



Executive Summary
INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT REPORT ON
THE UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

(03 November 2023)

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CHE	Council on Higher Education
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EMC	Executive Management Committee
EMT	Extended Management Team
EY	Ernest & Young
GMRMDC	Govan Mbeki Research Management and Development Centre
FTLQAC	Faculty Teaching and Learning Quality Assurance Committees
HE	Higher Education
HEDA	Higher Education Data Analyzer
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualification Sub-framework
HOD	Head of Department
IAC	Institutional Audit Committee
IA	Institutional Audit
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
IQAC	Institutional Quality Assurance Committee
IQMS	Internal Quality Management System
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LMS	Learning Management System
MEC	Management Executive Committee
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
PG	Postgraduate
PQA	Planning and Quality Assurance
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
QA	Quality Assurance
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
RPI	Research, Partnerships and Innovation
SA	South Africa
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SIU	Special Investigating Unit

SP	Strategic Plan
SRC	Student Representative Council
TLC	Teaching and Learning Centre
UFH	University of Fort Hare
UG	Undergraduate
VC	Vice-Chancellor

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) was established through the *Higher Education Act* (Act 101 of 1997, as amended) primarily to assure quality in the South African higher education sector and to advise the Minister on aspects of higher education. The *National Qualifications Framework Act* (Act 67 of 2008, as amended) conferred additional responsibilities on the CHE as the Quality Council for higher education, with overall responsibility for the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). The CHE executes its quality assurance responsibilities through its permanent committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The CHE, through the HEQC, exercises its quality assurance function using a variety of mechanisms, one of which is institutional audits that are mandated by the Higher Education Act.

The *Framework for Institutional Audits* (2021)¹ and its attendant *Manual for Institutional Audits* (2021)² are key instruments to regulate the implementation of institutional audits. These documents are also aligned in important aspects to the new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)³ that was approved by the HEQC and Council in September 2020 and which will be implemented in the medium term by the CHE. Institutional audits are strongly influenced by both the specific context within which each HEI works, and by the national transformational agenda within which higher education functions. The HEQC has identified a need to do full audits of all HEIs in South Africa. A full audit of an institution determines whether or not, and to what extent, its IQA systems, policies and procedures ensure the effective provisioning of good quality higher education that enhances the likelihood of student success through quality learning and teaching, research opportunities and integrated community engagement. The emphasis is less on ensuring that required standards are met at a particular threshold than on the deliberate, continuous, systematic and measurable improvement of the student experience, as well as on building reflexive praxis to develop quality cultures in institutions.

The following principles guided the institutional audit of the University of Fort Hare (UFH):

1. The primary responsibility for internal quality assurance rests with individual HEIs. Each institution is responsible for the establishment, implementation, maintenance, improvement and enhancement of its own quality management and assurance systems.
2. The uniqueness of each institution's size, shape, location, context and mission is recognised.

3. The value of institutional audits rests on the compilation of credible, contextually relevant and reliable information that is required for internal quality-related planning and self-evaluation, peer review and public reporting (for example, by publishing executive summaries).
4. Student experience, student engagement, participation, and the student voice are central to an evaluation of an institution's quality management system.
5. The institutional audit is a peer-driven and evidence-based process to ensure that the HEQC and its audit Panel reports are transparent, informed and consistent.
6. Institutional audits are developmental and intent on supporting continuous quality improvement and enhancement.
7. Institutional audits are required to balance their developmental character with the regulatory requirement that the CHE and the HEQC act on poor provisioning where institutions have no clear commitments, processes, practices or plans to improve.

Institutional audits are a key component of the HEQC's broad-based quality assurance mandate. Aligned to international practice, the HEQC's review methodology consists of an institutional self-evaluation report (SER), and an external peer review that verifies, triangulates and validates the institution's self-evaluation. The external peer review consists of a document analysis of the SER and institutional portfolio of evidence, as well as a site visit at which interviews are conducted with constituencies, and physical infrastructure is visited. This audit report forms the outcome of the institutional audit of the University of Fort Hare (UFH).

2. Brief overview of the Institution

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) (pp. 5-8) provides an overview and contextual profile for understanding the history of the UFH, as well as the context of the SER, the latter of which is discussed later in the Executive Summary.

Located in two districts in the Eastern Cape (Raymond Mhlaba Municipality of the Amathole District, and Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality) and with its main campus in Alice, UFH has a long and eminent history, and was for many decades the only University for black students. It was founded as the South African Native College in 1916. Through the years, the University was host to several significant public figures whose histories are captured and displayed in the University's National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre. The University is clear that its rich history will continue to be a resource on which it draws continually as it reinvents itself, while at the same time consolidating its identity within the higher education landscape in South Africa, regionally and globally.

The University is classified as a historically ‘disadvantaged’ institution (HDI) because of systematic under-resourcing during the apartheid era. Its history led to backlogs in infrastructure for teaching and learning, research, community engagement, staff- and student accommodation, and transport among others. Since 1994, the funding for higher education has not allowed these backlogs to be fully addressed.

The *National Plan for Higher Education* (NPHE) developed by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2001) framed the restructuring of institutions of higher learning in South Africa post 1994-and designated these into three types¹). The UFH fell in the category of a ‘traditional University’, meaning that its primary focus was to offer mainly, but not exclusively, academic programmes that led to degrees, and postgraduate studies. A direct consequence of this is that the institution acquired two additional campuses: one in Bhisho and the second in East London which hitherto had been part of Rhodes University. The addition of the East London campus gave rise to the institution having an urban (East London), as well as a rural context (Alice), both of which offered opportunity to consider how such locations would shape future research foci and programme offerings (SER, p. 6). The three campuses are located at a considerable distance from each other: Alice is 60km from Bhisho, with a further 60km needing to be travelled to East London.

The main campus in Alice exclusively hosts all Faculty of Science and Agriculture programmes, whereas the Faculty of Law only offers programmes on the East London campus. Programmes by the Faculty of Management and Commerce are offered in Bhisho and East London. Both the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, and the Faculty of Education offer programmes in Alice and East London. Demand and the availability of infrastructure and resources have played a key determining factor in the distribution of programmes across the three campuses (SER, p. 24).

The enrolment figures by campus reflect as follows (SER, p. 24):

Campus	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Bhisho	773	822	762	682	549
East London	6 161	6 760	7 033	6 724	6 697

¹ Traditional universities have an academic focus; universities of technology focus primarily on vocational qualifications; and comprehensive universities offer a combination of both types of qualifications (academic and vocational).

Alice	8 514	9 314	9 187	8 474	8 654
Total	15 448	16 896	16 982	15 880	15 900

It is clear from the profile provided in the SER that enrolments on the Bhisho campus are steadily declining, which is currently a topic of discussion in the institution. Viability, appropriateness, fitness for purpose, and the adequate use of resources are cited as important considerations.

The percentage of students in the university-owned and university-leased accommodation has consistently been between 55% and 59%. Alice is the only campus that has University accommodation available. Students in East London are accommodated in university-leased residences, while those in Bhisho rely on private residences as there is no student accommodation available on this campus.

Historically, UFH has been a site of struggle, experiencing a surge of disturbances that shaped and, in some ways, continues to imprint on the institution's identity. Some of the protests had to do with a lack of governance which resulted in the University being placed under administration by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). During the 2017-2021 strategic planning cycle, the Council of the University was placed under administration by the Minister of Higher Education and Training.² During the period of administration, the Vice Chancellor (VC) continued to oversee the academic project. The council was dissolved, and an administrator appointed in its place. In his presentation to the Panel, the VC was clear that there was no question as to the integrity of the academic project during the period of administration. Although the Panel does not dispute this, it was clear both from the SER and the site visit that the absence of strong governance and oversight during this period has had negative consequences for the institution at large – including for the quality of the academic project.

Notwithstanding the above, the UFH has established important partnerships with the local community, government, business, and other economic entities. An example witnessed by the Panel during the site visit was how the dairy farm served as a site of learning for students, a profit-making business, and a partnership with the local community. The dairy farm is one of a few examples attesting to the institution's 'symbiotic relationship' with various stakeholders in the Eastern Cape. The institution showed its intent not to interrupt its positive academic trajectory through the

² The period of administration ran from April 2019 to November 2020.

reappointment of the current Vice-Chancellor and Principal, which coincided with the end of one institutional Strategic Planning Cycle (2017-2021) and the beginning of another (2022-2026).

The CHE institutional audit process has focused on the 2017 to 2021 period and on quality assurance systems within HEIs over this time. In its SER, the UFH made the decision to focus both on the previous and on the current strategic planning cycles in a reflective and forward-looking perspective, respectively. Although this provided an opportunity for the UFH to reflect deeply on its past as a way to reframe the present and future, the Panel was of the opinion that:

- (a) there was an absence of a comprehensive SWOT analysis that went beyond the identification of technical and governance issues and concerns, and which would have surveyed academic concerns. Although the University indicates that the strategic plan was informed by the SWOT and PESTEL analysis, the brief reflection in the SER did not directly address gaps in the review of the 2017-2021 cycle that had (and continue to have) negative consequences for planning for the 2022-2026 cycle;
- (b) the timing of the audit coincided with ongoing preparatory work deriving from the new strategic plan. Much of this was still underway in 2022 period as well as during the site visit itself. Although the SER made a strong argument for looking forward, the terms of the audit were by definition retrospective.
- (c) The forward-looking view adopted in the SER then complicated the retrospective evaluation expected from an audit, during which the Panel is required to ascertain the University's performance against the standards during the defined period. As a result, the Panel learned from the SER and interviews with university stakeholders that much of the preparatory work for the full implementation of the 2022-2026 strategic planning cycle (Strategic plan SM00010, IOP (SM00013) and APP (SM00012)) in the ensuing years was still being undertaken in 2022;
- (d) the newness of several of the appointments to the senior management team (SER, p.2) meant that many had not been part of the development of the 2022-2026 strategic plan or the development of the SER. Several were still in the process of settling into their portfolios and planning strategic documents based on a strategic plan that they had not been party to developing. Nonetheless, the commitment of the team to the Strategic Plan 2022-2026 was evident;
- (e) the University's programme qualification mix (PQM) had been reviewed in line with the DHET requirements, and was yet to undergo alignment to the strategic plan;
- (f) because the University was in the process of clarifying its key research foci as well as defining its position locally, regionally, and internationally, it was not at that stage able to

solidify and / or align its programme qualification mix to a definitive research focus which would set it apart from others in the region; and

- (g) the University was still in the early stages of drawing on the unique features of each of its sites of delivery to determine the principles according to which the equitable allocation of resources could be determined, and efficiency in the use of available resources could be assured.

