the near future. The major purpose of the Centre is the provision of support for the professionalisation of teaching and learning. Interviewees indicated that staff development interventions at present are isolated and inconsistently implemented, and consistent and regular programmes for teaching and learning development offered by CHETL are required.
52. UNIVEN has an extended curriculum programme (ECP) providing support to students in Science, Arts and Law, however the number of students participating in these programmes is very small (250 altogether) in relation to the overall student population (10 500). The Panel is concerned about the perception that the extended programmes are isolated and more importantly that, in certain respects, these programmes do not seem to be effective.

Recommendation 11

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda review the location, resourcing and effectiveness of its extended curriculum programmes, and promote their contact and integration with the disciplines in the schools.

53. The DVC Academic provides strategic leadership for the implementation of teaching and learning and is responsible for overall academic planning, monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. However, the DVC Operations, in partnership with the DVC Academic, ensures the availability of appropriate and adequate resources for the execution of quality teaching and learning. These functions are executed through the use of committees, including:
- The Executive Committee of Senate (SENEX)
 - The Academic Planning Committee (APC)
 - The Quality Assurance Board (QAB)
54. The Panel heard during interviews with staff that while these committees have been established, their functioning has not always been consistent. For instance, the lack of consistency in the functioning of APC has delayed progress on the processing and approval of new programmes developed by schools in response to the comprehensive institution mandate. The Panel, however, recognises that the APC understands its role in ensuring the integrity and quality of programmes that are approved.

Recommendation 12

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda review its academic committees to ensure an effective and efficient committee structure that avoids duplication.

Academic Development and Support Services

55. UNIVEN has a recently established Academic Development Unit (ADU) whose main objective is the promotion of successful teaching and learning. There is, however, as yet, very little evidence of a sustained, appropriate and effective academic staff development programme across the University. It appears that the University has not adequately resourced this function and has been unable to offer adequate support or relevant academic development opportunities to either staff or students.
56. While there is evidence of occasional workshops provided by the University on topics such as policy development, project management, and management of electronic records for administration staff, it is not clear if the impact of these has ever been measured.
57. Staff are concerned that when academics who have been supported to improve their qualifications graduate they usually leave the University for better remunerated positions elsewhere. While the Panel appreciates this predicament, and that this is not a problem unique to UNIVEN, the University is encouraged to investigate the causes of the

high staff turnover. The Panel was unable to ascertain how exit interviews are used by the University to develop staff retention strategies that might help to improve staff retention.

58. Another area of concern in relation to academic support services is the induction and orientation of new staff members. The Panel heard that Human Resources offers an induction programme three times a year for newly employed staff. It was clear from the interviews that this is not a properly planned and adequately resourced initiative. Heads of departments were said to be responsible for managing the rest of the induction programme. However, there were no institutional guidelines, nor systems for ensuring that this induction takes place in the schools and departments. The Panel noted that this induction/orientation is not extended to part-time academic staff even though there is a large contingent of academic staff that is employed on a part-time basis.

Recommendation 13

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda develop a comprehensive staff development strategy as part of its approach to human resources management and ensure that the Academic Development Unit is appropriately resourced to support quality teaching and learning.

59. The University of Venda offers an “English for Academic Purposes” module for students focusing on English language proficiency. This module is an initiative to address the under-preparedness of first-time enrolments at university level. The Panel heard that there are no mechanisms in place to evaluate the outcomes of these interventions. University management is urged to consider the development of appropriate evaluation systems and mechanisms to measure the impact of the various academic support programmes provided to staff and students. It is critical that the University conduct periodic evaluations of these initiatives to assess their impact and effectiveness.
60. The University of Venda recently established a Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning in order to improve throughput in the undergraduate programmes. It is intended that the programmes of this Centre will add to the quality of teaching and learning and provide support to both lecturers and students. Staff development and student academic services will now reside in the new Centre in order to integrate these services to facilitate access (SER: 35). The Panel noted this as a positive development as it has the potential to help improve the teaching and learning core function at the University.

Library Services

61. Interviewees reported some key improvements in the provision of library services especially around the availability of computer terminals. Insufficient though these were to service the expanded student body, at least there is some availability, part of which is twenty-four hours access. The University Librarian informed the Panel that there were

recent developments intended to improve the ability of the library to support the academic project, such as the exclusive employment of library computer technicians. The Panel congratulates the University on taking these steps and urges it to continue to ensure that there is appropriate provision of library services to meet both teaching and learning, and research needs.

