



HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE

Audit Report on the University of the Western Cape

Report of the HEQC to the University of the Western Cape

Executive Summary

October 2008

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HEQC Audit Report Number 22

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ACRONYMS

ADO	Academic Development Officer
AP	Audit Portfolio
CALICO	Cape Library Consortium
CE	Continuing Education
CESM	Classification of Educational Subject Matter
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
DC	Departmental Chair
DLL	Division for Lifelong Learning
DoE	Department of Education
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
HDI	Historically Disadvantaged Institution
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HoD	Head of Department
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IF	Institutional Forum
IOP	Institutional Operating Plan
MAS	Marks Administration System
MIS	Management Information System
NRF	National Research Foundation
PET	Postgraduate Education and Throughput
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SDS	Student Development and Support
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SLLC	Senate Lifelong Learning Committee
SRC	Student Representative Council
UCT	University of Cape Town
UWC	University of the Western Cape
VC	Vice-Chancellor

Executive Summary

Brief Overview

1. The University of the Western Cape (UWC) is a medium-sized, contact, English-medium higher education institution situated in Bellville in the Western Cape Province in South Africa. It has three campuses: the main campus in Bellville, the Dentistry facilities at Mitchell's Plain, and Tygerberg. The institution also has teaching facilities at Groote Schuur Hospital, the Red Cross Children's Hospital, and the Lentegeur Hospital. UWC has seven faculties: Economic and Management Science, Community and Health Sciences, Arts, Natural Sciences, Law, Education, and Dentistry.
2. The institution was established in 1960 as a University College for the population classified 'coloured' in the context of the apartheid government's Separate University Education Act of 1957. In 1970, the institution gained university status and was able to award its own degrees and diplomas. In 1982, the University formally rejected the apartheid ideology in its mission statement. The following year, with the passing of the University of the Western Cape Act, the University gained autonomy. In 1987, the University designated itself 'the intellectual home of the left'. During this period, the institution attracted increasing numbers of students from disadvantaged communities. In the context of the restructuring of the higher education landscape, the UWC incorporated the Stellenbosch School of Oral Health into its Faculty of Dentistry and was mandated to be the sole provider in the Western Cape of a first degree in Nursing.
3. UWC has approximately 14,600 students by headcount, one fifth of whom live in residences on and around the campus. The large majority of student enrolments are concentrated at the undergraduate level, (80%). In 2005 50 percent of the student body was coloured, 31 percent African, 5 percent white and 2 percent Indian. In the same year women constituted 58 percent of the student body. UWC has a staff complement of approximately 1,900, of whom 1,185 are permanent staff, with 390 of these being permanent academic staff.

Institutional Mission

4. The Panel found significant quality achievements at UWC. In the area of teaching and learning, UWC is making an important contribution to the education of black academics and professionals in a range of fields. The institution's experience in, and contribution to, academic development, as well as its work in the area of lifelong learning, adult education and RPL, constitute substantive educational contributions from which the higher education system at large continues to benefit. In the area of research, UWC has 65 NRF rated scientists, a significant international reputation in the field of bio-informatics and water resources research and training, and a number of other research activities across the natural sciences and the social sciences and the humanities, which the institution is using to develop further research capacity in some specific areas of expertise.

Commendation 1

The HEQC commends the institution for overcoming the debilitating crisis of the mid and late 1990s, developing a sense of purpose and emerging as a university with recognisable areas of strength in all three core functions.

5. Interviews with senior management during the audit visit supported the view expressed by the institution in its Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) 2005-2009 that in order to transcend its past, and simultaneously position itself in the context of a transformative and globally competitive agenda, the institution needed to become an 'engaged university'. The Panel concurs with the view of the many staff interviewed that the notion of an 'engaged university' marks a number of continuities with UWC's history, and that the institution needs to explore more carefully the discontinuities that this notion is proposing, as well as the consequences that this choice has for teaching and learning, research and community engagement. The Panel suggests that UWC identify the continuities and discontinuities between its former phases of engagement in contributing to 'developing the Third World communities in South Africa', and as 'the intellectual home of the left', and the current notion of engagement, and consider their implications for governance, management and the work done in the three core functions. In the absence of such an exercise, the notion of the 'engaged university' might lack sufficient content to help the institution construct its future.
6. The Panel noted during interviews the pervasiveness in the discourse of senior management and some representatives of the institution's governance structures of the motto *to be a place of quality, a place to grow from hope to action through knowledge*. The Panel appreciates the unifying effect of the motto and the ideas underpinning it. However, it is not persuaded that the concrete implications of this motto and its connections with the new identity of the institution as an engaged university have been sufficiently spelled out and debated among the different layers of the University. The evidence gathered by the Panel through the analysis of documentation and the interviews with management, academics, students and a range of external stakeholders, suggests that this lack of connection between very important aspects of the definition of the institution's identity does not help UWC to translate with sufficient depth this conceptualisation into plans, systems, processes and actions in the three core functions.
7. UWC has identified seven challenges (SER: 14) arising from its mission statement. The institution has acknowledged that there are tensions between and among some of these demands. Although the self-evaluation report did not focus specifically on any of these and their concrete implications for the core functions and the management of the University, the IOP and interviews with staff and various stakeholders gave the Panel a clearer sense of the extent of these challenges and the institution's approach to them. The Panel concurs with UWC's sophisticated understanding of the framing role of its mission and, by implication, the seven directives mentioned above. The Panel, however, found little evidence of the translation of the current mission into specific quality processes, standards or directives as to how to measure and interpret performance.

