



**COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Audit Report  
on the  
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg**

Report of the HEQC to the University of the Witwatersrand,  
Johannesburg

**February 2008**

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## **Acronyms**

AESC	Animal Ethics Screening Committee
AP	Audit Portfolio
BARAT	Budget and Resource Allocation
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CLTD	Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development
CRO	Central Records Office
CUPS	Community University Partnerships
DoE	Department of Education
DST	Department of Science and Technology
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EDO	Education Development Officer
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
FRAC	Financial Resources Allocation Committee
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GSC	Graduate Students Committee
GSHSS	Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HR	Human Resources
IF	Institutional Forum
IP	Institutional Profile
MIS	Management Information System
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NRF	National Research Foundation
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SADC	South African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SET	Senior Executive Team
SIRS	Student Information Records System
SRC	Student Representative Council
URC	University Research Committee
VCO	Vice-Chancellor's Office

## **Overview of the Audit**

### **Introduction**

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

The Audit of the University of the Witwatersrand, (hereinafter referred to as Wits) was conducted by the HEQC in terms of its mandate. This document reports on the audit process and findings based on the Audit Portfolio and documentary appendices provided by Wits, supplementary documentation requested from the institution, and interviews and observations made during the audit visit that took place between 18 and 22 September 2006.

This report contains an overview of the audit visit, the findings of the Panel in relation to the audit criteria set by the HEQC, and a list of the commendations and recommendations made by the HEQC.

### **The Audit Process**

In November 2005 the Executive Director of the HEQC secured the consent of the Vice-Chancellor and the senior executive team at Wits that the University would participate in an institutional audit between 18 and 22 September 2006.

Wits conducted its institutional self-evaluation in the agreed time and produced an Audit Portfolio for review by the Audit Panel. Together with its focus on the 19 HEQC audit criteria, Wits chose, in consultation with the HEQC, to link the finalisation of its 2010 strategy to the recommendations of the audit report (AP: 5). The Audit Portfolio, together with its printed annexures, CDs and an electronic version, was submitted to the HEQC in July 2006.

The HEQC constituted an Audit Panel consisting of senior academics and academic administrators from the higher education community, all of whom had taken part in an auditor preparation workshop run by the HEQC. An Audit Portfolio meeting was convened in Pretoria on 7 and 8 August 2006 at which the Audit Panel met to consider the Audit Portfolio and prepare for the audit visit. During this meeting, the Audit Panel identified additional documents to be requested from Wits prior to the audit.

A senior member of the HEQC staff undertook a preparatory visit to Wits in August 2006. During that visit, the format and programme for the visit, and other details of the audit, were discussed and generally agreed to by the senior executive team of Wits.

The audit visit took place from 18 to 22 September 2006. The Audit Panel toured the campus on 17 September and conducted interviews with senior management and committee members on 18 and 19 September. On 20 and 21 September the Audit

Panel split into three groups and interviewed a wide range of Wits staff members and students. The interviews were completed on 22 September and verbal feedback was given to the Vice-Chancellor and the executive team.

An open session was also available for any staff or student member of the institution and community to meet the Audit Panel and make a submission. Some staff members made use of this opportunity to address the Panel.

In all, the Audit Panel interviewed approximately 330 people in 51 interview sessions during the audit visit, including

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

The Panel noted the inclusive and participatory approach to the Audit. In 2005, the Vice-Chancellor signalled his commitment to the process by making the Wits community aware of the upcoming audit. The aim was that staff, student leaders and office bearers should have the opportunity to voice their opinions and engage with the self-evaluation process prior to the audit visit. Methods used to achieve this included presentations to Wits committees, Schools and support units; workshops; progress updates for the committees; letters to stakeholders; e-mail news clips; articles in the campus publication, *The Wits Edge*; and the creation of a Wits Audit website (AP: 5–6).

Following his appointment in February 2006, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) took over the chair of the Audit Steering Committee from the Vice-Chancellor. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) led the self-evaluation of research and postgraduate education and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Partnerships and Advancement) directed the responses on the subject of community engagement. The Senior Executive Team (SET) determined the improvement priorities. The President of the SRC (Student Representative Council) participated in audit planning and joined the Audit Steering Committee in 2006 (AP: 5). Senate and Council were involved throughout the audit preparation process and commented on various drafts of the Audit Portfolio before approving the final draft.

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

It is expected that Wits will use these findings to strengthen its internal quality management systems and thereby improve the quality of its core academic activities as part of its *Wits 2010* initiative. Decisions about the way this is done, and the priority accorded to the various recommendations, are the prerogative of Wits. It is

expected that, eight months after the publication of the Audit Report, Wits will submit to the HEQC an improvement plan based on this report.

The HEQC would like to thank Wits for the cooperative way with which it participated in the audit process, and to express appreciation for the openness and confidence shown by Wits management in allowing the Audit Panel to conduct its work. Efficient preparation by Wits resulted in a smooth and trouble-free audit that enabled the auditors to focus their attention on the main purposes of the audit. The hospitality and assistance of Wits staff was appreciated. Professor Ballim and Ms Murray and their team are thanked in particular for preparing the documentation and for their cooperation and helpfulness throughout the process.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Institutional Mission**