62. The University has a tracking system in place that is analysed daily to measure the volume of library use. However, the Panel agrees with the Director of Libraries that this tracking system needs to be updated and refined to improve its efficiency. The Panel acknowledges that management recently allocated funding from the Teaching and Research Grant to increase the library collection.

Recommendation 14

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda review the resourcing of the library, including its infrastructure, book and journal collections, access to the internet and availability of sufficient professional staff.

Information and Communications Technology

63. UNIVEN has comprehensive Information Communications Technology services that support teaching and learning by providing computer laboratories for student use and access to personal computers to staff. The Panel noted that the UNIVEN has several computer laboratories on campus for student use and that each staff office is equipped with a PC connected to the internet. Impressive as these initiatives may be, their functioning is undermined by limited bandwidth and the uneven availability of wireless networks on campus.

64. In relation to the administrative processes supported by information technology the Panel finds that despite the fact that the ITS software is available to facilitate the administrative needs of the University, there is no generalised use of the technological advances offered by the system. The fact that timetables are only generated after registration is directly related to an inefficient use of the ITS system. Another example of the underutilisation of the ITS system is that manual systems are still used to establish whether all the programme requirements have been fulfilled by students before they graduate. The I-Enabler available on the ITS system could be used to facilitate online registrations.

Recommendation 15

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda improve and make use of information and communications technology and urgently review the resourcing of the ICT Division. Consideration should be given to extending the computer laboratory hours, especially before and during examination periods.

Certification and Student Records

65. The registrar's office is responsible for student administration and examinations, including the development of quality arrangements for learner records and certification. (SER: 74). The Panel heard during interviews that the University is constantly engaging with other institutions and service providers to keep abreast of security developments relating to the integrity of records and certification processes.
66. The Panel noted the processes adopted by UNIVEN to increase the security features such as watermarks, certificate numbers, and student national identity document numbers. The Panel concurs with the University that additional space and staff would add value to the efficiency of management of certificates and student records as the current office space is small and overcrowded.

Short Courses

67. The UNIVEN Centre for Continuing Education (UCCE) is responsible for the coordination of short courses offered at the University. The Centre, which was established by a Council decision and is intended for the generation of third-stream income, is fairly new. Short course policies are still being developed.
68. The Panel, however, found that short courses existed before the establishment of the Centre and were developed and delivered through departments or schools. Since there were no policies or institution-wide guidelines for short courses, each school or department had its own processes and procedures. It is intended that the new policy being developed will address issues of quality in addition to regulating the distribution of income generated.
69. The Panel noted that most of the short courses were developed as a specific response to the demand in the region. In this sense short courses seem to be one aspect of UNIVEN responsiveness to the educational needs of the region. In many respects these short courses are used as a community outreach programme and are run in collaboration with external service providers in the region. Two issues remain unclear in relation to short courses. First, how the University will ensure that this activity does not add to the load of already overworked staff and the demands put on an overstretched infrastructure. Secondly, how courses are monitored and evaluated in order to ensure that minimum quality standards are maintained.

Recommendation 16

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda assess the impact of short courses on the academic workload in relation to the core functions, establish a system for the recording and monitoring of courses on offer, and develop mechanisms to ensure that they meet minimum quality standards.

Programme Development and Review

70. The University has guidelines and procedures for programme development and approval (SER: 66). However, interviews with staff indicated that they were not generally aware of the existence of such guidelines.
71. It is clear from the review of documents and information gathered in interviews that the issues of resources, staff capacity and capability, and heavy workloads, play a major role in constraining staff from developing new programmes. Overall, the Panel's impression is that the capacity for programme development varies and might be stronger in the professional programmes than in the general formative ones. Some staff suggested to the Panel that there is a need to streamline the development of new programmes by providing central assistance to schools and departments through the IPQA Directorate or the Staff Development Unit as most academics required support in the area of programme development.
72. Programme reviews have taken a three-pronged approach. There were internal portfolio programme reviews whose main focus was relevance and financial viability. These reviews served an important purpose even though quality assurance was not part of the criteria used. The second level of programme reviews referred to the HEQC national reviews in specific programmes. The third level of reviews is carried out by professional bodies. The Panel found evidence of professional programmes such as law, nursing science, social work that have undergone regular reviews in order to comply with the requirements of a professional body. However, the impact of these reviews on the overall quality of teaching and learning has been limited.
73. Although there is some evidence of programme reviews, the Panel noted that the lack of institution-wide reviews compromises the quality of the core function of teaching and learning and the University is urged to consider implementing policies and mechanisms to periodically review all programmes to ensure quality, relevance and responsiveness. The Panel suggests the involvement and use of external reviewers from other universities, business and industry who would strengthen this process.