Recommendation 1

The HEQC recommends that UWC identify and develop appropriate strategies and processes to translate its current mission into specific quality processes, standards or directives for measuring and interpreting performance across the core functions and support services of the institution.

Equity, redress and transformation

8. The Panel learned through interviews with staff that the enrolment profile of the institution includes growing numbers of mature students who have entered higher education as working adults to acquire their first degree. This poses a challenge to the institution in terms of the quality and flexibility of educational offerings, the nature of student support, and administrative processes. Three other features in the evolution of enrolments at UWC are worth mentioning. First, the increase in enrolments of Indian and white students might be regarded as a sign of the confidence of the South African population in UWC's educational offerings. Secondly, the consistent increase in the number of postgraduate enrolments highlights the need for greater supervisory capacity, support, and appropriate management information systems. Thirdly the increase in the number of international student enrolments poses yet another challenge. UWC might like to reflect on the meanings of internationalisation in terms of curriculum and the tensions between local imperatives and global aspirations in its mission and identity. An analysis of the evolution of UWC's student enrolments since the 1990s suggests that the institution has been consistently and systematically pursuing its goal of providing access to higher education for previously disadvantaged sectors of the population at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Commendation 2

The HEQC commends UWC on the determination and success with which it has provided access to higher education for disadvantaged sectors of the South African population, thus giving effect to the institution's commitment to social justice.

9. With regard to employment equity, the distribution of UWC staff across population groups suggests that, unlike the student profile, it does not reflect the demographic profile of the Western Cape. While coloured employees constitute the majority of staff (66.4%), white staff members are over-represented (19.2%) and African staff under-represented (10%). This is particularly evident in the case of permanent academic staff where white and coloured staff members compose 42.8% and 38.7% respectively of the total staff numbers. The institution is aware of this problem but it sees its commitment to improve its employment equity profile in relation to African academic staff constrained by high competition with the public and private sector which pushes salaries to unrealistically high levels.

Governance, management, planning and resource allocation

10. The institution has emerged from a period of leadership crisis as a unified organisation with strong leadership. The Panel observed the commonality of purpose among the University community and how this is echoed in the view of the University held by external stakeholders. The Panel shares the

institution's concern, expressed during a range of interviews with staff, about the lack of sufficient capacity at management level. It is obvious to the Panel that the management team is overstretched due to vacancies and that it has found it difficult to fill vacancies with appropriate staff due to, among other problems, financial constraints.

11. UWC has an active Senate which, although very stretched by administrative demands, sees itself as the custodian of academic values and processes. The Panel was particularly impressed by the role played by the Registrar as the operational and conceptual link between management and administration in areas that affect both the sound functioning of the institution and the quality assurance of academic processes.
12. The Panel would like to compliment the University on the level of dialogue and debate which takes place at different levels of the institution in the context of governance structures and management processes. The Panel was particularly encouraged by the principled cooperation between senior management and the workers' union, which is based on a shared commitment to UWC students. Equally, the Panel found an interesting, well-informed and active student leadership capable of engaging with the conceptual aspects of the academic enterprise as well as being soberly critical of the institution. The Panel was also interested in hearing the Institutional Forum reflect on its lack of effectiveness as a governance structure when compared with its predecessor, the Broad Transformation Forum.
13. The Panel found that UWC lacks management and administrative capacity in terms of the technical tools which allow different layers of the institution to take responsibility for the achievement of institutional goals in the core functions. This has two main manifestations. First, there is a misalignment of business processes and lack of cooperation between faculties and the centre leads to errors, duplication, and waste. Secondly, the lack of efficient and sophisticated information and monitoring systems undermines not only the planning but also the design and implementation of improvement interventions at institutional as well as faculty and departmental level. The Panel heard repeatedly in interviews with students, alumni and external stakeholders of frustrating experiences in dealing with UWC's administration.
14. The Panel heard that because open source was being used for in-house software development the full implementation of the Management Information System would take longer than might be advisable. In view of the undermining effect the lack of more efficient administrative processes and an information base able to respond to the University's needs has, not only on the institution but also on external stakeholders, the Panel would like to urge the institution to consider whether there are other, more efficient, ways of achieving the same end, within the University's budgetary restrictions

Recommendation 2

The HEQC recommends that UWC investigate alternatives to the current open source in-house software development for its management information system in order to expedite its implementation and offset

the educational and administrative risks which the lack of a working Management Information System poses to the institution.