1. The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Johannesburg, is a medium-sized urban contact university, English-medium and research focused, with 20 percent of its student population living in residences. Its origins can be traced back to the 19th century when mineral discoveries in Kimberley and the Witwatersrand highlighted the need for locally trained mining engineers. Wits was inaugurated on 1 March 1922. By 1939, it was the only residential university in the interior of South Africa that offered English-medium instruction. The period between 1947 and the 1980s was marked by considerable growth as student numbers increased rapidly to 6 275 in 1963, 10 600 in 1975 and 16 400 in 1985, by which time the number of Faculties had grown to ten (Architecture, Arts, Commerce, Dentistry, Education, Engineering, Law, Management, Medicine and Science).
2. In the 1980s, Wits used its own funds to strengthen its financial commitment to black students. As a result there was a rapid change in student demography, but this was at the cost of maintaining equipment and infrastructure. The 1990s saw Wits coming to grips with the transformation imperatives of the broader transition within South African society. From the late 1990s, in line with the Wits 2001 project, the focus was on modernisation rather than expansion. In 2001, as part of the government's rationalisation of teacher education, the University incorporated the Johannesburg College of Education.
3. In 2006, Wits had five Faculties and 34 Schools. These are spread over more than 400 hectares across the East and West campuses in Braamfontein, and the Management, Education and Health Sciences campuses in Parktown. In addition, teaching occurs at academic hospitals and associated clinics where key facilities are available, for example at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital. Other landholdings include residences (Braamfontein, Parktown, Hillbrow) and field sites (Wits Rural Facility in Mpumalanga, Frankenwald, Sterkfontein Caves, Pullen Farm). Wits has two central libraries and 12 branch libraries.
4. Wits offers a vast array of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications per School and Faculty. The qualifications range from undergraduate diplomas through formative and professional Bachelor's degrees, Master's and PhDs and senior doctoral degrees. In 2006 Wits has 23 323 students, of whom approximately 3 500 are accommodated in residences and 32 percent are postgraduate. Approximately 66 percent are black. A little over half are female. The majority are from Gauteng. International students make up approximately 10 percent, with most being from the South African Development Community (SADC). Wits employs 5 015 staff, 59 percent of whom are academic.
5. Wits is ranked consistently as one of the top two universities in South Africa by national benchmarks and with respect to research productivity. In 2006 it had 12 NRF A-rated and over 50 B-rated researchers. In 2006 it was awarded two NRF/DST Centres of Excellence, one in Strong Materials and the other in

Tuberculosis research jointly with the University of Stellenbosch. It also has one DTI-funded Centre of Excellence in Aerospace. Wits's research on human evolution, palaeontology and rock art is internationally renowned, as is some of the work done in the humanities and social sciences. The institution has nine research institutes, over 20 research units and 13 recognised research groups. During interviews with employers the Panel heard that the institution's graduates are sought after and recognised across the professions.

### **Commendation 1**

**The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand for its achievements in the development of professionals, academics and scientists of high reputation in a range of interdisciplinary fields.**

6. Wits has built a reputation for itself in promoting freedom of enquiry and the search for knowledge and truth and has established itself as a centre for education and research of the highest quality. Wits's mission is to build on this foundation in a way that takes account of its responsibilities within South Africa today; and to maintain and enhance its position as a leading university in the Republic, in Africa, and in the world by sustaining globally competitive standards of excellence in learning, teaching and research.
7. Wits aims to be ranked in the top 100 universities in the world by 2020. The Panel heard that the Vice-Chancellor conceptualises this goal as an integrated developmental trajectory that includes all core functions, internationalisation and localisation, and undergraduate and postgraduate students, in a series of mutually reinforcing interactions underpinned by excellence. The Panel did not see any strategic document where the reasons, the benefits, and the strategies for achieving the 'top 100' goal are clearly stated. The Panel is of the view that this explains why there are different information levels, a wide range of interpretations, and varying measures of support for the project among different constituencies. Given that Wits has flagged this as a priority goal, the Panel encourages the institution to facilitate a fully fledged discussion of this priority among key constituencies whose commitment, enthusiasm and innovativeness is required to achieve it.

### **Recommendation 1**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand develop a common understanding of what it means to be in the 'top 100' research-driven universities in the world, why this is important for the university, and the measures to be undertaken to achieve this goal.**

8. Wits is strongly committed to an open democratic society that maximises the autonomy of academics through decentralisation and a culture of self-regulation. The Panel heard in interviews with the senior executive team about the challenge of maintaining a balance between these two seemingly disparate standpoints. Furthermore, the Panel heard during interviews with various layers of staff about how tensions between managerial organisational practices and the values of autonomy hinder transformation processes and the achievement of institutional objectives. The Panel encourages the Senior Executive Team to continue to make

strategic use of the several studies that have been carried out in this area and that have identified some of the key problems, and to continue to develop strategies to deal with these problems.

## **Recommendation 2**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand continue to develop and implement strategies that will allow it to identify and act upon those areas where the tension between central management and academic collegiality may be endangering academic freedom and discouraging innovation and creativity. Similarly, it needs to identify aspects of this tension that might be used to resist change.**