The factors identified above impacted the work of the Panel as many of the processes designed to steer the implementation of the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan were still under development at the time the SER was submitted and when the site visit took place. As the majority of senior portfolio holders (DVCs, Deans, and Directors) were newly appointed, most were still in the very early stages of developing portfolio-specific strategic frameworks and plans. A focus on the previous strategic planning cycle for this audit meant that there was limited institutional memory on which the senior executive could draw, leading to an overreliance on the Consolidated Turnaround Plan (SM0008), which was subsequently integrated into the Institutional Operating Plans (2022-2024) (SM0009). The UFH has articulated its Strategic Plan 2017-2021 (SM00011) in its annual APP (SM00012) and IOP (SM00012). Quarterly performance reports are approved by the Council.

The development of the SER, which presumably began in late 2021, coincided with the Vice Chancellor and Principal's declaration of 2020 to 2030 as the 'Decade of Renewal' and the preparation for the next strategic planning cycle (2022-2026). As a result, and as stated in the SER, the focus was more forward looking, an approach not ordinarily in keeping with audit.

3. Brief overview of the audit process and the Panel's work

The CHE confirmed the institutional audit with the University in May 2021. Dates were set for the submission of the SER and the site visit. The University approved the CHE Audit Panel whose names and brief biographies appear in Annexure A.

The University timeously submitted its SER and associated documentation, which were forwarded to the Panel before the initial briefing meeting with Dr B Zawada, Director: Institutional Audits, and Dr B Hobololo, Manager: Institutional Audits. Subsequent to this meeting, the Panel engaged in several preparatory meetings to (a) discuss the SER and attendant documentation, (b) prepare for the site visit, and (c) develop lines of inquiry for each session. The roles and responsibilities of each

Panel member were clarified, and each Panel member was allocated a focus area on which to concentrate during the site visit.

The CHE acted as liaison between the Panel and the UFH in planning the site visit, which took place from 17-21 October 2022. The Panel met with the VC as well as a group of senior executives at a formal meeting and dinner scheduled on 16 October. This meeting not only served to briefly introduce the senior executive to the Panel but importantly also to provide context for the security measures put in place for the Panel. The meeting set a positive tone for the nature of the Panel's engagement with the University, a feature throughout the visit.

The Panel spent three days in physical on-site contact with senior management, the Council, and key stakeholders within the academy (senior academic staff, directors, managers, student leadership, unions, and the Institutional Forum). The remaining two days were spent remotely interviewing various constituencies that included undergraduate- and postgraduate students (alumni and current), academic staff, nGAP, post-doctoral fellows, rated researchers, personnel involved in operations, student administration and support, academic support, finance and budgeting, human resources, and strategic funding and budgeting. The Panel re-called the VC, the two Deputy Vice-Chancellors, as well as the newly appointed Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Institutional Support for further clarification on pertinent questions.

In sum, some interview sessions overran the time allocated often as a result of the deep and reflective engagement by the interviewees and despite the Chair being aware of the time implications for subsequent sessions. The UFH staff was generous and gracious with some expressing an appreciation for lines of inquiry that provided time and food for thought. Those who participated in interviews understood why, in some instances, sessions ran over schedule. To ensure that all interviews were held, the Panel opted for shorter lunches to make up for lost time.

The Panel met every evening during the site visit (in person during the first three days, from Sunday to Tuesday, and remotely on days 3 and 4) to review each day's deliberations and findings and to revise the lines of inquiry identified before the visit. The site visit culminated with a meeting that included the VC and the executive management team (MEC): this meeting provided feedback to the University on aspects which the Panel found to be functional and/or in place. It also identified broad thematic areas for improvement arising from careful consideration of the SER, the interviews, and the observations arising from the on-site visits.

The Panel held a debriefing session on 21 October 2022, after the reflection session with the University leadership. The purpose of the session was for the Panel to reflect on the site visit, the process, content, and collaboration. A follow-up meeting was scheduled to plan the report-writing process. The Panel subsequently held several feedback sessions to engage with submitted drafts, until the draft report was submitted to CHE.

4. Reflection on the University of Fort Hare's Self Evaluation Report and process

In the foreword to the SER (p. ii), the VC declares the University's intention to use the SER as a reflective tool and acknowledges that, in principle, (a) the SER is backward looking in order to learn from the past, and (b) is forward-looking in that it signals *intentions* rather than actualisation and progress. As a result, the institution chose to focus on the period 2017 to 2021 for two reasons. First, this period coincided with the first 5-year term and subsequent reappointment of the current Vice-Chancellor, and the attendant strategic plan (2017-2021). Secondly, it provided an opportunity for the University to reflect on a tumultuous time that included the 18-month administration period. The institutional audit imperative that required the development of a SER thus served as a reflexive tool which the Institution used critically to analyse the period and at the same time to chart a new trajectory, which coincided with the development and approval of its new strategic plan (2022-2026) (SER, pp. 5/6). As is made clear later in the SER, the integrity of the academic project was not under scrutiny during the administration period but rather, the workings of the Council and the overseeing of the governance structure.

The University was fully aware that supporting data submitted with the SER did not include 2021 audited reports. However, it made a conscious choice to include these data due to their significance in marking the end of one strategic plan (2017-2021), and the transition to a new strategic cycle (2022-2024). Importantly also, however, it signalled a watershed moment as the University emerged from administration with the appointment of a new Council in December 2020 (SER, p. 6).

The SER was submitted to the CHE on 30 June 2022 after extensive work by the UFH community. The institutional audit process was initiated in May 2021 when the CHE met with the University's MEC. The Institution established an Institutional Audit Steering Committee (IASC) (SM0002), which was chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning (following the restructuring of the portfolio previously known as DVC: Academic Affairs). The University concedes that membership in the IASC had been compromised due to changes in the executive and senior management structures.

According to the SER, and which was again confirmed during interviews, four working groups were established, each focused on a specific focus area. Membership of the working groups was negatively impacted by several new appointments, or vacancies in key positions yet to be filled. Each working group comprised a broad cross-section of the University community and included student representation. Members of the IASC were allocated to each working group, with one person identified as the group leader.

Senate approved the IASC and the working group membership. The SER (p. 3-4) provides the schedule for engaging with the University community and completing the SER. The institution followed due process in completing the SER. Participation in the process was confirmed by staff, even though levels of participation varied in terms of input to drafts. Some staff noted that, although they had access to the final draft, it was not always clear how or whether their contributions would be reflected in the drafts provided.

The University had appointed an external SER writer, a fact which became clear in interviews during the site visit. While the use of an external SER writer was useful in consolidating the audit report, the Panel was of the view that this may have resulted in some of the gaps in the information provided. In addition, the nature of the consultative process and the impact of staff changes on the steering committee resulted in several gaps in information, possibly as a result of the passing of time between the drawing up of the SER, and requests for additional documents were made by the Panel, both prior to and during the site visit. The Panel notes that engagements with the standards in the SER are uneven, and limited data was available for two aspects, which the University acknowledged. An internal writing team, familiar with and experienced in the Institution may have had privileged access to the context or nuance needed not available to an external report writer, given the complexities in the data-gathering process. Important complex realities that the institution faced (for example, the security concerns and the fractious and uneven relationship between the SRC, unions, and the executive) were presented descriptively, for the most part without interpretations of the implications of these for the full functioning of the University. Despite the emphasis on the Strategic Plan and the notion of the decade of renewal, the additional implications and consequences of the University's administration were somewhat downplayed, especially about what is still needed for it to become fully functional and to achieve its strategic goals. The transition from one strategic cycle to the next was presented with limited engagement with the SWOT analysis or a nuanced appreciation of the road ahead for the institution. Finally, reliance on an external writer led to an over-reliance on documents rather than on the insights that the Panel was able to elicit during interviews. Such additional sources enabled the Panel to triangulate data to reach its conclusions.

5. Summary and Recommendations

The summary and recommendations for the UFH are based on an analysis of the SER, the PoE, and engagement with the Panel during the site visit. While there were persistent patterns that emerged in each standard, there were common trends that pointed to fundamental issues that were not only crosscutting, but also had a ripple effect across the Institution.

The standards are intertwined, and thus, the Panel notes its recommendations should be read as integrative across the different Focus Areas and Standards, rather than in isolation per standard. Recurring concerns in a particular standard that were discussed from different vantage points in other standards often led to the same conclusion (that may have already been articulated in other standards). Thus, the Panel found that the re-appearance of its observations was unavoidable across standards in some instances, even though the recommendation is mentioned once only in the report.

5.1 Focus Area 1: Governance, strategic planning, management and leadership support the core academic functions

The four standards in Focus Area 1 focus on overall governance frameworks and strategic planning and execution that ensure quality delivery of the academic project. The standards in this focus area establish the role that an institution's governance, strategic planning (as in its vision, mission and strategic goals), management and academic leadership play in its quality management.

Standard 1: *The institution has a clearly stated vision and mission, and strategic goals which have been approved by appropriate governance structures, subject to further comprehensive stakeholder engagement.*

The interaction with the VC, senior, and middle management highlighted the constraints of the audit in respect of the timing of the Institution's past, present, and future. The period under review, namely 2017-2021, was consequently not the focus of the SER, as would have been expected, with the result that at the time of the audit, many structures, processes, and plans were still under institutional review, development or approval due to the governance concerns highlighted in the Introduction. As the Institution was still in the implementation phase, this standard animated the tension between *intention and actualisation*.

It was clear in the SER and in deliberations with various stakeholders that the Institution has a carefully crafted vision and mission, expressed in the Decade of Renewal document, the Strategic Plan (2022-2026), and concomitant documentation: through these, the Panel gained insight into the plans and steps to be taken to propel the University in its post-administration phase. It also became clear that placing the Institution under administration was not the result of a lack of confidence in the University's management or its leadership of the academic enterprise, but rather in the highest level of governance, namely the Council.