15. The Panel is satisfied that at UWC planning and resource allocation are aligned at the central level. Documentary evidence and interviews with senior management and those responsible for the central allocation of resources confirm this. The ability of the institution to overcome its straitened circumstances before its recapitalisation in 2005 suggests a careful and effective administration of resources. The institution's commitment to strategic projects and priorities identified in the IOP is confirmed by its top slicing of the budget (SER: 27-28).

Commendation 3

The HEQC commends UWC on the careful and effective way it has allocated resources to support the achievement of institutional goals.

16. The Panel is of the view that Deans are the fundamental link between academic and administrative processes in the context of the disciplines and the key to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of teaching and learning and research strategies. The evidence gathered during the audit suggests that, despite the view expressed in the SER (p. 40), Deans are not sufficiently integrated into the executive management of the institution and therefore into the decision-making processes that affect the strategic direction taken by the institution. The Panel is of the view that insufficient participation of the Deans at the strategic level impoverishes both the conceptualisation and the implementation processes, particularly when the decisions taken affect the quality of provision in the three core functions.

Recommendation 3

The HEQC recommends that UWC consider identifying innovative and appropriate ways of drawing the Deans more deeply and actively into the conceptualisation and implementation of the strategic direction of the University and the necessary allocation of resources in order to achieve the University's goal of access, equity and quality across all its academic offerings.

The quality management system

17. The Panel acknowledges the intellectual energy invested by the institution in developing a multilayered notion of quality which responds to its mission and historical circumstances. However, the Panel did not see evidence of some of these notions being examined rigorously. The Panel is of the view that neither senior management nor the different layers of academic staff and students at the University have sufficiently discussed these meanings of quality, how they are translated into systems, and what they mean for the practice of teaching and learning and the conduct of research or community engagement. The Panel suggest that, given the richness and complexity of this notion of quality, the University needs to unpack and examine its various components and ensure that the practical implications of this notion are understood and implemented across the institution.
18. The Panel was concerned about two issues in this regard. First, the Panel found a disjuncture between a rich and multilayered understanding of

quality and a set of quality assurance processes which, although efficient, run independently of that understanding. Secondly, the Panel found that efficient quality assurance processes at a central level were not underpinned by an articulated conceptual engagement with the practices of teaching, learning and research. The Panel is of the opinion that the institution's quality assurance system could be more effective if such conceptual engagement took place.

Recommendation 4

The HEQC recommends that UWC enter into a process of intellectual engagement with its multiple definitions of quality in order to ensure that the richness of the conceptualisation is given appropriate expression in operationalising its quality assurance system in the core functions.

Benchmarking and surveys

19. The Panel was satisfied that in the matter of benchmarking the institution has taken into account international practices. The Panel was pleased to see that UWC has looked into benchmarking critically and has indicated a cautious approach to the development of performance indicators that do not take into account the complexity of educational processes or that do not factor in contextual constraints. However, the Panel did not find a systematic list of strategic priorities, the benchmark against which performance will be measured and the methodology used for the measurement, given that no simplistic performance indicators would serve the purpose.

Recommendation 5

The HEQC recommends that UWC's senior leadership, in consultation with the University's Council, develop a series of performance indicators that will help the institution measure its progress in the achievement of strategic objectives and externally benchmark its performance.

Teaching and learning

20. The Panel has no doubt about the importance of teaching and learning for UWC. With 80 percent of the enrolment at undergraduate level and a strong commitment to respond to the knowledge and skills needs of a society in transition, it is not surprising that teaching and learning is the issue most focused on in the institution's strategic documents and policies. Faced with the numerous challenges of under-prepared students, UWC's approach to teaching and learning is to create a supportive environment of teaching and learning which values not only the development of academic ability but also a variety of other competences. Interviews with senior management strongly supported the image of UWC as a caring and nurturing environment which is especially welcoming to students. Through interviews with lecturers, academic development officers, and tutors, the Panel confirmed that there is in practice such learning environment at the University.

Commendation 4

The HEQC commends UWC on the way it has given effect to its commitment to social justice through a work ethic that is shared by the majority of the University's staff responsible for teaching and learning and that is generally recognised by the students.