- 9 Wits' interpretation of transformation as 'a process of organisational change that breaks decisively with past discriminatory practices in order to develop an environment where the full potential of everyone is realised and where diversity, both social and intellectual, is respected and valued and where it is central to the achievement of the institution's goals', enables it not only to engage with issues of access and redress but also to incorporate the contribution of diversity of ideas into its institutional culture and work in the three core functions. The Panel noted that this conceptualisation of transformation is closely aligned with Wits's mission and identity. It was clear to the Panel both from the Audit Portfolio and from interviews that Wits understands the need to move away from a strongly white and English culture towards inclusivity and diversity.
- 10 Although the university has made repeated attempts at examining its institutional culture and especially the ways in which it is welcoming towards newcomers and enabling of their academic aspirations, the Panel learned from documentation and interviews with academic staff and students that there is a considerable degree of concern and discomfort, especially among a new generation of academic staff and students, with the slow pace at which Wits is changing the profile of its academic workforce and traditional aspects of its institutional culture. The Panel urges the Senior Executive Team to interrogate the reasons and factors as to why, despite several studies in this area that have identified some of the key problems, strategic take-up of these challenges has not been comprehensive enough.
- 11 The institution has developed a language policy that proposes to develop staff competence in speaking Sesotho. However, this policy has not found expression in the internal level of activities and the University remains insensitive to and fairly intolerant of multilingualism as an important issue for institutional culture development at South African higher education institutions. And while Wits has confidence in its mission and strategic plans, there is concern that implementation has been patchy.
- 12 The Panel noted that Wits has attempted to change employment practices by developing specific appointment and promotion guidelines and criteria for the various academic levels and by delegating selection and promotion decision making to Faculty Staffing and Promotions Committees. The Panel heard that not all Schools have systematic equity plans. It also heard about the difficulty of making progress because there is insufficient knowledge of what resources are

available in the long-term to show commitment of University budget or resources to equity oriented programmes. The Panel encourages the institution to adopt a more systematic approach to employment practices so that there is alignment between Faculty-level decision making and the University's strategic objectives.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider the extent to which resourcing and more consistent implementation of the Employment Equity Policy and Plan across the institution would further advance Wits's own goals of transforming its staff profile.**

13. Wits has an Equity Development Unit located in the Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development (CLTD), which oversees capacity building and equity development programmes. The Panel was of the opinion that closely monitoring their effect in a systematic fashion at School and Faculty levels could strengthen the Unit's impact in its programmes. The Panel is of the view that the relationship between the Equity Development Unit and the Transformation Office may need to be further strengthened. The Panel encourages the institution to consider how a more effective relationship can be developed and responsibilities more effectively allocated between the two.
14. Wits's student profile has moved away from its traditional white male constituency in all Faculties, albeit unevenly. The Panel learned that Wits's student population is close to matching the race and gender profile of greater Gauteng. The Panel also noted that during the period 1984 to 2004 Wits recruited a significant number of poor students. While the number of African students has increased since 2005, there are fewer poor students enrolled, which shifted the emphasis from inequalities based on race to inequalities based on class. The Panel encourages the institution to explore and develop innovative strategies to provide poor students with opportunities to succeed at Wits.
15. The Panel agrees with the institution that attention should be paid to the relatively low proportion of African students in the Faculty of Health Sciences, just over 30 percent in 2005, and the 25 percent of females in the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment. The Panel understand that this is a national problem; however, it encourages the institution to find innovative ways to attract and support African and female students in these Faculties.

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

16. Over the last six years, Wits has undergone a significant change in its management and administrative structures. The Panel noted that the shift from centralised to decentralised approaches to decision making and core operations has imposed challenges that Wits has struggled to address, particularly in the areas of finance, staff capacity, information management, IT, administration, and the

reporting and decision-making systems. The Panel urges the institution to develop mechanisms to ensure a more efficient system in which the strategic management intersects with the operational management of the core functions. The Panel concurs with the institution that one important area that needs to be addressed is the operational connectedness between the VCO and the Faculties and Schools.

17. The Panel heard during interviews with management of the difficulty of directing resource allocation from the top or centre when decisions are being made at Faculty and School levels in a climate of financial austerity. The Panel was not clear whether it is the scarcity of financial resources or the decentralised model that is the primary reason for the decline in resource allocation to the implementation of the strategic objectives, or a combination of the two factors. The Panel encourages the institution to examine the roles of, and relationships between, various committees, and to consider enhancing articulation between the committee system, the SET, and the Heads of School. The Panel also encourages the institution to develop mechanisms to ensure its strategic objectives and resource allocations are fully aligned.
18. The Panel heard during interviews with management and staff and noted from the self-evaluation that the BARAT model (Budgeting and Resource Allocation Model) rewards the 'wrong kinds of performance'. During the interviews it was made clear to the Panel that recent proposals to combine the BARAT model with a taxation model for resource allocation are treated with suspicion by Deans and Heads of School.
19. The introduction of, and migration to, a management information system (Oracle) has proved difficult and has yet to bear fruit. The difficulties found in the implementation of Oracle seem to have had a considerable negative impact on staff at all levels. The Panel was concerned about the frequency and intensity with which staff members pointed out the negative impact that the glitches in the implementation of Oracle had on staff morale.
20. The Panel is of the opinion that the long period of restructuring undergone by Wits has yielded not only a new organisational model and management structure but also considerable self-knowledge about what remains to be done. The process of finalising and settling the restructuring should provide the institution with the opportunity to focus on the development of strategies, implementation plans and resource allocations to realise new conceptualisations of the institution in the three core functions.
21. The Panel appreciates the way Wits conceptualises quality as intrinsic to the practices of teaching and learning, research and community engagement and not as something separate or distinct from these practices.