The new strategic documents, the Decade of Renewal and the Strategic Plan, were approved at the end of the cycle under review (November 2021). In the SER and the deliberations during the site visit, it remained unclear *how* the academic project was positioned and what 'renewal' meant in terms of the direction the University is taking to position itself locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. It is also not clear how the vision would be operationalised. Another likely result of the timing of the audit was that the UFH had no consistent definitions of concepts such as the "African University"; "excellence", "socially and contextually relevant", "innovation", and "research niche areas" which would enable it to characterise and express its strategic direction. The Panel was thus left with unanswered questions about the articulation of the Decade of Renewal, the UFH vision, and other features intended to make UFH a "distinctive African University". Similarly, the articulation between the vision and agenda, the identification of key research niche areas, and how such these would work to shape the PQM had not been explored. The Panel was unable to explore the synergistic elements that would enable the renewal of the academic project while placing it at the centre of initiatives already underway at the University. As a result of several factors, among which the timing of the audit and the newness of the University team, the Panel concluded with respect of this standard that multiple interpretations of key concepts may compromise strategic development and planning as well as student success in its multiple forms.

The Panel appreciated the clear mission of the University, which is to provide quality education and conduct innovative research, focusing on niche areas that contribute to the advancement of knowledge that is socially and contextually relevant, with an overall emphasis on the application of digital technologies. Deliberations made clear that, although the vision and mission are in place and have been approved, questions on the link between the aspiration and the operational and implementation processes to realise this ideal remains uncertain. From interviews, it became clear that there was inconsistency and unevenness in the University community, particularly among the academic staff, in understanding their role in translating the vision and mission into measurable

outcomes aligned with the strategy. Critical academic deliberations on the conceptualisation of the academic project and the vision and mission were not in evidence.

Similarly, the issue of graduateness and the formulation of the UFH graduate attributes had not yet been well articulated. Interactions with various stakeholders about what successful UFH graduate attributes are revealed that there was no shared understanding nor a sense of how these would be exemplified in the curricula and expressed in student successes.

The Performance Report of 2021 (SM00026) showed that the University is making steady progress, albeit slow, towards the achievement of its predetermined goals and objectives. For example, the *Annual Report 2021* indicated that the University has met only 32% of its predetermined objectives and targets. There was no report for preliminary progress provided to the Panel beyond the *Annual Report 2020* and the *Annual Report 2021*. As a result, the Panel was unable to review the overall progress made towards the systematic implementation of the Turnaround Plan (SM0008).

The unevenness with which policy documents have been – and are being – prepared and approved may pose a risk to the achievement of the University's targets and goals. Overall, a more systematic and coherent approach is required to the development and approval of key policies and documents relating to and impacting the academic project broadly.

The Panel noted the restructuring of the Senior Executive Management in support of the strategic goals. For example, the portfolio of DVC: Academic Affairs was divided into two portfolios, DVC: Teaching and Learning and DVC: Research, Partnerships and Innovation. According to the SER (p. 58), new job profiles for the deans and deputy deans (SM00039) require that deans “implement and monitor the implementation of policies and regulations”, in line with the provision of the institutional rules. The result is that several incumbents are new to their portfolios with some positions still vacant (SER, p. 19). The Panel found that the conceptual frameworks needed to guide the work in these portfolios have not been fully developed. In interviews with executive- and senior management, the Panel determined that the lack of conceptual frameworks has resulted in inconsistencies among faculties in respect of how they discharge their duties, with the result that the deans and deputy deans interpret their roles differently.

Research and research management are key pillars of the academic project. The Panel noted that the role played by the Research Directorate and the unique value-add provided by the Govan Mbeki Research and Development Centre (GMRDC) could not be established. Staff development activities and post-doctoral grants management are not integrated in the Research Management Directorate.

The Panel also noted that the role of GMRDC was flagged in the Ernest & Young (EY) report as meriting further investigation concerning its articulation and integration in the Research Management Directorate, a finding the Panel supports.

Executive management, especially the VC, was clear on the administrative areas that continue to compromise and plague the functionality of the Institution. Key areas identified as requiring a total overhaul related primarily, but not exclusively, to organisational tardiness or dysfunctionality in, among other areas, (1) human resources, and a slow turnaround in recruitment processes; (2) manual administrative and other processes which create inefficiencies and compromise the integrity of documents and their memorialisation; (3) the safety and security of staff and students; (4) financial management, including procurement processes; (5) the management of student protests; and (6) the role of trade unions in University governance matters.

Although the Panel noted several Community Engagement activities across the faculties and directorates, captured in the *Annual Report 2020* and the *Annual Report 2021* that were provided to the Panel and had been submitted to the DHET, these activities were not based on a coherent Community Engagement Strategic Framework. It was clear to the Panel that the Decade of Renewal is intended to address this, among other aspects of the University's functioning.

The Panel was informed of several key partnerships both locally and internationally, however, these are not located in and informed by a coherent strategic framework. Considering that partnerships are key to realising the goals and objectives of the Decade of Renewal, the Panel is of the view that such a framework needs to be developed promptly.

The Panel was made aware by the Vice Chancellor of the University's sense that it is over-reliant on DHET funding. The lack of sustainable funding beyond the DHET was identified as a major risk by the University and the Panel, which was unable to conclude the role and strategy of mobilisation of third-stream income by the Advancement Office, despite its questions to the Finance Directorate.

From the evidence provided and through interactions with the MEC, the Panel concluded that significant and in-depth reflection on the vision, mission, and goals of the University has taken place, and on the extent to which these may be realised through what is already in place. Nonetheless, there is a gap, and despite the lifting of the DHET moratorium (SM00017), in the absence of a clearly articulated plan which integrates all aspects of the core functions of the University and its academic project. The relative slowness in this area, coupled with the lack of sound frameworks from which to develop a coherent and consistent policy framework, poses a risk to the University. Although the

Panel acknowledges the University's decision to develop policies outside of a guiding framework, interviews with executive and senior management indicate there is no clear articulation of the key concepts, common goals for the UFH graduate attributes, and the programmes themselves. The above findings have led to the recommendations below.

Recommendations

1. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop shared institutional understandings of the key concepts expressed in the vision and mission, strategic goals and, in particular, in the Decade of Renewal document, so that these may inform, guide, and frame the operationalisation of the Strategic Plan across the various University domains.
2. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop and implement a rigorous, quality-driven approach to policy formulation, negotiation, approval and implementation, by.
 - a. Establishing a timeline for the identification of all outstanding policies and their development, review, and approval in line with the Strategic Plan
 - b. In line with the SER (p. 52), develop a plan with timelines for the replacement of the Senate Standing Orders.
 - c. Review the SRC Constitution to align to the Strategy 2022-2026 and the Decade of Renewal document.
 - d. Finalise the implementation of the Turnaround Strategy.
3. Given the potential risks identified above, the Panel recommends that the UFH should consider establishing a Risk Management unit to monitor and maintain an institutional risk register that records faculty- and division-specific risks and risks pertaining to student affairs and the SRC, among others, to move this from an audit function to one embedded in the institution's management and governance systems to ensure that the University's strategic goals may be achieved.

Standard 2: *The stated vision, mission, and strategic goals align with national priorities and context (e.g., Transformation, creating a skilled labour force, developing scarce skills areas and a critical citizenry, and contributing to the fulfilment of national goals as informed by the NDP and related national planning), as well as sectoral, regional, continental and global imperatives (e.g., Africa Vision 2063 or the Sustainable Development Goals).*

The UFH has contextualised the development of the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan to align with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (SER, p. 39). However, it is not clear what this means for students and

staff beyond the use of the learning management system, Blackboard, and the provision of laptops to students and staff. At an institutional level, there is no guiding policy framework for the Fourth Industrial Revolution to ensure that the goals align with the needs of local-, national- or regional contexts. The reference in the strategic goals to the enhancement of local (Eastern Cape), national (South Africa), regional (Southern Africa and Africa), and international impact remains undefined.

The UFH mission statement refers to a distinctive African University with an innovative research focus with specific research niche areas, but, as already mentioned in Standard 1, senior management and academic staff were unable during interviews to elaborate on its distinctiveness and what the related attributes would be. Interviews with the Deans of the various faculties confirmed that the process of identifying niche areas had been devolved to the faculties. However, there was no evidence of a strategic and coherent approach to this task, with deadlines not being fixed. Although each faculty and division was to develop faculty strategic plans aligned to the University Strategic Plan 2022-2026, no evidence was provided for how the various faculties would collectively articulate their respective niche areas to contribute towards the institution realising its ideal of being a distinguished university. As described below and in Standard 1, above, while there was clear evidence that discussions were underway, the Panel was unable to obtain insight into the explicit strategic mechanisms for ensuring coherence, distinction, or attainment of the ideal of being a 'distinguished African university'. In part, this has been a consequence of the unbundling of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic Affairs portfolio, which led to the appointment of the new DVC: Research, Partnerships and Innovation who had only recently taken up the position.

The Panel noted the ongoing curriculum innovation in the provision of scarce skills, which might contribute to the National Development Goals. Examples of new, innovative programmes under development were mentioned during meetings with the EMT. These would be cutting-edge and distinguished, while also contributing to filling scarce skills gaps. Although plans were indicated (e.g., Council Action List Submission: Page 7, Item 3.1.1; 30 March 2022, New niche programmes planned by Faculties), no evidence of where in the internal/external approval process such programmes were. The Thuthuka SAICA training programme was also mentioned as an example of curriculum innovation that would potentially fill a scarce skills gap and transform the accounting profession. However, this is an externally driven initiative that requires success in an application process. Although the UFH is a participant, it cannot be considered a curriculum innovation initiative driven by the Institution itself. Aligned with curriculum innovation, the Panel was informed that research niche areas in Renewable Energy and Maritime and Marine Science were under development. However, evidence of progress (and process) in the establishment of these was not provided.