21. Despite the remarkable commitment of many individual staff, in the Panel's view teaching and learning at UWC takes place under three major constraints that affect the educational process and could undermine its outcomes. The first is financial. Human resources constraints due to lack of funds include the shortage of academic development specialists to support teaching and learning at departmental level, which affects the quality of teaching and learning at programme level. The second is technical and administrative. The lack of a tracking and early warning system to identify at-risk students is something that the University knows requires attention. The third, in the Panel's view, is conceptual. It has to do with the way the institution thinks about, develops and implements pedagogical principles and practices that can give effective expression to UWC's commitment to equity with quality.
22. The Panel is concerned that what several interviewees called 'aspirational pedagogy' is not consistent with the notion of an 'engaged university' that links equity with quality based on disciplinary knowledge. This is not to say that there is not an enormous amount of knowledge and experience at UWC in terms of teaching practice. On the contrary, it means that this experience is not sufficiently reflected upon in a systematic manner, and that the conclusions of those reflections are not translated into an institutionally discussed and clearly stated approach to teaching and learning that could become one of UWC's unique contributions to the higher education system and the broad society. Interviews with academic staff and management made it clear to the Panel that some see UWC's pedagogy as a complex and yet under-theorised practice rather than communicating clear objectives and instilling self-confidence in the students. The Panel noted with interest that many of the staff directly involved in teaching and learning seem to see this lack of theoretical and critical engagement with the idea of an 'aspirational pedagogy' as a weakness in UWC's approach to teaching and learning.

Recommendation 6

The HEQC recommends that UWC, taking as a point of departure the richness of the institution's teaching and learning experience, critically and systematically examine the theoretical underpinnings of its pedagogical approaches in order to ensure that the disciplinary knowledge developed and acquired by the institution through reflection on its teaching practices is adequately translated into a conceptualisation and strategies for teaching and learning which effectively support the University's link between equity and quality.

23. With regard to the introduction of effective teaching strategies, the Panel learned, through the analysis of the relevant documentation and interviews with staff, about UWC's thrust to make optimal use of e-learning as a tool to alleviate high staff: student ratios and support effective learning (SER: 48). Evidence gathered through interviews and analysis of the documentation provided suggests that two contradictory views of e-learning coexist in the institution. One seems to regard e-learning as a repository of lecture notes and course material which students can access, should they so desire, in their own time. From this perspective, e-learning is a tool to support what has already been discussed in class. The other view sees e-learning as a methodology of learning in its own right that engages students within a

specific paradigm of teaching and learning. The Panel suggests that the institution resolve these tensions.

Recommendation 7

The HEQC recommends that UWC put the necessary mechanisms in place, including appropriate staff development, to ensure that ongoing work on a research-based and educationally informed view of e-learning supports a more general utilisation of this resource for teaching and learning at undergraduate level across faculties.

24. The Panel noted that, despite being part of the IOP, the Teaching Plan was regarded by some senior members of staff as more principled and idealistic than implementable in the context of the large classes that often have to be taught at UWC. However, most academic staff indicated their sense of the importance of the Plan by pointing out the negative impact that lack of awareness of the Plan among part-time staff has on the quality of teaching and learning in certain modules. Interviews with staff and analysis of the relevant documentation did not provide the Panel with evidence of a centrally or faculty managed system in place to monitor the achievement of the Teaching Plan goals.

Recommendation 8

The HEQC recommends that UWC develop appropriate mechanisms, including the allocation of responsibilities, for monitoring the implementation and achievement of its Teaching Plan at institution level, thus harnessing the efforts being made at faculty level.

25. The Panel was concerned about the effectiveness of the institution's systems for *improving* the quality of teaching and learning and helping the institution to achieve its objectives in this area. While the Panel is mindful that some of the policies and plans that support institutional arrangements for the quality of provision are too new to assess, it nevertheless suggests that there are some weaknesses in the system that should be addressed. The institution does not seem to have sufficient monitoring mechanisms to close the quality loop, for example to analyse and act on the effect of student and moderator feedback on module and programme review, the delay or absence of improvement plans after feedback has been provided, or the timeous return of feedback to undergraduate students – a problem that was mentioned in interviews with students.

Recommendation 9

The HEQC recommends that UWC look at the effectiveness of the available mechanisms to monitor the quality of teaching and learning at different levels, to address identified problems and to generalise existing good practices across faculties.