## **Commendation 2**

**The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand for its rich conceptualisation of quality management and for the initiatives taken to improve, integrate and institutionalise this conceptualisation into its core functions.**

22. The Panel understands that, in a devolved system, Faculties are primarily responsible for realising the institution's strategy, principles and policies and for monitoring the extent to which goals are achieved. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to put in place further mechanisms and resources to implement its devolved system in a way that takes the specific needs of the Faculties as well as institution-level goals simultaneously into account. The Panel concurs with the University that it should reconsider how responsibility for quality improvement and management can be best located within both Senate and executive structures, in a way which is consistent with the policy and approach of the University towards matters of quality. The Panel encourages the institution to allocate clear responsibility for overseeing, monitoring and evaluating quality assurance and integrating quality assurance planning into the university-wide planning and resource allocation cycles.
23. The Panel learned during interviews that Wits is using service-level agreements, especially with respect to support services, to define relationships and standards. The Panel heard from some interviewees that the relationship between these agreements and the quality management system is not always made explicit. The Panel encourages the institution to review agreements and develop a succinct and clear statement of principles and operational procedures for quality management with allocated responsibilities.
24. Wits acknowledges that it has not adopted a systematic approach to providing feedback to students and conducting surveys, graduate tracer studies and international benchmarking. However, the Panel appreciates that Wits engages in informal benchmarking practices and that considerable benchmarking takes place in Faculties and Schools.
25. The Panel heard during interviews with management that the development of appropriate sets of performance indicators and an institutional dashboard with attached benchmarks against which to measure the achievement of Wits's 2010 and 2020 objectives is still work in progress. The Panel would like to reinforce the institution's understanding that, in developing indicators, it should not reduce the complexities inherent in becoming one of the top 100 universities, or being research-led, to a numbers game, which only applies to the research function. Taking a perspective that moves away from the numbers game, the Panel encourages the institution to focus on developing performance indicators that concentrate on teaching and learning issues and the local aspects of the Wits mission and strategy.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand develop the necessary structural mechanisms to integrate, as far as possible, benchmarking, impact surveys and planning, so that these activities can help monitor the achievement of the institution's strategic plan.**

## **General Arrangements for Teaching and Learning Quality**

26. Wits holds that its understanding of teaching and learning is aligned with its mission and identity, both of which emphasise a research focused approach that places a high value on independent inquiry and an environment that fosters critical thinking in students. While the culture of argument, high levels of academic autonomy and Wits's commitment to self-regulation fit with the purposes of a research oriented university, it was not clear to the Panel how these are balanced with management's commitment to developing a more systematic institutional approach to improving the quality of teaching and learning.
27. The Panel learned that the University is trying to enhance the importance and the quality of teaching through the introduction of teacher evaluation as a necessary component of staff promotions. The Panel noted with appreciation the fact that Wits has an annual Vice-Chancellor's Teaching award to recognise high quality teaching. The Panel is of the opinion that this is an important step towards increasing the value attached to teaching within the University.
28. The Panel would like to compliment Wits on its introduction of the idea of the professionalization of teaching as an institution-level strategic priority. For this idea to be sufficiently taken up and therefore to improve teaching and learning, it is essential that the institution identify effective ways of increasing the level of staff participation in these activities.

### **Commendation 3**

**The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand on developing a strategy to professionalise teaching and learning as a way to improve the quality of students' educational experience at the institution.**

29. The Panel was concerned that there is no teaching and learning plan, equivalent of the Wits Strategic Research Plan. Although there may be issues about how effective such a plan would be in the University's decentralised academic model, the Panel is of the view that this could support the institution in better integrating academic planning with resource allocation. Furthermore, the absence of an overarching academic plan could well mean that the strategic priorities for teaching and learning have not been laid out in sufficient detail to guide decision making on qualification design and curriculum development at the Faculty and School levels.

### **Recommendation 5**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider developing an overarching plan that gives clear expression to the institution's conceptualisation of teaching and learning, and which sets out objectives, targets, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as well as allocation of responsibilities and committed resources at the Faculty level.**

30. The Panel noted that there is no institutionally coordinated system in place to manage teaching and learning. While acknowledging that such a system may present challenges, given the decentralisation model, the Panel concurs with the self-evaluation report that Wits would benefit from a common understanding of what it recognises as ‘programme management’, especially with regard to the links between programmes, enrolments and resource allocation, and concurs with the institution that such a system should be put in place.
31. The Panel noted that the information on service learning at institutional level is inconsistent. Currently, individual lecturers at the School level decide whether to embark on service learning and whether there are adequate resources to implement service learning programmes. Furthermore, there is no institution-wide understanding or decision on the merits or demerits of integrating service learning into overall qualifications through identifying specific courses that would benefit from the service learning methodology. There are currently no significant incentives for implementing service learning courses. The Panel encourages Wits to debate the benefits of service learning in the context of programmes offered at the institution.
32. The Panel agreed with the self-evaluation that the system for experiential learning is currently informal and decentralised and little attention is paid to identifying and disseminating examples of best practice. The Panel encourages the institution to develop and implement policy and procedures for work-based learning.
33. The Panel noted that there are no specific quality management systems for e-learning, even though many Schools have developed resources that are web-based. The Panel encourages the institution to develop a systematic approach to the quality assurance arrangements for e-learning.
34. The Panel noted with appreciation the comprehensive approach to student support and the positive feedback that emerged in the interviews with staff and students, which was supported by the evidence from satisfaction surveys. The Panel heard in interviews some international students’ concerns about the importance of the international office for supporting their transition into the university. While there was appreciation for the support that was offered, it was thought that consideration should be given by Wits to providing more orientation programmes for international students.

#### **Commendation 4**

**The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand for its extensive high quality non-curricular support services that enhance the student learning experience.**

35. In terms of academic staff, support for teaching and learning is provided by the Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development (CLTD), which also offers programmes for improving teaching practices. These are supported in some Faculties by Education Development Officers (EDOs). The Panel noted that their roles are often not well defined and that there is no formal direction from the CLTD to the EDOs.