In 2020, the DHET called for a review of the academic enterprise at the UFH due to duplication and other questions about the PQM and its relevance. The decision was based also on over-enrolments during the 2017-2019 period (SER, p. 14-15). The Panel noted that Senate approved the review of all academic programmes based on the report from DHET (SM00016) on 09 February 2021. The PQM review aimed to remove duplication, to ensure relevance, and, specifically, to foster alignment with the vision and mission as articulated in the Integrated Turnaround Plan and the Strategic Plan 2022-2026. The DHET subsequently approved the revised PQM (SM00017). What was not in evidence, however, is an overarching academic plan which will inform the review of such, as well as signal how curriculum innovation initiatives form part of such an institutional plan.

In the SER (p. 27-28), UFH reported on its student demographics, details of which are provided in the main report. The University serves mainly South African, Xhosa-speaking students from rural quintile 1 schools in the Eastern Cape, an issue (discussed later in the report) that has implications for the form and nature of academic support that the students need as they transition into higher education. The data in the SER (p. 28) shows that the majority of the student population is female, comprising around 55% of the total student population. However, at Doctoral levels, female students are in the minority. The University will benefit from an overarching framework for transformation, which places the University in its context, informs activities related to staff development programmes, and ensures measures are in place to attract students who will enable the institution to engage productively with its demographic imbalances.

In the SER (p. 37), the staff demographic indicates that the majority of academics are South African and male. Table 26 (SER, p. 37) indicates that while there are 25 South Africans at associate professor level, there are only thirteen full professors compared to ten foreign nationals at associate professor-level and 20 at full professor-level.

Males comprise the majority of academics in the institution. The SER (p. 37) indicates that approximately 41% (146 of 328) staff members are female, of which only seven are at professoriate level. Thus, as in the national context, gender transformation of the staff remains a critical issue to be addressed. In response, the institution participates in a number of national career development initiatives aimed towards addressing such discontinuities. However, as already indicated earlier in Standard 1, clearer clarification of the role played by the Research Directorate and the unique value add provided by the Govan Mbeki Research and Development Centre (GMRDC), the development of research capacity could not be established. Staff development activities and post-doctoral grants management have not been integrated into the work of the Research Management Directorate.

The Panel heard in interviews with senior academics that there is the sense that the UFH has become a 'training ground' for staff who leave for other South African universities once they have achieved the doctoral degrees supported by the UFH Staff Development Grant and the DHET Staff Development Grant. These staff members leave the UFH for better employment opportunities at other institutions. The retention of UFH-funded staff requires serious consideration.

The Panel was made aware of the challenges relating to the recruitment of local post-doctoral students to support the research niche areas. Most post-doctoral students recruited have been international post-doctoral students. Most of these PDRFs then become lecturing staff at the UFH as they are the most likely to be qualified, with good research track records as required for lecturing positions. The result is that many lecturer positions are occupied by international staff members, a development which has raised tensions between internationalisation at the University and the national imperatives in respect of staffing.

Recommendations

4. The Panel recommends that the UFH Develop a clearly articulated academic plan and strategic framework aligned to the strategic plan, which will inform the transformation of the University, enable enrolment planning, allow for UFH graduate attributes to be defined, facilitate the identification of new programmes, assist in the definition of research niches, and guide the allocation of facilities, resources and capacity in accordance with the University's mission (Recommendation 2 has reference).
5. As part of an academic plan, The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a framework for teaching and learning which articulates the University's pedagogical philosophy, and teaching and learning strategy, and which facilitates the expression of the new vision and mission of the institution.
6. The Panel recommends that the UFH Develop a distinct strategy and plan for research and innovation, aligned to the University's Strategic Plan, to guide research development and support across all the relevant structures, processes and policies.
7. The Panel recommends that the UFH Review all policies and practices in support of research to ensure the achievement of the University's goals in this regard.
8. The Panel recommends that the UFH Develop clear criteria for the identification of research niche areas in line with the University's strategy and stated vision as a distinctive African University.

9. The Panel recommends that the UFH Define transformation as expressed in the national policy framework as it applies to the specific context of the University and develop a strategy and framework which addresses the tensions between internationalisation and national equity imperatives at student and staff levels.

In summary, as the UFH continues to address its future, it has to be guided by critical, transformative foundational research- and academic frameworks informing the different components of the strategic plan.

Standard 3: *There is demonstrable strategic alignment between the institution's quality management system for core academic activities across all sites and modes of provision and its vision, mission and strategic goals, as well as its governance and management processes.*

The library is an example which the Panel uses to draw attention to concerns of equitable access and provisioning across all campuses. Although library infrastructure on the East London campus has been modernised to reflect post-Covid requirements, a similar state of the art system is not in place in either the Alice or Bhishe campuses.

The Panel was informed of plans to extend the East London campus as well as to provide new infrastructure and to refurbish the Alice campus. However, there was no evidence of these developments or commitments provided. The Alice campus now has a recently completed DHET-funded student residence village. Unfortunately, on this campus, access control was not functional and had not been for a while, as reported by the wardens. The Panel notes from the SER (p. 42) that the UFH is aware of the need to complete the outdated 'spatial development plan' that was approved in 2014. In addition, the alignment of space planning to the strategic direction especially in the establishment of niche areas (with associated space requirements) remains unclear. The higher education landscape has evolved, with major shifts in the academic needs of students and with different dynamics and demands playing out in learning and teaching spaces. The extent to which learning and teaching shapes spatial planning and vice versa was not yet evident in any of the documentation provided by the Institution.

The Panel was informed that the Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) is the vehicle through which the measurable objectives of the Strategic Plan will be cascaded to both faculties and directorates to allow alignment with the individual performance management system which was being 'piloted' with

the executive team at the time of the site visit. Standard 5 in this report addresses this point, and the Panel notes that the operationalisation of the individual performance management system was in the initial stages and its impact was thus not yet measurable. Mechanisms to cascade and monitor performance management have yet to be developed. From interviews, it was clear that the institution recognises the challenge of such a process and the need to have stringent systems and mechanisms in place to ensure accountability and the realisation of its strategic goals.

The budgeting, monitoring, and reporting business cycles accordingly prioritise and appropriate the available resources based on measurable objectives. Reporting will also be cascaded down to the departmental and directorate levels and used in the subsequent years to prioritise funding.

During the interviews with students, the Panel noted the students' satisfaction with the theoretical component of the courses they received at the UFH. However, some graduates interviewed felt that they lacked the requisite practical training in comparison with their counterparts from other institutions. Thus, while graduates felt they were equipped with the requisite theoretical knowledge, they felt that they would rather complete a postgraduate qualification over seeking employment as their first degrees had not prepared them sufficiently well for the world of work. In particular, students in science degrees were concerned about the limited time they had spent in the laboratories. The Panel noted that the graduates' observation of the gaps may be attributable in part to the Covid-19 period, during which time universities provided teaching online.

The Panel noted that the provision for student life outside the classroom was diverse. Workshops were available on specific topics as well as opportunities for extracurricular participation. The SER, however, is silent on the mechanisms and processes used to ensure fuller participation by the student population. During interviews, it became clear that any coherent and systematic approach to student development was in its infancy, especially in light of the new appointment of the Dean of Student Affairs. The Panel noted the early developments in place but could not find evidence of how student development activities are integrated or linked to academic experiences in the faculties, or how these link to student development needs in the first instance. The Panel observed that student development and support activities are managed in silos, both concerning each other and concerning the academic activities.

The Panel was informed of the development of the UFH Student Tracking System, which still needs to be put in place, implemented, and monitored, with results used to inform decision-making and planning.

In interviews with academic staff at all levels, the Panel was alerted to an overloading of teaching staff and to vacancies that were not filled, a concern addressed in more detail in Standard 11. As a result, the University relies on high numbers of part-time or temporary staff. The Panel also learned from staff interviews that the University did not have an approved Workload Model but that its development was in the pipeline.

From the Panel's interaction with the MEC, EMT and the deans, it became clear that there is no explicit plan for the Bhishe Campus. Although the Panel appreciates the expansion of the East London and Alice campuses, there appears to have been no audit of space available (SER, p. 105) which would validate and enable the effective utilisation of existing infrastructure.

In conclusion, there is much to be done to formulate an integrated Quality Management System that supports the core academic project and enables the achievement of the Strategic Plans, Goals and Objectives. The year 2022 is the first year of implementation of the new Strategic Plan and, therefore, there is substantial room for improvement to ensure the achievement of the Decade of Renewal.

Recommendations

10. The Panel recommends that the UFH establish a system to evaluate the alignment and functioning of the core academic activities across faculties, departments and support units to the new strategy, the 'Decade of Renewal' and the performance management model (Recommendation 2 has reference).
11. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop and implement a comprehensive and integrated quality assurance framework that, in going beyond compliance, addresses aspects additional to the formal requirements of regulatory bodies as part of the overall development of a quality culture across all elements of the academic project (Recommendation 17 has reference).
12. The Panel recommends that the UFH implement the performance management system at all levels in the Institution. Aligned with the University's strategic goals and based on feedback from the performance management system currently being piloted with senior management; the performance management system should include an implementation plan with specific deadlines.

Standard 4: *There is a clear understanding of and demonstrable adherence to the different roles and responsibilities of the governance structures, management, and academic leadership.*

The University's analysis of this standard (SER, p. 52) acknowledges that past lapses in governance led to the near collapse of the University, resulting in its being placed under administration for the period April 2019 to November 2020. Both the independent assessor's report and the Ernst and Young (EY) 2018 report (SM00031) reveal the lapses in governance at the UFH. In the main, the issues that needed to be addressed had to do with Council-related governance and are detailed in the main section of the report. The EY report also recommended the review of the Senate Terms of Reference as these were deemed not to be aligned with the Statute (SER, p. 52).

In the SER, the Institution states that the recommendations arising from the EY report were incorporated into the Consolidated Turnaround Plan (SM0008), which comprises five (5) projects, one of which is focused on governance. The plan sets out the performance indicators required, monitoring the implementation of the EY recommendations, and allocating responsibility to the relevant portfolios. From interviews at all levels of governance, there is a commitment to adhere to the roles and responsibilities of the various governance structures and that management and academic leadership are actively concerned with the prevention of relapses. Accountable and transparent governance is central to the success of the Decade of Renewal and the new Strategic Plan (2022-2026). However, five years after the EY report and the termination of the period of administration, some of the key recommendations have yet to be implemented. For example, the Senate, the apex body for academic matters, continues to operate based on Senate Standing Orders and its Terms of Reference have yet to be reviewed (SER, p. 52).