26. UWC offers academic development activities and foundation programmes and has commenced a system of tutors for undergraduate students as ways of giving effect to the institution's understanding of equity and quality. The current Teaching and Learning Policy requires each faculty to have at least one designated academic development officer (ADO). Interviews with ADOs suggested that the majority of the faculties operate in a context in which the demand for support, not only in relation to students but also in terms of lecturing staff, is greater than the resources available. The Panel was very impressed by the commitment shown by the ADOs and it is aware

of the impact their work has in the various faculties. However, the Panel concurs with the opinions voiced during interviews about the need to revise the current system of academic development, the lack of sufficiently trained academic staff to introduce necessary innovations in teaching and learning, and the caution about the use of educational technologies to support teaching and learning before basic issues of language and numeracy have been addressed.

27. Concerns about success and throughput rates were put into perspective by ADOs and DCs who mentioned the tension between, on the one hand, students not passing subjects and complaining about the difficulty of module content and, on the other, lecturing staff arguing that the content taught and assessed is what is expected in the various programmes. In the context of the huge challenges faced by the institution, the Panel shares the view voiced during interviews that one of the main problems UWC faces in relation to teaching and learning is that it depends mostly on individual initiative, good will and knowledge and that practices are not sufficiently informed by research.

Recommendation 10

The HEQC recommends that UWC explore different institutional mechanisms to ensure that academic development practices become more research-based and better able to address the specific challenges that under-preparedness in a context of social deprivation poses to students and lecturing staff across all faculties.

28. **Academic Support Services.** The Panel would like to encourage the institution to develop adequate monitoring mechanisms for all its support programmes and units within the Division of Student Development and Support, not only to provide sufficient relevant information, but also to identify strengths and weaknesses in these programmes. The Panel would also like to encourage the institution to link some of these activities with its efforts to identify the desired attributes of the UWC graduate and inculcate these in its students, and to monitor the process. The Panel would, however like to compliment the institution on the programmes and projects of the SDS, which have the potential to enhance students' educational experience.
29. **Library.** The UWC Library is well resourced and easily accessible for students, including physically challenged students. The library network with the libraries of UCT, Stellenbosch and CPUT in the CALICO system seemed to be working well. The Panel noted the extended working hours of the library on four days of the week and the working hours during weekends. This, plus the provision of a shuttle service from the libraries to the residences, guarantees ample access to the library services for most students. The Panel was impressed by both the infrastructure and the staff commitment, particularly the support of postgraduate students. The Panel was satisfied that the library provides a good service to the University.
30. **Information and Communication Technology (ICT).** The Panel noted the commitment of UWC to the use of open source software and to the open sharing of its courseware, for which the institution must be congratulated. The increase in IT infrastructure, particularly the number of workstations available for students at the laboratories signals the level of funding committed by UWC in this area. The Panel was impressed by the range of

activities and projects managed by the Information and Communication Services (ICS) division and by the enthusiasm of their staff.

31. The Panel noted that in its 2006 report, the ICS had made comparatively little progress in most areas involving teaching and learning. Monitoring of usage indicates that approximately only 10 percent of UWC's students are involved in e-learning a low percentage considering the funds invested in this area. Interviews with academics suggested that while some staff are making good use of e-learning and many interesting and innovative courses are being designed, a large number of staff remain sceptical, untrained or relatively unaware of the uses of e-learning and the work of the E-learning Development and Support Unit (C10: 754-7). The Panel is of the view that the identification of clearer benchmarks with a time frame for each of the objectives listed in the 2006 report could help the institution in a number of ways. First, it would assist in assessing the returns on UWC's human resource and financial investment in e-learning. Secondly, it would show whether the conceptualisation of e-learning needs to be revised taking into account lecturing staff and student uptake. Finally, it would signal whether there are further obstacles hindering the uptake of e-learning at UWC by greater number of students and staff.

Recommendation 11

The HEQC recommends that UWC consider undertaking a formative evaluation of the E-learning Development and Support Unit in order to ascertain the appropriateness of the unit's strategic goals, the effectiveness of its location within the organisation of teaching and learning at UWC, and the extent to which its conceptualisation is informed by an institutionally adopted approach to teaching and learning.

32. **Staff development.** The Office of Staff Development, located within the Human Resources Department, offers an academic induction programme focused on teaching and learning for new staff, and facilitates other initiatives for all staff. The Panel agrees with academic staff interviewed that the location of staff development for teaching and learning under human resources, instead of in the core function itself, confirms the lack of deep conceptual engagement with teaching and learning at an institutional level, as well as a confusion between education and training.
33. Most of UWC's strategic documents on teaching and learning and the institution's SER point to the quality of teaching as one of the problems affecting student success and throughput at the University. The Panel found that, given the serious learning needs of the majority of UWC's students, the current arrangements for staff development are inadequate. Experienced and committed academic staff members were concerned at the inability of Departmental Chairs and Deans to be more proactive in this area. The Panel found that in certain areas, such as assessment, there is an urgent need for systematic training of new and existing staff, but this should take place in the context of a conceptualisation of assessment which is not independent from teaching and learning.