36. The CLTD also offers a range of Teaching Evaluation services, including computerised Assessment of Lecturer Performance, Peer Evaluations, Small Group Instructional Diagnosis, and a Qualitative Questionnaire. Although most Faculties have dedicated staff for academic development programmes, these are not centrally coordinated and there are differences in approach among Faculties.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider creating some form of co-ordination of academic development activities and projects as a way of providing more systematic support for institutional commitment to the professionalization of teaching and learning.**

37. During interviews with the staff of the CLTD, as well as with some EDOs, the Panel noted with appreciation that there is a younger generation of university lecturers and professors who are engaging with teaching as a research-based activity and who are in their own right also active researchers. However, it was the opinion of the Panel that the secondary status of teaching vis-à-vis research remains a pervasive problem. Regardless of the commitment of staff and the SET to the professionalization of teaching, there seems to be a perception of teaching as a lesser occupation. This indicates the continuing power of a particularly narrow understanding of the nature of academic work as centred exclusively on research. The Panel urges the institution to examine its understanding of research and teaching as interlinked activities.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand examine the implications for teaching and learning of its vision of being a research focused university, in order to define innovative and more substantial articulation between research and teaching and learning.**

38. The library system is comprehensive, with a collection of approximately 1 100 000 book volumes and over 25 000 electronic and print journal titles, which may be accessed remotely through the Library website on the Internet as well as on campus (with approximately 270 networked computer workstations for library users). The Panel was impressed by the recent innovation of 'learning portals'. However, during interviews with academics the Panel heard that more library resources are required to bring it in line with its strategic objective of being a research driven university. The Panel strongly supports Wits's findings that more resources need to be allocated to the library in order to support ongoing innovation and to extend the working hours of the various libraries.
39. Wits has developed a system with high levels of security to protect the integrity of its certification. Access to the SIRS (Student Information Records System) is password protected and includes a 'footprint' feature that allows changes made by a particular password holder to be traced. Records date back to 1922 and are kept in a fireproof cupboard and the university has systems for backing up electronic records. The examinations and graduation office is monitored by closed circuit television and has an alarm system that is linked directly to

Campus Security. The Panel found the range of security features for the certificates to be robust and well-managed.

### **Commendation 5**

**The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand for the rigour of its management of certification and the scrutiny to which it is subjected.**

40. Wits offers a wide range of short courses, many of which are geared to continuing professional development. The Panel heard during interviews with academics that there is uneven awareness across Faculties and Schools of the arrangements for the management of short courses. Furthermore, the current quality management system for short courses does not have policies or procedures for systematic reviews. The Panel concurs with the institution's opinion that the quality management of short courses should be consistent across all Faculties and Schools. The Panel noted with concern that some Schools are not complying with the requirement to submit records of students who have completed short courses and encourages the institution to give urgent attention to this matter.
41. The Panel heard during interviews with management that Wits faces difficulties in aligning its qualifications with its mission and strategy as a result of scarce financial resources. The Panel was concerned to hear during interviews that it is sometimes necessary to prioritise the income-generating potential of a qualification or programme rather than its alignment with Wits's mission. The Panel urges Wits to put in place mechanisms to ensure that the financial and academic imperatives in the development of programmes are adequately balanced and that new programmes are aligned with the institution's mission.
42. Responsibility for developing sound curricula lies with academic staff at the Faculty and School levels. This includes ensuring that there is coherence between the intended learning outcomes of the programme and of the pedagogy. During interviews with academics the Panel heard that this coherence is not always achieved. The Panel learned of attempts to remedy this through the introduction of new formats for course proposals and the requirement of an explicit statement of the link between the course and the exit-level outcomes of the qualification. The Panel received confirmation in interviews with academics that there was resistance to this approach by some staff on the grounds that exit-level outcomes are too opaque for the exercise to be worthwhile.
43. Faculties and Schools responsible for professional qualifications have ongoing relationships with professional bodies. The Panel learned from interviews with staff and members of external bodies that a primary source of information for the design and development of such programmes arises from external accreditation processes. However, the Panel heard during interviews with staff that feedback from these external stakeholder groups is not gathered or recorded in a systematic way. The Panel urges the institution to put in place a system to ensure that external feedback is integrated into the development of new programmes.

44. The Panel heard during interviews with students that course reviews generally do not address problems, such as poorly performing lecturers. The Panel also learned that course evaluations tend to focus more on the lecturer than on the curriculum or learning because they are initiated by staff seeking promotion. This undermines their value as an instrument for scrutinising the quality of programmes as part of the quinquennial reviews.
45. The decentralised model of Wits has located responsibility for staffing and promotions at Faculty level, with each Faculty having a Human Resources manager and significant responsibility for the implementation of HR policies and procedures. The Panel noted with appreciation that as a result of the 2005 review of HR policies, research into current policies and the redevelopment of certain policies was commissioned under the direction of the HR Director.
46. The Panel appreciated that Wits is attempting to address the challenges of managing staff performance. From the interviews with academic staff, the Panel heard that there appears to be a significant level of mistrust about performance management, largely because of the tension between academic autonomy and the need for accountability and alignment with the University's strategic objectives. The Panel also heard that lecturer evaluation appears to be linked most strongly to applications for promotion rather than being a developmental tool applied to all lecturing staff. The Panel encourages the University to tackle the perceived tensions of performance management in a more directed fashion and to develop a system that achieves an appropriate balance between autonomy and accountability.
47. The Panel heard during interviews with staff that the current system for addressing the developmental needs of new staff and for improving the teaching competence of all staff is not adequate. The Panel heard that there has been more emphasis on improving teaching than on improving curricula. The Panel encourages the institution to pay attention to curriculum development so that the capacity to develop curricula becomes an integral part of a lecturer's competence.