As required, the UFH has reviewed its statute. The Amended Statute (SM0005) was gazetted on 8 May 2020 (SER, p. 8). A new Executive Committee of the Convocation was appointed in March 2021 and changes were made at the executive management level (SER, p. 8). The DVCs' roles and responsibilities were documented in 2021 (SER, p. 8).

Membership of the new UFH Council is of a high calibre. After interaction with the Council, the Panel concurred that members have a notable understanding of the challenges facing the UFH. From interviews with Council Members, the Panel learned of the Council's commitment to the Decade of Renewal. Council expressed unambiguous support for the Vice-Chancellor and his team in the journey towards the Decade of Renewal.

At the Council level, the University has finalised the institutional rules, developed Council Committee Charters, and is making progress in the review of the Delegation of Authority Policy. The council has also approved the UFH Governance Framework. The Panel noted that the Council appears to be working well.

As provided by statute, the Council has constituted the Institutional Forum (IF). The Institutional Forum unequivocally supports the new Strategic Plan as well as the Mission and Vision towards the realisation of the Decade of Renewal. Minutes of IF meetings were provided and the Panel was satisfied that the IF supports the ideals espoused in the Decade of Renewal. The group interviewed acknowledged that this structure was dysfunctional in the past. Under the recently appointed leadership, they were hopeful that they would be in a position to play the pivotal role required of such a structure.

The Institution provided the Task Team report on Senate Committees, completed in September 2019 (SER, p. 53). The findings conclude that some Senate committee meetings were not quorate, that the membership was dominated by senior academic leadership, that discussions and decisions made were not adequately disseminated, and that there were inconsistencies in both the Terms of Reference and meeting procedures, which were sometimes not adhered to. The Panel learned from the SER (p. 52-54) and from interviews that Senate Committees have been reviewed and revised. However, the University acknowledges that a monitoring tool is needed and that the implementation of the recommendations or the efficiency of Senate committee meetings have not been monitored. The Panel was also appraised during interviews of the new faculty structure and the composition of Faculty Boards. Faculty governance structures are established, and although some Faculty Deans are relatively new appointees, interviews with the deans, other academics, and information from policy and other activities set out in the SER (for example, exclusion appeals, p. 64; assessment management and oversight, p. 65; new programme development, p. 65), made it clear that these structures are actively focused on academic activities as required.

The establishment of processes to enhance relationship-building beyond meetings through statutory structures was noted. These included regular meetings with the SRC and Senior Management as well as with a non-statutory body, the Extended Management Team (EMT) which comprises deans, and directors from critical portfolios. Interviews with this body attested to its value and to its serving as a vehicle for critical engagement and inclusivity. From interviews with student leadership, it was clear that management engages proactively with student representatives in an attempt to address students' issues before they escalate into protest action. The SRC singled out meetings of this nature

as a positive step and acknowledged and attributed the extended period of peace at the UFH to management's new attitude.

The current SRC leadership noted the need to review the SRC Constitution in general and to revise it so that it aligns with and supports the Decade of Renewal. It was not clear to SRC members, however, what the procedure for the constitutional amendment is.

The UFH reports that it has made progress in implementing the recommendations of the Task Team led by the then-DVC: Academic Affairs (SER, p. 16; 52). The changes to governance, and the implementation of the new documents and policies go some way towards substantiating this assertion. Several Executive Management positions are, however, still new, and, although there has been progress in this area, it will take time for all appointees to settle and for the policies, procedures, and KPIs to take effect.

New positions and the review of portfolios have been necessary but are not yet sufficient to ensure a smooth implementation of the Strategic Plan (2022-2026). The unbundling of the DVC: Academic Affairs roles into a DVC: Teaching and Learning and DVC: Research, Partnerships, and Innovation have been effected and the appointment of Dean: Student Affairs has been finalised. The roles of the deans and the review of faculty structures have also been completed. It is noted that in interviews, the Panel was informed that the position of HOD is a two-year rotational appointment, and it is unclear how this had or would impact the decision-making and leadership needed to put the new strategy into effect. Such sentiments were echoed in interviews with senior academics, who reported a lack of clear guidelines for the appointment of HODs, which in some cases led to the appointment of young and inexperienced academics, which was regarded as compromising the academic project. The HODs too voiced that the two-year rotational appointment did not allow them to grow as leaders, implement solutions, and evaluate their impact on the academic project.

As the 'secretariat' of various UFH Committees, the Registrar is responsible for leading and ensuring adherence to the roles and responsibilities of governance structures, management, and academic structures. According to the institutional rules, the registrar's office provides secretarial support and the operational governance framework. The registrar's office is required to lead the development of policies and terms of reference for the various committees. The incumbent has been in office since 2019 (SER, p.1). By developing a Policy on Policies, the Registrar becomes the custodian of the process and its regular reviews. The Panel noted the leading role played by the registrar's office in the development of the Committee Monitoring Tool, and this will no doubt assist the UFH as it implements the Strategic Plan 2022-2026.

In addition to keeping records of meetings, one of the key functions of the secretariat of the Council is to organise and arrange the annual training for Council members. The Panel interrogated this aspect of the Registrar's portfolio with the Registrar and Council and found no evidence of the training of Council members, nor were any plans presented for the current Council to be trained in the various aspects of its responsibility.

Recommendations

13. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop and implement a monitoring tool for the functioning of different Senate committees as well to ensure adherence to the terms of reference of all governance structures.
14. The Panel recommends that the UFH review the functions of the registrar's office to ensure optimal effectiveness in supporting the adherence, compliance, and functionality of all relevant governance structures.
15. The Panel recommends that the UFH ensure that the Registrar plans and executes mandatory training of Council members to ensure that the Council continuously renews its understanding of its roles and responsibilities and to use training sessions to reflect on the Council's mandate and effectiveness.

5.2 Focus Area 2: The design and implementation of the institutional quality management system supports the core academic functions

The four standards in Focus Area 2 concentrate on how the *design and implementation of an integrated quality management system* in the institution enhances the likelihood of student success and improves the quality of learning, teaching and research engagement, as well as accommodating the results of constructive, integrated community engagement within the context of the institution's mission.

Standard 5: *A quality assurance system is in place, comprising at a minimum, of:*

- (i) *governance arrangements*
- (ii) *policies*
- (iii) *processes, procedures and plans*
- (iv) *instructional products*
- (v) *measurement of impact*

- (vi) *data management and utilization as these give effect to the delivery of the HEI's core functions.*

Although the UFH Teaching and Learning policy indicates that curricula should support socially responsible community development and empower graduates through experiential learning (p.4) and promote collaboration with internal role players and external partners (SER, pp. 70-1), it was not clear from the SER nor from interviews how this philosophy finds expression in the University's programmes and research niche areas. Related to this, community engagement is not guided by a clear framework which establishes the terms of its stated integration into teaching and learning, and research.

The UFH has no plan for the transformation of staffing, the student profile, curricula, or the PQM. Although the Decade of Renewal includes a commitment to enhancing the likelihood of student success, improving the quality of learning and teaching, and enhancing research- and community engagement, the SER states that transformation is "still open to question" as is "evident in problems that continue to surface in the system" (SER, p. 49). A clearer expression of how the transformation will be articulated through, inter alia, the PQM, research, and community engagement is needed. A comprehensive academic plan or framework is a priority, and a clear delineation of how the University understands transformation is essential to the functioning of, for example, the UFH Recruitment and Selection Policy (SM00034).

Curriculum renewal is limited to a focus on pedagogy and assessment (SER, p. 49) which are narrowly conceived of as the integration of e-learning and blended learning technologies (SER, p. 49). The SER's statements in this regard were corroborated by academic and support staff and students.

The University applies a pragmatic rather than systemic, quality-driven approach to the development of policies. According to the SER, a policy audit had identified gaps (SER, p. 56), but not all had been addressed by the time the SER was submitted or the site visit took place. Despite the fact that some policies have been approved and others were in the process of approval, these were not driven by a coherent quality assurance framework, nor is there an established quality assurance culture providing the basis from which to regulate and support core academic functions. A limited Quality Assurance Policy (SM00035) and an undated and outdated Teaching and Learning Policy are in place. According to the DVC: Teaching and Learning, new Policies for the Approval of New Programmes (SM00041) and for the Approval of Amendments to Existing Programmes (SM00043) had been approved, however, there was no community engagement (CE) or work integrated

learning (WIL) policy in place although both currently form part of some of the curricula. The DVC: Teaching and Learning informed the Panel that the UFH will use the policies as the basis for the academic plan, a reverse approach to that commonly found. The UFH approach has, given the urgency of the need, been to address the most urgent gaps first. Although this approach is effective in that it allows the University to continue its work, it does mean that it may not at present be aligned with the requirements of the focus areas and standards. In the interim, the policy gap is currently filled by Senate Standing Orders (although some of these still needed alignment to the new Statute (SM0005) and Senate Charter), and Faculty Standing Orders (SM00037).

It is clear from the SER that enrolment planning at the UFH has improved significantly in the past two years (SER, pp. 15-19; p. 50). Given that the approach has been to address the most urgent lapses or gaps first, this does mean that there is not yet a coherent and framing academic plan (as discussed above) and no entrenched culture or practice of academic reviews across the University (whether of programmes, modules, departments or faculties). The University will, the Panel found, still have to find a way to align its enrolment planning to the stated strategic focuses and the PQM exercise.

The SER indicates that the UFH does not have a solid record of management or of accountability by management for either its actions or a lack thereof (SER, p. 89). The Panel learned that the University Council had been placed under administration at the behest of the VC, for 18 months from 2019 to 2020. As a result, it was difficult to discern how accountability for adherence to the various roles and responsibilities was assured during the period under review. Interviews with management staff in academic- and support functions during the site visit confirmed that the performance management system was being 'piloted' at the executive management level and that even at this level, performance agreements were still to be finalised. Executive management confirmed that performance management was still to be cascaded to the rest of the University community; however, no implementation plan for such was available.