Recommendation 12

The HEQC recommends that, in the context of the appointment of a new DVC Academic and the Director of Teaching and Learning, UWC

should review the location and conceptualisation of staff development in order to ensure that it supports the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning at the institution and the achievement of institution-level strategic goals.

34. **Certification.** The Panel is satisfied that all the necessary security measures are in place to prevent the fraudulent issuing of certificates. The Panel is of the opinion that, with regard to certification, the University operates according to well-defined and well-maintained administrative processes. All risk areas are observed and are managed well by the Registrar, who is in full control of the central processes. In 2005, an audit conducted by Deloitte & Touche of the student administration system found that controls were generally adequate except in the area of moderation and in terms of marks adjustments. The report acknowledged that the Marks Administration System that was being put in place would standardise processes across faculties and introduce greater efficiency. As the system has not been fully implemented the Panel cannot comment on its impact.
35. **Short Courses.** The Panel is fully aware of the national leadership provided by the Department of Lifelong Learning (DLL) in the areas of adult education and RPL. The replacement of the DLL Board for a Senate Lifelong Learning Committee appropriately signals the achievement of the DLL and the institution's commitment to make lifelong learning a way of looking at education. The Panel was particularly interested in the opportunities that the creation of this committee might open up for the beginning of a serious and systematic conversation about teaching and learning at UWC. Conducted within the parameters of the experience of the DLL, this conversation could help the institution to look more carefully at the profile of its learners in terms of age, gender, and circumstances; and to investigate more systematically how students at different stages of their lives and careers learn and what implications this might have for course design, assessment, and materials development.
36. The Panel found through interviews that while a number of initiatives have been taken at the institution to mainstream lifelong learning, there is still a lack of conceptual clarity among some staff in the faculties about the differences among the range of modalities of courses offered. Given this lack of clarity, the Panel would like to suggest that the University devise a process, preferably led by the DLL, to ensure that there is a consistent understanding across faculties of the differences between Part-time Studies, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and Adult Education Programmes and Continuing Education (CE) in terms of purpose and target enrolment population, credit level, assessment requirements, expected outcomes and modes of certification and how all of these relate to lifelong learning as an educational philosophy.

Recommendation 13

The HEQC recommends that UWC devise a process, preferably led by the Division for Lifelong Learning, to clarify the differences between Part-time Studies, Continuing Professional Development and Adult Education Programmes, and Continuing Education in terms of purpose and target enrolment population, credit level, assessment requirements,

expected outcomes and modes of certification and the way all of these relate to lifelong learning as a educational philosophy.

37. **Programme Development.** The Panel found that UWC has clear procedures in place for the development and approval of new programmes, including a market appraisal, a curriculum scrutiny encompassing learning outcomes and assessment. The Panel heard in interviews that in the last year several programme proposals had been turned down. In the Panel's view this is a sign that the process is working and that the programme approval process is a genuine hurdle. The Panel identified the scrutiny of programmes from outside the originating department and faculty as good practice. The three-tiered structure in the approval process – Department, Faculty, Senate – appeared to be working and adds rigour to the process.
38. **Programme Review.** The Panel found that there is little use of quality performance indicators other than pass rates to assess programmes. In this regard, the institution might want to consider drop-out rates and some indicators attached to the student evaluation of modules to widen the issues looked at in the review. The Panel is of the view that the institution could strengthen its sound review process by examining strategies for learning, teaching and assessment more explicitly. The Panel found that, despite the focus on assessment at the approval stage, assessment strategies and programme pedagogy were not systematically examined during programme reviews, unless prompted through the observations of students.

Recommendation 14

The HEQC recommends that UWC consider strengthening its system of programme reviews by including a focus on the quality and effectiveness of the strategies for learning, teaching and assessment.

39. **Assessment.** In its IOP the University identified the quality of assessment as one of the causes of low throughput, prolonged time-to-degree and high attrition (SER: 79-80). Given the seriousness of these challenges for UWC, it is not surprising that the institution has put considerable effort and resources, including the conduct of an external audit of the marks administration system of the University (SER: 118-119, AP, C2), into identifying problems in this area. The Panel congratulates the institution in its proactive approach to improving the quality of assessment.
40. The Panel found a number of points in which the Assessment Policy is either contradictory or not sufficiently supportive of other areas of concern for the institution. Given the institution's concern with early warning systems about students under-performing in modules, the Panel would have expected the assessment policy to insist on early assessment, which is only mentioned in a few cases. There was evidence from several interviews that often the first opportunity to assess progress is an examination at the end of the first semester, which is probably too late to institute meaningful improvement.
41. In discussing the relationship between assessment, pedagogy and outcomes, the Panel found that the academic staff's theoretical and conceptual engagement with assessment as part of teaching and learning is uneven across faculties. Some of the staff who were interviewed could not engage in a discussion about assessment of different pedagogies used in the faculty.