### **Recommendation 8**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand reconceptualise staff development as a mechanism of support for the development and implementation of its conceptualisation of teaching and learning and that it finds a mechanism to align its approach to staff development and the range of its offerings to the actual needs of staff.**

48. The management of assessment is located at School level, with moderation and validation being carried out through the use of external examiners. The Panel acknowledges Wits's use of a range of summative and formative assessment instruments ensuring assessment *of* students. However, the Panel heard during interviews with academics that assessment *for* students as part of the development process is not used consistently across Schools and Faculties. The Panel urges the institution to ensure that academics are provided with adequate support so that they understand the various types of assessment tools.

49. Wits has a long tradition of internal and external moderation. Current policy requires that 50 percent of the assessments that contribute to the final mark of any course must be internally or externally moderated and that 30 percent must be externally examined. The Panel noted from documentation and from interviews with academics that feedback to staff on their assessment practices is not done systematically by moderators. The Panel also heard about differences in Faculty and School assessment committees' moderation practices and that the large variations in the numbers of students in different courses led to inconsistency in these practices. Overall, the Panel was satisfied by the University's approach to assessment and, despite the weaknesses identified by the University, is of the view that Wits has a rigorous and systematic approach to assessment.

### **Commendation 6**

**The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand for its systematic and rigorous approach to assessment.**

50. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is included as one of the means by which access to the institution is increased and has been delegated from Senate to Faculty level. There are no institution-wide guidelines or plans for implementing or evaluating RPL. Wits has not prioritised the development of RPL policies and practices, on the grounds that they make heavy demands on personnel and financial resources at a time when these are scarce. The Panel heard during interviews with staff that RPL is used in the main for two purposes: first for recognising credits earned at another accredited institution and second for providing an alternative access route for those mature age students who do not meet the requirement of the existing mature age exemption certificate. The Panel found this to be one interpretation of RPL and encourages the institution to review the ways in which the intended purpose of RPL can be appropriately implemented at Wits.

### **Recommendation 9**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand review its definition of RPL to include a broader understanding of the purposes and approaches to RPL. This should be accompanied by plans to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate RPL across the institution with the allocation of clear lines of responsibility.**

## **Management of Research Quality**

51. Wits has a sustained reputation in South Africa for excellence as a research university. In terms of quality and productivity of research, it is one of the top two South African universities, and ranks in the top 100 in the developing world and in the top 500 globally.
52. Although Wits recognises that its general research output declined over the 1990s and early 2000s, the Panel acknowledges that its research output improved in 2004 and 2005. Wits is aware of the need for urgent action if the

University is to improve its research output by 2010. The Panel encourages Wits to develop specific implementation strategies that indicate how its research targets are to be achieved, and what financial resources are made available to this effect. This strategy should include milestones and indicators that allow it to systematically monitor the progress of its different units towards this objective.

53. The increase in the number of postdoctoral fellows across the research units and groups in the institution has been met with general support and approval by all researchers. The Panel congratulates the institution on an initiative that is set to produce important spin-offs in terms of capacity development and enhancement of research outputs, which will go some way towards addressing the aforementioned challenges of increasing research output and the number of PhD holders.

### **Commendation 7**

**The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand on its postdoctoral fellows programme.**

54. The Panel noted, however, that Wits has a number of research-active academics who are not rated by the NRF and that there are no institutional incentives for researchers to become NRF rated. Furthermore, there are no structured development and guidance programmes to steer new researchers towards obtaining their NRF ratings. The Panel encourages the institution to consider putting in place mechanisms to develop and guide particularly early career researchers to gain an NRF rating.

### **Recommendation 10**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand develop an integrated strategy for research development that includes supporting and mentoring staff pursuing doctoral studies and emerging researchers trying to establish a career in their areas of specialisation. This should include funding, support and, fundamentally, adequate advice and guidance.**

55. Wits acknowledges that research intensification and the goal of becoming one of the top 100 universities require large and sustainable investment in equipment and infrastructure. The Panel heard in interviews with researchers that resourcing to support research also needs to include increased investment in library holdings and access to journals. The Panel agrees that Wits needs an infrastructural strategy to ensure that investments in equipment, the library and ICT resources are sufficient to support and improve the quality of research. More broadly, the Panel suggests that Wits needs to devise policies and procedures linking resource allocation and support for research with the quality management of research output and the enhancement of research productivity. The Panel supports Wits's intention to establish a Central Research Facility to address weaknesses in research equipment and physical infrastructure.

### **Recommendation 11**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand develop an approach to funding and investment in equipment and infrastructure which is more supportive of the institution's strategic goal of becoming a top 100 research institution by 2020.**

56. The Panel noted the commitment of the VCO's team to realising the research driven conception of the University and working towards the goal of entering the ranks of the top 100 universities in 2020. However, the Panel is of the impression that the support structures available for research might not be sufficient to sustain the realisation of Wits's research goals. The Panel is of the view that it might be necessary to redefine the role of the Central Records Office to support the planned intensification of research activities at the institution. This will entail a review of the resourcing for this office in terms of both human resources and budgets.

#### **Recommendation 12**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider redefining the role of the Central Records Office and its resourcing, so that this structure can provide leadership and advice to established and new researchers and thus contribute more fully to the planned intensification of research activity at the institution.**

57. The Panel is concerned at the lack of self-evaluation mechanisms for the University Research Committee and the Faculty Research Committees, which creates a gap in the research quality management system, particularly in respect of monitoring and review responsibilities. It is not clear to the Panel at what point in Wits's quality cycle the effectiveness of the committee-based review structures is addressed. The Panel concurs that this lack of monitoring is exacerbated by Wits not having a comprehensive and accurate centralised research information system in place.