Recommendation 17

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda initiate a comprehensive process of external programme reviews focusing on teaching and learning issues, and that it take the necessary steps to develop capacity and provide resources at school and departmental level in curriculum design and programme development.

Staffing and Staff Development

74. The SER as well as interviews with different individuals and structures at the University clearly indicate that recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff constitutes a major problem. The rural character of the University and its concomitant problems such as a lack of choice of schools, inadequate staff housing and lack of comparable amenities constitute obstacles to attracting appropriately qualified staff. Consequently, in

November 2009, Council approved a number of HR policies, of which staff development was one. Academics have since been involved in internships and learnerships.

Assessment

75. The University of Venda has developed policies for monitoring the assessment of teaching and learning (The University of Venda Assessment Policy) together with guidelines for assessment and moderation of student performance (Rules for Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates). Part Three of the General Regulations addresses the issue of assessment and makes provision for the general management of assessment strategies and procedures. The Panel noted that the policies are fairly recent and therefore it is difficult to determine their effectiveness.
76. Interviews with staff and, particularly, with external examiners pointed the Panel to variability and inconsistent standard of assessment across departments. While the Panel has evidence of courses and programmes offered at the appropriate level with up-to-date content and bibliography and commensurate assessment, there is some evidence that in some departments the quality of assessment, and therefore the quality of the programmes, is problematic.
77. The Panel found inconsistencies in the implementation of moderation for non-final year module examinations question papers, scripts, and mark sheets. During interviews, the Panel gained the impression that lack of moderation in non-final year courses was a known practice that was being tolerated in some departments. The Panel would like to remind the University that in order to lend credibility to the qualifications offered by the University, the process of internal moderation of question papers, scripts, and mark sheets must be taken seriously, even for non-final year papers.
78. The issue of large classes and small lecture halls also impacts negatively on the quality of assessments. Staff members confirmed during interviews that the University does not have adequate venues for examinations and that the venues used actually compromise the integrity of assessment.
79. The Panel also learned that UNIVEN does not have a system for monitoring academic integrity and plagiarism and at present plagiarism only gets detected through external examinations. This is of concern to the Panel as plagiarism especially at postgraduate level impacts significantly on the quality of the student performance and further compromises the integrity of the University's qualifications and reputation.

Recommendation 18

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda consider the acquisition and implementation of plagiarism detection software.

80. Students reported in interviews numerous instances in which students were not given timely feedback on completed work. While this could be due to large classes and the limited number of academic staff, such complaints should receive prompt attention. It is the Panel's view that the quality of teaching and learning is compromised by delay in feedback as students are not made aware of their shortcomings and therefore do not take measures to correct them. Given the important part played by prompt feedback, the University is encouraged to ensure that academic staff prioritises timely feedback on student assessment in order to capture the developmental value of assessments.
81. The system of appointing external examiners for three-year terms seemed to be strictly adhered to, since the Panel finds that while the majority of the external examiners are within their first term, a few were doing a second term, and none had exceeded the two terms. This is a good practice that the University should endeavour to continue.

Recommendation 19

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda establish appropriate mechanisms and provide resources to ensure that the assessment policies and procedures are applied consistently across the Institution, and that sufficient examining capacity and adherence to procedures exist to guarantee that high success rates match actual student competencies. This should also include regular and timeous provision of assessment feedback to students.