This does not mean that the Panel did not find examples of good practice in assessment. Given this situation, the institution might want to ensure that all the structures responsible for assessment have at least one member who has adequate expertise in teaching and learning, as distinct from assessor training.

42. Interviews with staff revealed an inconsistent understanding of the ‘second choice examinations’ such that they could be easily manipulated to a student’s (unfair) advantage. This is especially the case of special examinations/assessments, supplementary examinations/assessments, and re-submission of assessment exercises (Assessment Policy, B3.1, 3.2, 3.4). In particular, the fact that a supplementary assessment, taken after the failure of a module, could now generate a much improved mark on the student’s record might discourage deeper and more integrated learning of all the contents of the module. The Panel is of the impression that academics are not sufficiently familiar with the appeals system. Many of the staff interviewed in this regard seemed largely ignorant of the policy. The Panel was concerned to find cases in which student names appeared on examination scripts, assignments, and even on notice boards where marks were displayed. More worrying still was the reaction of several academics interviewed who did not understand this to be a problem.

Recommendation 15

The HEQC recommends that UWC review its Assessment Policy in order to deal with identified weaknesses and ensure that the policy is designed to support the teaching and learning goals of the institution, particularly in terms of ensuring the quality of its graduates.

43. Interviews with external moderators revealed to the Panel some of the challenges UWC is dealing with in terms of student performance as well as some of the weaknesses of the moderation system. All moderators agreed about the effort put in by the institution to ensure that students meet the knowledge and competence requirements expected of them in the different disciplines and many indicated that the quality of the graduates is good. Some also pointed out that they have found the average pass rates to be somehow inflated, given the level of writing that students could deliver. Most moderators were not aware that their recommendations had been followed up or acted on since they had received no feedback, but they considered the administrative system to be running efficiently.

Recommendation 16

The HEQC recommends that UWC consider introducing a system of staff development in assessment good practice at all levels.

44. **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).** The Panel was impressed with the RPL policy which provides for a variety of routes for access to the University. In particular, the Panel found the portfolio development course to be an innovative set of activities to prepare potential students for admission. The Panel was also impressed with the dedication and knowledge displayed by the staff of the DLL, and was pleased to learn from the interviews that the policy was being translated into practice.

Commendation 5

The HEQC commends UWC for its policy and practices in the area of Recognition of Prior Learning. These were considered exemplary and

innovative and the Division for Lifelong Learning is commended for its contribution to the understanding of lifelong learning at a national level.

Research

45. UWC has two strategic documents that deal with research; the Research Plan and the IOP. The former locates research within UWC's mission and indicates that the overall strategic vision of research at UWC is to be a 'good research-based university' (AP, A7: 257). The Panel found that targets are rarely set and if they are, there is no indication on how these will be measured, or what benchmark was used to set the target and why. The document does not situate UWC in the context of research production and postgraduate education in the Western Cape or nationally, nor does it propose a range of strategic options for niche or focus areas in which the institution has current strength, comparative advantage or great potential. The Panel was not persuaded that this plan provides a strategic direction in which to grow UWC's research capacity. Given these constraints, UWC's achievements in the area of research are noteworthy.
46. The University has clearly stated that it intends to improve its research profile and is taking some concrete steps to achieve its goals. However, the concern voiced by many academic staff is that there has been no institutional debate to determine the research directions that should be pursued. The Panel gained the impression that research is not coordinated at an institutional level. Many of these issues probably arise from the fact that the Research Office does not play a central role in creating and implementing policy on research; it does not have sufficient funds and is poorly staffed. A well-resourced and properly staffed Research Office can be the catalyst for growth in the area of research. While the Panel is of the view that the appointment of a DVC with responsibility for research is a necessary step in including research in the strategic plan of the University, this on its own would not accelerate change. It is also necessary to strengthen the policy, implementation and administrative capacity of the Research Office, which up to now has been running a fairly complex operation without sufficient resources.

Recommendation 17

The HEQC recommends that UWC review its Research Plan, and identify goals, objectives and targets in line with the Institutional Operating Plan and the position of the institution in the Western Cape higher education landscape. This should be supported by the strengthening of the policy, implementation and administrative capacity of the Research Office.