#### **Recommendation 13**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider establishing a means for evaluating the performance of the University Research Committee and the Faculty Research Committees in order to assess the effectiveness of these structures in the support of the strategic goals of the institution in the research core function.**

58. A further area that may require support in the light of achieving the institution's goals is the role that Deans and Faculties play in the administration and enhancement of research. Concerns were expressed during interviews with researchers that the Deans may not be providing enough strategic leadership or active encouragement for research in their Faculties. While this might be related to the newness of some Deans, it is important that they are considered as active participants in the development of a strategy for achieving institutional goals.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider assessing the effectiveness of the role of the Executive Deans in relation to the research function and their responsibility for achieving the institution-level goal of becoming a research intensive university.**

59. The research strategic plan provides an overarching framework within which the policies and other plans operate. The Panel learned from interviews with management and researchers that the implementation of this framework has been compromised partly by the lack of a centralised MIS and partly by the lack of alignment between university-level strategic plans and their implementation at School level. The Panel found that response to the delegation model is inconsistent and that there are inconsistencies in the Schools' practices. The Panel concurs with the University that the decentralised model for managing quality in research creates a disjuncture with respect to achieving an alignment between the University's mission, vision, identity, objectives and resource allocations on the one hand and the implementation of this vision in the Faculties and Schools on the other.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand review the effectiveness of the current decentralised model of decision making, particularly in relation to the consistent application of research related policies and the alignment between the institutional strategy for the research function and its interpretation and implementation at Faculty and School levels.**

60. Wits has in place a number of initiatives to develop and enhance the participation of black and women researchers in the University's research activities. The Panel heard during interviews with researchers that these initiatives provide opportunities and are making a difference, but that there are no data or tracer studies to demonstrate their success. The Panel encourages the institution to develop a database and undertake studies to determine the success or otherwise of these initiatives.
61. Wits takes an innovative and effective approach to balancing commercial work against basic and fundamental research. The two most significant ways it manages its commercial research activities are through Wits Enterprise and the Wits Health Consortium. The Panel was impressed with the innovative nature and effectiveness of these companies.

#### **Commendation 8**

**The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand on the effective support provided by Wits Enterprise and Wits Health Consortium for staff and student research.**

62. The goal of becoming a 'top 100' university requires a significant increase in postgraduate students. Wits has a dual focus on postgraduate research degrees

and on high-level coursework qualifications as it moves towards being a research oriented institution and continues to cater for the high-level skills requirements of the professions. However, the Panel noted that over the last five years Wits has not succeeded in significantly increasing the proportion of postgraduate to undergraduate students. The Panel encourages the institution to develop ways to attract students to postgraduate studies and thus ensure the effective implementation of its research strategy.

63. Responsibility for postgraduate studies has been devolved primarily to the Faculty and School levels, albeit with coordination and oversight from the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) established in 2003, which focuses mainly on the Master's degrees and on Doctoral degrees by thesis. Many of the Schools have successfully implemented improvements to enhance postgraduate studies, as is evidenced in particular in the example of the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences (GSHSS).

#### **Commendation 9**

**The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand on the quality of its postgraduate activities and the success of the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences.**

64. Wits has a less than adequate number of full-time academic staff. The Panel concurs with the institution that this affects the capacity for research and postgraduate student supervision since supervisors have large workloads. The Panel concurs that the University needs to develop some norms to ensure consistency of quality in supervision, particularly regarding the number of students per supervisor, and an equitable system across Schools to determine how supervision time may be included in the workload models.

#### **Recommendation 16**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand provide more support structures for postgraduate education, in particular with regard to supervision, and use its examples of good practice in Schools more effectively.**

### **Management of the Quality of Community Engagement**

65. Wits's conception of community engagement covers all of society (government, business, civil society) and combines four traditions: (1) making academic expertise available in the public domain; (2) the practice of public scholarship, notably in the media, humanities and arts; (3) public interest work, often on behalf of communities or individuals who do not have the power, resources or expertise to act on their own behalf; and (4) the direct provision of services to communities. The Panel congratulates the university on the diversity and depth of its understanding of community engagement.
66. The Panel was pleased to learn that the Community University Partnerships (CUPS) Office has developed a draft HR Policy for Engagement that is

currently in the approval process, and that the University has approved a workload norms policy that recognises community engagement. The Panel noted with appreciation the annual Vice-Chancellor's award of R80,000 for academic citizenship, which contributes to a new climate of official recognition of community engagement similar to that provided for recognition of teaching.

67. Quality management within the first tradition is concentrated on the planning, support, resourcing and monitoring of the research that is ultimately delivered to the public. The primary form of quality management in the second tradition is through the existing policies and procedures for the quality assurance of teaching and research. In the third tradition, the primary form of quality assurance is located in the research underpinning the public interest intervention. Quality management in the fourth tradition poses the most challenges as it lies, in the main, beyond the reach of mainstream quality management of research and teaching. While community engagement has recently been subjected to more directed quality management, the Panel is concerned that none of the four traditions has its own quality management system.

#### **Recommendation 17**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand develop and implement a quality management system for the four traditions of community engagement.**

68. The Panel congratulates Wits on the nature and intensity of its engagement with the Johannesburg Metro and the Province and the way research and teaching are integrated into the relevant projects, for example, the institution's involvement in activities such as the Origins Centre and the Johannesburg Cultural Precinct. The Panel also congratulates the institution on the role of Wits Plus in enhancing access to higher education and on the community work done at the Wits Rural Facility.