Research

82. The University of Venda has an approved Research Policy which was undergoing revision and was in the final stages of approval at the time of the audit. The 2005 Policy makes no statement on research monitoring and evaluation. This has been recognised and the Panel was assured that a quality assurance chapter included in the new policy will enhance the arrangements for the quality management, development and monitoring of research and postgraduate education. An additional chapter on financial support for postgraduate students has been approved.
83. Despite the emphasis in the Strategic Plan 2009–2013 on building and strengthening its existing research capacity in niche areas, the Panel heard that researchers and deans found a lack of clarity around whether research should be focused in niche areas or be driven as a core activity across the whole University. The Panel encourages the University to consider the advantages of a focused approach to research in niche areas which have existing strengths and invest in their growth, while encouraging scholarship and research into teaching and learning as a key aspect of the establishment of CHETL.
84. It seems to the Panel that the University lacks both strategic and intellectual leadership provided at the senior leadership levels. The University needs effective leadership for research development that will be responsible for providing a strategic direction, setting specific targets to be achieved with realistic time-frames, with a clear understanding of

what is necessary in terms of staff development and training to empower individuals as researchers. There is also a need to take decisions about funding requirements for the research enterprise at the University in alignment with the University's vision and mission, and the change management strategies necessary to achieve both short and long-term institutional objectives.

85. UNIVEN has a Research Directorate charged with the operational matters dealing with the entire research enterprise of University. The Panel learned during interviews with staff that the lack of continuity in the administration and leadership of research at the institutional level had been noted and had the potential to impede the development of research across the University. It is acknowledged that there are procedures in place to provide institutional research leadership and the University is urged to address the lack of research administration at both school and University levels.
86. The Panel noted the efforts made by staff to maintain their research and improve their qualifications in a context of extremely heavy teaching and administrative workloads. The academic qualifications of the academic staff appear to be good. The Panel also recognises the efforts recently made to attract rated scientists and to create some basis for the development of research at the University.

Recommendation 20

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda adopt an increasingly focused approach to research in niche areas which have existing strengths, while encouraging scholarship and research into teaching and learning as a key aspect of the establishment of Centre for Higher Education, Training and Learning. The University should also strengthen and empower the strategic management of the research enterprise at both central and school level.

87. The University acknowledges the low research productivity and the need to introduce appropriate mechanisms to support research. The Panel noted the positive use of financial incentives and the celebration of research excellence. The Panel recognises that some interventions are already having a positive effect with an increase in the number of active researchers and the number of NRF-rated researchers.
88. The CREST report indicates that the participation of UNIVEN authors in publishing journal articles has steadily increased in recent years – from 25 authors in 2006 to 36 authors in 2007. The Panel noted from the same report that the 30% most productive authors produced more than 70% of all journal article output during 2006 and 2007. This clearly illustrates that while overall participation has been steadily increasing, a small core of productive authors continue to generate the bulk of UNIVEN's research output. This is an identifiable trend in a number of other South African universities.

89. With respect to the gender profile of the UNIVEN authors, there has been an overall increase in female authors from 19% in the period 2000–2002 compared to 22% in 2006–2008. As far as the racial origins of authors is concerned, the results show that the UNIVEN authorship profile has changed from 57% of African authors prior to 2000 to about 86% by African authors in the period 2006–2008. Similar increases also occurred with regard to the contribution of African authors to the overall research output at UNIVEN (from 46% to 87%), with a concomitant decrease in the number of journal article equivalents produced by White authors from 54% to 13%.
90. The analysis of scientific fields showed that journal article output in the Natural Sciences and Engineering accounts for 46% of the University's output over the entire period from 2000–2008, followed by the Social Sciences and Humanities with 25%. The sub-fields of Animal and Veterinary Sciences and Plant Sciences are the most prominent in the broad field of Agricultural Sciences with 4% and 3,7% respectively, of all research output. The three prominent scientific fields in terms of total output are Water Resources with 9,9%, Chemistry with 8,5% and Multidisciplinary sciences with 5,9%.
91. 160 authors published their articles in 145 journals during the period 1990–2008. About half of the 275 UNIVEN journal articles appeared in non-South African journals that are indexed by the ISI. Publishing in such journals appears to be growing from about 35% of all publications during the early 2000s to 64% in 2006–2008 period. There is also an increase in journal article co-authorship. The proportion of single-authored journal articles has declined from 44% in the pre-2000 period to 9.5% in the period of 2006–2008.

Commendation 3

The HEQC commends the University of Venda for the significant increase in the number of research outputs in the form of journal articles by African academics, and urges the University to continue to recognise and reward academics for research excellence and research productivity.

Postgraduate Studies

92. The University of Venda is a predominantly undergraduate institution in which the majority of postgraduate enrolments are at master degree level. According to the CREST Report, for example, in 2005, the University produced 32 masters and 2 doctoral graduates. The master degree graduates are predominantly from the social sciences disciplines.
93. The University does not have an institution-wide higher degrees committee above the level of schools, and as a result, assessment of postgraduate results is monitored by SENEX. This arrangement could present workload challenges to SENEX as the number of postgraduate student enrolments increase.