47. The Panel was pleased to note that UWC has increased its support for research and that there is a move towards a greater prioritisation of research as a core function. The Panel also observed that UWC has created a research environment and culture which is open and free and within which it is possible to pursue a variety of research interests. There is evidence of recognised expertise in particular areas such as bioinformatics, biotechnology, geo-hydrology, phytotherapy, and sensor research, among others, which the institution has decided to prioritise in terms of funding and showcasing (SER: 134).

48. In a context of expansion such as this, the Panel was particularly concerned about the lack of institutional policies dealing with patents and intellectual property and an office or a function that deals with this and manages contract research. In the Panel's view this is another manifestation of the implications of research development at UWC that does not seem to have been considered from a strategic point of view.

Recommendation 18

The HEQC recommends that UWC review the organisation of its research function in order to identify the policies and administrative tools that are needed to support an expansion of this function, and to fill these gaps.

49. **Research Outputs.** Between 1990 and 2004, UWC increased the number of its NRF rated researchers from 6 to 65. It also increased its research outputs from 115 article equivalents in 1993 to 159 in 2005 and the enrolments of PhDs from 131 in 1996 to 321 in 2005.

Commendation 6

The HEQC commends UWC on the growth of its research core function in terms of research output, rated scientists and postgraduate enrolments at doctoral level.

50. **Postgraduate Education.** The growth in postgraduates at UWC has been supported by the excellent Postgraduate Education and Throughput (PET) project that was introduced in 2001. All interviewees were aware of the project, supported it and found it successful. The Panel also noted the efforts made to gear the library services to support postgraduate education. With regard to the PET project the Panel would like to encourage the institution to introduce appropriate monitoring mechanisms in order to enhance the project through the analysis of its outcomes.

51. In terms of supervision, the University is aware of the need for improvement. Activities such as supervision workshops have been organised by the Dean of Research. These activities notwithstanding, the Panel is of the view that the institution might want to consider the development of systematic training for new supervisors, including mentorship with more experienced colleagues. The Memorandum of Understanding signed between a student and supervisor is seen as an excellent quality enhancement initiative, but interviewees gave the impression that the procedure is not followed with the same rigour in all faculties. Overall, the Panel is of the impression that the practices and the quality of supervision vary significantly from department to department.

52. The Panel was particularly concerned about the policy regulating the examination of postgraduate theses. The rules specify supervisors as examiners of postgraduate theses, and also to write the combined report that is submitted to the relevant Senate Committee for ratification. The Panel is of the view that UWC's policy and practices for the examination of postgraduate theses and dissertations can undermine the quality and rigour of the institution's postgraduate degrees.

Recommendation 19

The HEQC recommends that UWC revise its policy for the examination of postgraduate theses in order to exclude supervisors from participation at any stage of the examination.

Community Engagement

53. The Panel was impressed by the range of community engagement activities managed by the institution which are embedded in teaching and learning through service-learning and community based education. The Panel noted the tradition of service-learning at UWC in the areas of Community and Health Sciences, Education and Library and Information Sciences (SER: 182). The Panel was impressed with the range of civic engagement approaches and student-led initiatives run by the institution.

Commendation 7

The HEQC commends UWC on the range of its community engagement activities, which include service-learning activities and civic engagement and student-led approaches.

54. The Panel noted that community engagement at UWC is integrated into teaching and learning and research. While the Panel agrees that community engagement can be quality assured within the other core functions, this is not necessarily true of the full range of activities run by the institution. It seems important that the University develop ways to assess the quality of this aspect of its provision and the outcomes of the various manifestations of community engagement. The Panel is particularly concerned that despite the importance of engagement in the definition of the University's identity, there are no specific performance indicators and benchmarks to help the institution assess its own achievements in this area.

Recommendation 20

The HEQC recommends that UWC consider identifying specific criteria to assess the quality of the different approaches to community engagement used by the University.

Conclusion

55. The University of the Western Cape is a well-functioning higher education institution. It is rightly proud of its role in the struggle against apartheid, and its intellectual contribution to the democratic movement and the education of thousands of black graduates. The University has recognised areas of strengths in all three core functions.
56. Its mission and its definition as an engaged university put UWC in a particularly good position to give effect to a rich understanding of transformation and to reconcile in practice the tensions between equity and quality and between the local and the global through sound research-based teaching at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, focused research in all its areas of strength, and carefully thought-through community engagement.
57. For UWC to realise its mission in the context of competing internal and external demands and aspirations, the institution will have to develop a rigorously theorised approach to teaching and learning which can be given

effect in classroom practices, develop a research strategy capable of establishing the scale of its research focus in relation to its identity as an engaged university, and align its system for the assurance, monitoring and improvement of quality to its complex understanding of quality. Finally, the University will have to develop the appropriate management processes, tools and information systems to ensure that its various academic and support units contribute consistently to the achievement of the institution's mission.