#### **Commendation 10**

**The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand on the nature and intensity of its engagement with the Johannesburg Metropolitan area and the Province and the way research and teaching are integrated into the relevant projects, and the institution's involvement in activities such as the Origins Centre and the Johannesburg Cultural Precinct.**

69. In synthesis, the Panel found that Wits University is a well managed and capably led institution, actively grappling with the contradictions of its historical legacies and the challenges of its transforming present. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to sustain the momentum for quality enhancement gained through the process of self-evaluation. In its self review there are important conceptualisations which have emerged or have been redefined about the university's core functions. These need to be translated into clearly formulated strategies to be engaged with and given effect at different levels of the institution in order to make the gains of the audit sustainable.

## **Summary of Audit Findings**

This section summarises the main conclusions stemming from the audit. The commendations of the HEQC signal areas of strength, excellence and/or innovation which may require ongoing institutional support. The recommendations of the HEQC signal issues which may require new or strengthened attention with regard to quality provision. The HEQC notes that Wits has itself identified many of these issues for attention. These and a number of other issues will need to be incorporated into the overall quality assurance planning and practice at Wits, with appropriate allocation of responsibility for implementation and monitoring.

A list of commendations and recommendations follows. These are not presented in any order of priority, but are presented in the order in which they appear in the report. They are clustered below to provide a quick overview for the reader. The body of the report also draws attention to other issues for attention and consideration by Wits.

### **Commendations**

1. The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand for its achievements in the development of professionals, academics and scientists of high reputation in a range of interdisciplinary fields.
2. The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand for its rich conceptualisation of quality management and for the initiatives taken to improve, integrate and institutionalise this conceptualisation into its core functions.
3. The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand on developing a strategy to professionalise teaching and learning as a way to improve the quality of students' educational experience at the institution.
4. The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand for its extensive high quality non-curricular support services that enhance the student learning experience.
5. The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand for the rigour of its management of certification and the scrutiny to which it is subjected.
6. The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand for its systematic and rigorous approach to assessment.
7. The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand on its postdoctoral fellows programme.
8. The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand on the effective support provided by Wits Enterprise and Wits Health Consortium for staff and student research.

9. The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand on the quality of its postgraduate activities and the success of the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences.
10. The HEQC commends the University of the Witwatersrand on the nature and intensity of its engagement with the Johannesburg Metropolitan area and the Province and the way research and teaching are integrated into the relevant projects, and the institution's involvement in activities such as the Origins Centre and the Johannesburg Cultural Precinct.

### **Recommendations**

1. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand develop a common understanding of what it means to be in the 'top 100' research-driven universities in the world, why this is important for the university, and the measures to be undertaken to achieve this goal.
2. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand continue to develop and implement strategies that will allow it to identify and act upon those areas where the tension between central management and academic collegiality may be endangering academic freedom and discouraging innovation and creativity. Similarly, it needs to identify aspects of this tension that might be used to resist change.
3. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider the extent to which resourcing and more consistent implementation of the Employment Equity Policy and Plan across the institution would further advance Wits's own goals of transforming its staff profile.
4. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand develop the necessary mechanisms to structurally integrate, as far as possible, benchmarking, impact surveys and planning, so that these activities can help monitor the achievement of the institution's strategic plan.
5. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider developing an overarching plan that gives clear expression to the institution's conceptualisation of teaching and learning, and which sets out objectives, targets, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as well as allocation of responsibilities and committed resources at the Faculty level.
6. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider creating some form of co-ordination of academic development activities and projects as a way of providing more systematic support for institutional commitment to the professionalization of teaching and learning.
7. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand examine the implications for teaching and learning of its vision of being a research focused

university, in order to define innovative and more substantial articulation between research and teaching and learning.

8. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand reconceptualise staff development as a mechanism of support for the development and implementation of its conceptualisation of teaching and learning and that it finds a mechanism to align its approach to staff development and the range of its offerings to the actual needs of staff.
9. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand review its definition of RPL to include a broader understanding of the purposes and approaches to RPL. This should be accompanied by plans to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate RPL across the institution with the allocation of clear lines of responsibility.
10. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand develop an integrated strategy for research development that includes supporting and mentoring staff pursuing doctoral studies and emerging researchers trying to establish a career in their areas of specialisation. This should include funding, support and, fundamentally, adequate advice and guidance.
11. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand develop an approach to funding and investment in equipment and infrastructure which is more supportive of the institution's strategic goal of becoming a top 100 research institution by 2020.
12. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider redefining the role of the Central Research Office and its resourcing, so that this structure can provide leadership and advice to established and new researchers and thus contribute more fully to the planned intensification of research activity at the institution.
13. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider establishing a means for evaluating the performance of the University Research Committee and the Faculty Research Committees in order to assess the effectiveness of these structures in the support of the strategic goals of the institution in the research core function.
14. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand consider assessing the effectiveness of the role of the Executive Deans in relation to the research function and their responsibility for achieving the institution-level goal of becoming a research intensive university.
15. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand review the effectiveness of the current decentralised model of decision making, particularly in relation to the consistent application of research related policies and the alignment between the institutional strategy for the research function and its interpretation and implementation at Faculty and School levels.
16. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand provide more support structures for postgraduate education, in particular with regard to

supervision, and use its examples of good practice in Schools more effectively.

17. The HEQC recommends that the University of the Witwatersrand develop and implement a quality management system for the four traditions of community engagement.