A review of committees conducted in 2020 (SM00033) resulted in restructuring, and the development and approval of Charters for all committees had been completed. Interviews with staff confirmed membership of committees, although the impact of these on the overall quality system is yet to be evidenced.

Four of the deans were newly appointed and the fifth was yet to assume duties. All deans and deputy deans had job profiles articulating their roles and responsibilities (SER, p. 17). In the VC's presentation, and across the interviews, emphasis was placed on the new UFH strategy, in line with

its vision “To be a distinctive African university, advancing excellence and innovation in research, teaching, learning, administration, and social engagement.” However, from interviews with senior management, deans, and deputy deans, there was no consistent view on what constitutes quality or excellence and a concomitant lack of consistency across faculties in understanding these quality assurance roles and responsibilities. As a result, disparate and uneven activities rather than a coherent, programmatic approach to teaching and learning and research are in place.

The involvement of deans and deputy deans in enrolment planning is a positive step as is the identification of application bottlenecks (SER, p. 58). The SER indicates a lack of real-time data in keeping with the enrolment plan (p. 59), which was confirmed by deans and deputy deans.

The Planning and Quality Assurance (PQA) Unit is responsible for quality assurance, institutional planning, and institutional research. The PQA is headed by a director appointed in February 2017 (SER, p. 72). From the SER, the Panel learned that only three programme reviews had taken place in 2018. Of these, one report was never received, and another was rejected by the Department concerned. From questioning the interviewees (DVC: Teaching and Learning; the PQA team; Heads of Department, Deputy Deans: Teaching and Learning), the Panel concluded that quality assurance appears to have been primarily externally directed and compliance-driven.

Given that the policies for the design and development of curricula and learning materials are newly approved (viz., Policy on the Approval for New Programmes (SM00041), Policy for the Amendments to Programmes (SM00043), and Principles and Procedures for the Approval of Modules or Revisions to Existing Modules (SM00044)), and given the recent lifting of the DHET moratorium (SER, p. 59), it is too soon to determine the impact of these on programmes and learning materials. Several development programmes had been identified before the moratorium or because of its recent lifting. It was not clear to the Panel that there was an understanding among staff of how or whether these particular programmes align with focus areas or with what the UFH wants to be known for. Existing programmes are also a concern, especially given the low numbers of internal quality assurance programme reviews. According to the SER (p. 72), and after the approval of the Quality Assurance Policy (SM00035), five reviews were scheduled, only three of which took place (BSc Hons (Biochemistry); BSc Hons (Human Movement Science); and Bachelor of Fine Arts). The first two reports were accepted by the departments; however, the Department of Fine Arts rejected its report. The SER states that developing and reviewing programmes is initiated at the faculty level and that curricula are reviewed every three years with comprehensive reviews taking place six-yearly (p. 60). The Panel notes that the Curriculum Development and Review Policy (SM00045) was reviewed in

2021 for approval in 2022. However, from both the SER and the POE as well as from interviews, it is clear that no regular programme reviews have taken place. The Review of the Academic Enterprise served to “eliminate duplication and identify niche areas for new programmes” (SER, p. 60).

The question of internal reviews was interrogated with HODs and deputy deans and the lack of institutional principles for reviews in general was clear. Furthermore, the PQA has little to no ‘authority’ where reviews do not go to plan. The Panel notes that reviews of programmes and modules have not focused on the quality or the substance of curricula but on technical aspects largely related to CHE or professional body standards, or administrative aspects of the PQM. From interviews, it appears that only site visits and programme reviews that are statutorily required, or which are CHE obligations (such as for national reviews) have been undertaken. The lack of success in initiating, conducting, and concluding internal programme reviews is of deep concern.

In interviews, students indicated that there had been no practical work in some undergraduate degrees, placing additional pressure on postgraduate teaching and learning. This could be attributed to the pandemic for the 2020-2021 period. In interviews, students expressed the view that their undergraduate programmes do not prepare students for postgraduate research or practice.

The Panel found a lack of approved and implemented strategies or policies to promote the quality of teaching and learning and to address the distinctive needs of undergraduate and postgraduate students at different levels and stages, and in different programmes. It was also unclear how the University will determine the way forward with respect to what it is good at and what it wants to be known for. An academic plan would also provide the parameters for programme review, new programme creation, and so on. Such a plan was not evident in the SER, the PoE, or in any of the interviews. Furthermore, at the time of the review, the Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses had not yet been approved by the governance structures and was consequently not in operation.

The Teaching and Learning Centre is the main provider of academic support, and trains and manages Supplemental Instruction (SI) leaders; the Writing Centre; the use of Blackboard; plagiarism and Turnitin, Peer Assisted Student Services (PASS), teaching and module evaluations (Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses), and tutor training (SER, p. 61). Interviews with support staff and students indicated that workshops across a range of activities and skills had been provided by TLC. However, it seems that these activities did not take place in the context of a coherent approach to academic support and development and relied on student agency rather than

a proactive and responsive approach, which accounts for the student life cycle. From interactions with academic support providers, the DVC: Teaching and Learning, and academics, it is not clear that student support is integrated into the curriculum, sufficiently differentiated and scaffolded to meet the different needs, responsive and proactive, and part of a coherent, overarching plan.

A wide range of student support in non-academic areas is provided, including counselling, health services, residence management, sports, SRC, and student societies (SER, p.62-3). From interviews, students and staff are aware of the services available and students make use of these. From interviews with the SRC, there is alignment of SRC portfolios across the different campuses as well as functional / governance areas to aspects of student life. From Panel interviews with staff in the various support services, and with the DVC: Teaching and Learning, there is little in place to guide and facilitate the articulation between central units and faculties to ensure a proactive rather than reactive approach to student development and support.

The SRC is governed by a Constitution (SM00050) and has representatives in all faculties and on the Senate, the Council, and other relevant committees. In interviews with the SRC, the Panel learned that the SRC Constitution will be reworked in line with the University Statute. However, it is not clear how the current 'stalemate' described will be broken. The SRC does appear to be working in terms of its mandated role.

The General Rules for Undergraduate Qualifications (SM00038) have been refined and a clear appeals process has been implemented for exclusions. Nonetheless, despite this, from interviews with students and academics, it is evident that the management of students-at-risk is not early enough to enable remedial steps to be taken. There is an over-reliance on assessment results, by which time remediation may be too late. Students interviewed indicated high levels of informal support from staff and proactive management of students at risk. Student satisfaction surveys are run annually (SM00051) by the PQA unit and address the overall student experience. The SER indicates, however, that these surveys have a consistently low response rate (generally less than 2% of student population), which must be addressed (SER, p. 64). The reasons for the low response rate are not analysed in the SER (p. 64), neither was information on this forthcoming in the interviews.

One area in which much attention to quality is needed is in respect of short learning programmes. The SER (p. 65) indicates that at present, UFH Solutions manages and promotes short courses that are not part of accredited programmes. No clarity could be obtained on short learning programmes that are linked to qualifications, and staff interviewed indicated that they were not aware of these. If

these do exist in the University, there is no oversight nor, it seems, a guiding policy for their provisioning. UFH Solutions provides unit standards-based education through the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and is accredited by these SETAs whose authority is delegated to them by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). Nonetheless, these accreditation processes require policies, over which UFH appears to have no clear oversight. The University must urgently clarify the legal status of UFH Solutions and its use of the Bhisho campus. A comprehensive policy on short learning programme provision is needed and the principles under which unit standard-based provision is permitted must be part of this policy.

From the SER, GMRDC is responsible for the University's research-education and management. GMRDC offers workshops and seminars, while faculties foster research capacity. The staff is encouraged to attend and, from interviews, do make use of the services and support offered. However, interventions *should* be linked to a clear institutional research plan that sets out the career development pathways and postgraduate student support available so as to enable effective monitoring and evaluation. Evaluations of the effectiveness of the GMRDC's interventions were not readily obtainable and the data is patchy. Projects to develop research span a range of activities, including the NRF's Thuthuka Programme, the UCDG, funding for staff's doctoral studies, and so on. However, interviews with academic staff and management indicate that research is negatively affected by workload, bureaucratic funding procedures, the availability of funds, and high vacancy rates. There is also no systematic approach to career development.

Policies for regulating research ethics (SM00057) and a culture of ethically responsible research are in place (SER, p. 67-8). The University has thirty-one NRF-rated researchers and was a recipient of the NRF 'Excelleration' Award for improved performance from 2019 to 2021. Research output fell somewhat in 2020 as indicated in interviews, perhaps due to the increased demands relating to Covid-19 (SER, p. 69).

The UFH Community Engagement Office was disestablished in 2019 and responsibility for community engagement allocated to the DVC: Teaching and Learning and the DVC: RPI (SER, p. 70). Community engagement is, according to staff interviewed, embedded in teaching and learning and research, and its allocation to the DVCs also ensures oversight at a high level (SER, p. 70). The UFH Teaching and Learning policy indicates that curricula should support socially responsible community development and empower graduates through experiential learning (p. 4). Secondly, curricula should promote collaboration with role players both within the University and with external partners (SER, p. 70-1). Although these were not foregrounded in the SER, the Panel heard and saw excellent examples of community engagement both as expressions of curriculum and as

expressions of research, including, for example, the dairy farm and agronomy, the Nguni cattle project, and the piggery. Despite these successes, community engagement is concerningly undertaken in the absence of an institutional policy and is not articulated in programmes as part of an integrated academic approach. CE is inconsistently applied across similar programmes, for example, or to study levels where it could provide opportunities for students' exposure to practical work. There is no formal institutional accountability for CE in learning programmes.

Despite the existence of the PQA unit, quality assurance activities at UFH appear to be primarily driven by compliance with professional bodies and EQA requirements. The SER (p. 72) reports that insufficient attention has been paid to addressing feedback from the first round of audits in 2009. The Quality Improvement Plan (SM00096) contained numerous recommendations, many of which have not been implemented, which is in part attributed to the CHE's lack of follow-up (SER, p. 72). From the SER and from interviews (minutes of the IQAC, 7 April 2021), it is clear that the operationalisation of the IQAC's remit as set out in the Charter (SM00036) has been limited, focusing on compliance and administrative matters in its scope. Coupled with the lack of quality-driven internal reviews and the absence of an academic plan, quality assurance at the UFH lacks depth, and no coherent or integrated IQMS is in place.