94. The Panel learned of the uneven quality of supervision and support received by students. Although supervision training and development workshops have recently been implemented, interviews with academic staff pointed to the need for more rigorous and regular supervisor training opportunities. The low numbers of academics with supervisory experience has had the effect of many of the current postgraduate supervisors being overloaded, and that has a negative impact on the supervision process. Although the Panel heard examples of good supervision practice of committed supervisors, it also heard a number of student complaints that their supervisors had little time to provide to supervision due to their other University work commitments.
95. The Panel noted with concern that postgraduate education does not receive dedicated resourcing, with apparently no central provision of support services. Postgraduate students are expected to reside in the overcrowded residences and have very little access to computer facilities and other equipment and services significant for their success.
96. Interviews with postgraduate students revealed that they were unaware of any formal procedures for lodging complaints or appeals. There also appears to be very little monitoring of the student and supervisor relationship to ensure the quality of the supervision process. The students who knew of the appeals process believed that it is difficult to implement because in most cases the dean who is the appeals officer, is often also the supervisor. The University is urged to address both supervisor training and supervision monitoring processes.
97. Interviews with research supervisors and postgraduate students suggest that the lack of infrastructure for postgraduate research results in difficulty to retain postgraduate students and recruit good quality applicants. Academics confirmed that there is no consistent induction or orientation programme for postgraduate students with only a few schools having their own induction programmes. A lack of coordination of postgraduate student education is evident with no published student handbook.
98. The recently revamped work-study programme is proving to be very helpful and the Panel noted with appreciation the recent review of financial support for postgraduate students as identified in the Revised Research and Innovation Strategy. The Panel also acknowledged that senior management showed an awareness of the weaknesses and limitations of the postgraduate infrastructure and have identified strategies to improve the situation. The efforts taken to attract rated scientists to create a critical mass for the development of research at the University is also acknowledged by the Panel.

Recommendation 21

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda review the infrastructure for postgraduate education and consider taking a conscious decision not to enrol more

postgraduate students than the infrastructure and resources can presently accommodate.

Recommendation 22

The HEQC recommends that the University of Venda develop and ensure that effective structures and processes are in place to manage and monitor the quality of postgraduate education. In addition, it should consider establishing a robust complaints procedure and clear lines of communication with postgraduate students.

Community Engagement

99. Work in the area of community engagement has been taking place at the University without a formal structure responsible for it or a policy framework that outlines its role in the realisation of the Institution's mission. The Panel noted the establishment of the Directorate of Community Engagement in 2009, and the policies that are currently being developed.
100. There is a clear definition of community engagement underpinning the work in this area which involves community-engaged teaching and learning; community-engaged research; community benefit; community outreach and volunteerism. The emphasis is on community partnership rather than service within the community engaged throughout the process. Work in this area is enhanced by the fact that many students come from the communities in which they engage as part of the University's community engagement activities.
101. Lack of a framework has not been an obstacle for the development at school and departmental levels of a number of very important, highly regarded and effective community engagement projects. The Panel heard of a number of examples demonstrating the integration of these projects into teaching and learning, and research activities, for example, in health, law and agriculture.
102. The Panel was particularly impressed with the work of the Vuwani Science Resource Centre which plays an important role in making science accessible to schools without laboratories, which constitutes a national example of good practice. The Panel encourages the University to develop mechanisms and strategies to integrate and monitor community engagement initiatives in order to enhance their impact on the other core functions of the Institution. The Panel acknowledges how the University has been able to integrate its community engagement into its other core functions in an admirable way within a resource-constrained environment.

Commendation 4

The HEQC commends the University of Venda for the good practice of the Vuwani Science Resource Centre in making science accessible to learners in schools that do not have science laboratories.

Conclusion

103. Despite the numerous institutional constraints mentioned in this report, the University of Venda meets many of the necessary conditions to be successful in its endeavour to fulfil its mission.

104. Greater attention to increasing the exposure of staff and students to current disciplinary discourses in the three core functions and, very importantly, a clear sign from executive management that the academic project takes central place at the University will help to ensure the success of the University. However, the Panel would like to place on record that all of the above will not suffice. The University of Venda requires focused state support to enable it to fulfil its role in the national higher education system, in the local and provincial contexts and to make effective its contribution to social justice and national development.