Efforts are being made in the University to acquaint stakeholders with the new QAF. However, the QA Policy was under review at the time of the site visit. In light of this, and given the CHE's *Framework for Institutional Audits 2021* (p. 17) statement that institutions must "have developed effective internal quality assurance systems, which provide an enabling framework for the provision of high-quality programmes, effective student support, flexible learning modes, and innovative pedagogies to improve access, retention and success", the Panel believes that there is a limited appreciation at the UFH of what the quality assurance framework means for the establishment and maintenance of an IQM system comprising structures, processes, policies, and practices to ensure that quality infuses all activities across the University's core functions. The SER acknowledges that the UFH needs to pay attention to the implementation of recommendations, and frameworks governing internal reviews and monitoring, noting that capacity is needed in the PQA to support the reviews (SER, p. 74). The Panel acknowledges the challenges faced by the UFH, the policies and procedures it has developed to infuse QA into the core academic functions, and its success in moving academic operations online in 2020-2021. However, at the time of the site visit, a number of the policies and procedures required to embed QA in the institution were only in draft form. Although these will no doubt impact UFH's culture of quality in due course, by the time of the site visit, however, the Panel found no overt evidence of the integration of quality assurance with the core academic function of teaching and learning.

The Panel noted that manual timetabling, coupled with a clear lack of direction in respect of the facilities and resources on each campus, means that some facilities and resources are being underused, while others may be over-utilised. For example, the Bhisno campus is empty during the day and is only used after hours by UFH Solutions to offer unit standard-based short courses. A more strategic allocation of programmes to the sites would ensure more effective use of existing facilities and resources.

Given the lack of clear, defining graduate attributes to guide programme reviews, tracer studies, and proactive student support mechanisms, it is unclear how the University defines success and how this definition is articulated in its academic plan.

Although each support unit in administration management, the library, human resources, and residence life are clearly and actively engaged with their areas, in interviews with academic support staff, there is no sense of (a) links between different portfolios and (b) the criticality of these areas for the success of the academic project in general, and student success in particular. The move to remote teaching and learning in 2019, 2020, and 2021 is addressed in the SER (p. 82). From interviews with students, it was clear that, although the laptops and data issued to all students and staff assisted in their completing the academic year (see also SER, p. 82), delivery across subjects, programmes, and years of study was uneven. In the absence of specified UFH minima, students reported unequal provision of support and/or teaching during emergency remote teaching.

In summary, quality assurance cannot yet be said to be embedded across all levels and activities of the UFH: given the timing of the audit, the SER (pp. 72-74) and the minutes of the IQAC submitted as additional evidence all focus on compliance consistent with the period of stabilisation.

Recommendations

16. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a comprehensive quality assurance strategy aligned to the University's Strategic Plan.
17. The Panel recommends that the UFH strengthen and capacitate the quality assurance staff to develop, implement and entrench quality assurance practices across the institution. Capacity considerations should include those specifically linked to the monitoring and evaluation role this entity plays at institutional and faculty levels.
18. The Panel recommends that the UFH implement a strategy for the systematic, consistent, and cyclical internal review of existing programmes to address the quality of the curricula,

the needs of various programme types and levels, and the research, WIL, CE, practical, and / or other relevant aspects of the different curricula.

19. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a consistent strategy for curriculum review and transformation.
20. The Panel recommends that the UFH review, update, and develop teaching and learning quality assurance guidelines and standard operating procedures to align to the Academic Plan and Strategic Plan.
21. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop and implement a student tracking system as well as a framework for graduate tracer studies that will guide effective design, implementation, and interpretation (and use) of findings of the tracer studies.

Standard 6: *Human, infrastructural, knowledge management, and financial resources support the delivery of the institution's core academic functions across all sites of provision, in alignment with the concomitant quality management system, in accordance with the institution's mission.*

For the University's new Strategic Plan and the Decade of Renewal to take effect, active and directed recognition of the overall Quality Assurance Framework and the centrality of the academic project across all University activities is needed. All departments, divisions, and units must work coherently together to support the core functions and not as ends in themselves.

The SER indicates that the PQA had been "perilously understaffed" (SER, p. 76). By the time of the site visit, the unit consisted of 10 staff members across three campuses (SER, p. 74). In 2020, the Manager of Quality Assurance was appointed, with two QA officers appointed in November 2020 and January 2021. The allocation of quality assurance responsibilities to the DVC: Teaching and Learning, and the recently appointed DVC: RPI (SER, p. 76) will help address the constraints. However, much work is needed to entrench a sound understanding of quality, even in this unit itself. From the interviews with PQA staff, it is clear that the team is not capacitated to implement and entrench quality assurance practices across the Institution. The PQA does not at present engage in activities designed to monitor and improve the UFH's quality management system. Furthermore, the information and communication technology infrastructure is not yet at a level to facilitate quality management.

The Audit and Risk Committee has focused on finance and governance processes (SER, p. 76). Although some academic risks have been noted, in interviews with academics and from the module and programme review reports (SM00016), these risks have been high level and the quality of

curricula has been overshadowed by the risks relating to enrolment planning and the DHET moratorium. In interviews with academic staff, the need for administrative support for the academic and research goals of the UFH was emphasised. From interviews, support from central University administration to the deputy deans is uneven.

The Panel acknowledges the financial challenges communicated by Council members in interviews, and from the VC's presentation, and finances will continue to impact the University's ability to address shortfalls for some time. The number of vacant posts and the practice of 'time on task' for academic work (SER, p. 77; interviews with professors and other academics) impacts negatively on programme quality. The need to reduce expenditure and maximise income was reiterated in the SP 2022/2026 (SM00010) and by senior management.

Third-stream revenue is one of the sources of income identified for the University although there is no policy and no plan in place for its achievement. Similarly, there were no plans in place for the achievement of Goal 1 (SP 2022/2026 (SM00010)) which speaks to "the pursuit of high-quality teaching and learning and blended learning" (SER, p. 77).

Although ICT infrastructure plans are in place, it is not clear how these align with the academic project. For example, the provision of laptops to undergraduate students (SER, p. 77) is admirable, but in interviews with staff and students, it became clear that some laptops were not fit for purpose, despite the assertion that "specialised IT requirements in some programmes are monitored for adequacy of hardware and software" (SER p. 78). The focus is on digitisation (i.e., making analogue information digital) rather than digitalisation (i.e. moving academic and administrative processes into digital technologies), which enables academic transformation.

The staff interviewed spoke of the slowness of the tender system, a lack of planning for ongoing maintenance, rigid procurement processes, budget challenges, and a lack of follow-up and feedback from central administration for IT. Disaster recovery is poor, with on-site backup, poor data, and little integration between systems.

From interviews with EMTs, deans, the PQA Unit, and heads of departments, the Panel learned that technical compliance in new programmes is in place and is provided by both TLC and PQA (see also SER, p. 78). The Panel was concerned that the PQA is 'responsible' for the feasibility of programmes and their provisioning, but that its role, in reality, is limited to compliance with CHE requirements. From interviews with the staff, it was not clear how the PQA engages with academics

in activities designed to enhance the quality of programmes for submission, as opposed to ensuring the completion of documents.

Library facilities across the three campuses are unequally resourced and limited (SER, p. 79). That said, high levels of support are provided for disabled students and no concerns were expressed by staff or students regarding the quality and equivalence of the holdings. The Panel concurs with the SER's statement that "surveys ... show that both staff and students are generally satisfied with library resources and services" (SER, p. 79). The East London library in particular is a sterling example of collaboration between three institutions and how the uniqueness of each institution is evident is good. From engagements with the library staff, who are professional across the areas of the library's work, it became clear that a more effective integration of support services' roles into the academic project is needed. In addition, library staff require additional professional development. The Panel was unable to conclude that data and other measures guide the provision of library support services.

It may be that given the current emphasis on accountability, the library is also affected by the slow disbursement and use of DHET funds allocated to facility upgrades (SER, p. 81). From engagements across the University, no integration of planning across the core areas is evident. The fact that the library has oversight of the University's digitisation project may result in it being distracted from its core business in respect of the academic project.

According to the SER (p. 82), the shift to online teaching and learning in 2020 resulted in more blended- or hybrid-teaching modalities. Given the lack of minimum requirements in this regard, some staff (and possibly also students) are more capable of teaching and learning in this environment than others. Differentiation in staff support appears to be driven by national imperatives (e.g., nGAP) rather than by a consistent institutional approach to staff development which accounts for the academics' career trajectories. Despite the University's existing student support programmes and supplemental instruction which is informed by HEMIS and ITS data, students' perceptions of support are that it relies on student agency. From the high dropout and on-time throughput rates, a more strategically focused approach is clearly required. Goal 1 of SP 2022/2026 (SM00010) focuses on high-quality teaching and learning, and urgent attention is needed in light of the focus on this shortcoming emerging from all interviews.

Related directly to the above is the capacitation of academic staff as teachers (SER, p. 83). The staff interviewed had attended a range of formal and informal sessions relating to teaching online. They indicated that although the assessment module of the PGDip is compulsory for staff, it has not been enforced. Despite a total of 400 workshops (p. 83) having been run, it was not clear how or whether

these were tailored to the different stages of a teaching career. The SER mentions that large numbers of staff are part-time employees, (SER, p. 35) and it was unclear both from the SER and from interviews whether these staff are supported, particularly given the high turnover. The reliance on high numbers of part-time staff is a concern and has the potential to impact negatively the quality of teaching and learning and assessment.

Classroom visits undertaken during the site visit tours indicate most classrooms are equipped with the minimum required and are clean and appropriate. However, students and staff indicated the need for suitable technology, which was reiterated in interviews with IT and facilities staff. Computer laboratories appeared to be equipped on the East London and Bisho campuses; however, students and staff alike reported that many of the machines were not working (variable depending on the lab or facility being visited). The laboratories in Alice (especially in the natural sciences) were in the process of being upgraded, with some already in good condition.

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) has already been mentioned in Standard 5, above. WIL is only included in programmes where it is a professional body requirement. Although the SER (p. 78) indicated that WIL was “mainly” for professional programmes, the Panel did not find evidence in interviews with staff or students of any other examples of WIL, even where this may have been appropriate. Given the students’ indications in interviews that practical experience was lacking (for example, in some programmes requiring laboratory-based work), this is a concern. Where WIL is included, and despite the absence of a WIL policy, it appeared to be appropriately managed and supervised.

The SER (p. 83) indicates that the PQA surveys staff satisfaction annually (SM00062) but there are no additional mechanisms to monitor staff wellness. In interviews with senior and other academic staff, and despite general optimism and commitment, the Panel heard of staff fatigue and exhaustion, despair at high workloads, frustration with administrative processes in place (or the lack thereof), and the slow rate in the release of funds. The success of the Strategic Plan depends on effective governance as much as on staff commitment.

During interviews, postgraduate students expressed concerns at having to vacate residences during vacations, given their study calendars. Foreign students in particular reported feeling unwelcome and argued for more support for their unique needs.

In summary, the UFH does not yet have the consistent human, infrastructural, and financial resources needed to fully support the core academic functions across all sites. The quality

management system is still in development and is not yet directed at achieving the University's mission and strategic plan.

Recommendations

22. The Panel recommends that the UFH implement a strategy to ensure that DHET-allocated funds for the enhancement of library facilities and resources is spent efficiently and effectively speedily to address the current shortfalls.
23. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a plan for the management of campuses, and update and revise the Campus Spatial Development Plan in line with emergent needs and the new strategy.
24. The Panel recommends that the UFH implement a strategy to ensure that annual budgeting discussions at all institutional levels include explicit allocations for the design and implementation of quality assurance measures, for their support, their development and enhancement, and the monitoring of such measures (Recommendation 17 has reference).
25. The Panel recommends that the UFH undertake a systematic, institution-wide evaluation of academic staff development as the basis for developing a differentiated approach to career development, which accounts for various career needs, and which integrates training and development opportunities (Recommendation 9 has reference).
26. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop and implement a plan to upskill support staff, including library staff, with skills appropriate to their respective fields. Career development pathways for staff in the library should be part of this plan.
27. The Panel recommends that the UFH devise a clear strategy for the digitisation and automation of all aspects of student academic administration.

Standard 7: *Credible and reliable data (for example, on throughput and completion rates) are systematically captured, employed and analysed as an integral part of the institutional quality management system so as to inform consistent and sustainable decision-making.*

The UFH uses Higher Education Data Analyzer (HEDA) to support administrative and statutory processes and reporting requirements (SER, p. 84). Although the SER indicates that "Qualitative and quantitative data is used in the quality management of teaching" (SER, p. 84), this statement was not supported in the interviews. There is unevenness across faculties and departments in understanding what the quality management of teaching is, and how it is achieved, despite references to the Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses (SM00048). It was too soon

after the policy's approval for its impact to be evenly felt across the University. TLC support for staff has been addressed in Standards 5 and 6, above.

The SER (p. 84) indicates that data on student learning is used to identify students at risk, however, in interviews with academics, it was clear that some use the results of the students' first assessment, while others indicated that they use iEnabler and Blackboard. The use of data, and of which data, thus depends on the degree of the individual's familiarity with at-risk management, the data available, or the use of the learning platform. A system for the early identification of student support is lacking (SER, p. 84). A task team has been mandated to implement the system by the end of 2022. Despite this, interviews with students indicate that support is generally positively received, although it had not yet impacted positively on time to completion or success rates.

The Panel concluded that University staff (whether academic or administrative) do not currently have access to credible, reliable, and systematic academic data. Although some data is gathered, it tends to be done manually (as in the library, for example), or at the discretion of the individual, manager, department or faculty. From interviews, much work has been done to 'clean' data and data processes to ensure integrity. However, the Panel concluded that data is not systematically used as part of the quality management system. In addition, Blackboard and ITS are not linked, which creates additional work. Standard operating procedures are being developed across key areas of data but have not yet been finalised / applied. As a result, interviewees spoke of a lack of data or of data discrepancies.

The online application system *has* been a great success. From interviews with faculty staff and academics, the Panel learned the system will greatly enhance the UFH's ability to align its enrolment plans, to achieve targets, and to inform planning. However, given that it was only implemented in 2022, the option for walk-in applications and manual processes remains, as do the attendant risks.

Recommendation

28. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a data management and usage framework/strategy; review current policies and develop any additional related policies required and implement a strategy covering the use of data for decision-making, and for identifying courses and students at-risk.

Standard 8: *Systems and processes monitor the institution's capacity for quality management, based on the evidence gathered.*

Given the discussion in Standard 7 above, the UFH is not yet in a position to provide appropriate and adequate data for it to make informed decisions on quality management. As a result, the basis for decisions was often unclear.

From interviews with staff and students, faculty- and University-level governance structures do allow for engagement between staff, and between staff and students. In interviews, students reported feeling included in these structures and recognised the alignment between their portfolios in student leadership and their roles in the University governance structures. On the other hand, students also reported feeling that in some committees, decisions were 'rubber stamped', resulting in their not being able to debate the issues.

The UFH's implementation of online learning indicates sufficient processes were in place to address the requirements for completing the 2020 academic year during the pandemic. Quality management of the period, however, took second place to the focus on stabilising the Institution. The UFH Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Plan 2016 (SM00089) (reviewed in 2022) is in place, although, as the discussion in Standard 7 indicates, the practicability of some of the arrangements is concerning.

Positive aspects highlighted in the SER and confirmed in interviews include that faculty- and division operational plans align to the Strategic Plan, and have articulated goals, objectives and KPIs (SER, p. 85). Compliance with strategic objectives is monitored and reported to Senate and Council (SM00091). From interviews with the deans, their familiarity and positivity about their newly defined roles reinforces the need for data to underpin their decision-making and monitoring.

Recommendation

29. The Panel recommends that the UFH implement a broader conceptualisation of digitisation to support the integrated data needs of all the various domains across the University, aligned to the strategic goals.

5.3 Focus Area 3: The coherence and integration of the institutional quality management system supports the core academic functions

Standard 9: *An evidence-based coherent, reasonable, functional, and meaningfully structured relationship exists between all components of the institutional quality management system.*

As set out in the SER (pp. 86-88), the University has a number of the elements of a quality management system in place, although these had only been implemented recently. The IQAC has overall oversight of all quality activities in the University; the PQA Unit ensures compliance with national policies and regulations; the Internal Audit structure, located in the VC's Office, complements the work of PQA Unit by providing reports; the EMT monitors the quality and plays an advisory role; and FTLQACs report to the IQAC. Faculty standing orders regulate the FTLQACs. Although the University has some quality management processes in place (including structures, policies, procedures, standing orders, personnel, etc.), the Panel learned from the SER and interviews that coordinated alignment of all the components of the institutional quality management system is still needed.

It was indicated in interviews with academic leadership and academic staff that faculties and departments receive draft policies from management for comment. The Panel notes that their contribution could be enhanced by having representatives participate in the writing process, followed by faculties providing feedback on policies. As discussed above, not all reviewed or new policies had been approved by the time of the audit.

From the SER (p. 84) and interviews with academics, data on student learning is minimal and most academics reported using the first assessment result as the primary indicator, with few making use of iEnabler and/or Blackboard to identify students at-risk. No evidence was provided on the identification of courses at risk. Identification of both seemed to depend on the individual academic and not on a clear institutional strategy.

The Panel notes the University's clear commitment to the implementation of its strategic plan to setting up a monitoring and evaluation tool to assess progress towards the strategic goals, and to use staff performance management to ensure accountability for responsibilities. Despite acknowledging this commitment, the Panel was nevertheless required to assess the coherence of the system in action. Accordingly, given the timing of the audit, the Panel could not assess whether the *implementation* of the above systems would be successful at some point in the future.

From interviews with University governance and leadership, and academic governance and leadership, the Panel learnt that quality management systems are primarily focused on teaching and learning and research, and not on community engagement. The integration of community

engagement (CE) (SER, p. 45) and work-integrated learning (WIL) (SER, p. 78) into teaching and learning does not obviate the necessity for policies, and these must be developed, as indicated earlier. As also indicated earlier in the report, the Panel cannot overemphasise the need to foreground CE activities as one of the three core activities expected of a University.

In summary, the institutional quality management systems are in the early stages of development and no measurable evaluation of their efficacy is as yet available, as insufficient time has elapsed for review to take place. As a result of the above, the University's quality management systems are deemed not to be functional.

Recommendations

30. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a research, innovation and partnership framework with attendant policies to guide the partnerships in place and any future ones to be established.
31. The Panel recommends that the UFH create structures, policies, and procedures, to ensure formal oversight of strategic partnerships.
32. The Panel recommends that the UFH formalise community engagement (CE) across the University to guide the current and future community engagement activities by;
 - Developing a policy or structure to provide oversight of and monitor the articulation between community engagement and the academic programme and curriculum needs and requirements.
 - Designating oversight to relevant structures to ensure that CE practices are systematically integrated into teaching and learning and research and that these form part of formal institutional accountability.
33. The Panel recommends that the UFH review the policy on rewarding staff excellence so that the criteria are clear.

Standard 10: *Evidence-based regular and dedicated governance and management oversight of the quality assurance system exists.*

Standard 10 is addressed in the SER (p. 89). Although most governance structures are newly formed, they aim to monitor compliance with the strategic objectives and report to the Senate and Council (SM00091). As indicated in standard 9, the IQAC has overall oversight of all quality activities

in the University; the PQA ensures compliance with national policies and regulations; the Internal Audit structure complements the work of the PQA Unit with reports; and the EMT monitors quality.

Performance management of the executive management team was implemented in 2022 and plans are needed to cascade this process to all the levels of the University. No plan for the operationalisation of performance management across the University was provided at the time of the site visit, nor in the SER.

Elements of a quality management system are in place as discussed above, and in Standard 9. The lack of performance management below the executive management level does, however, mean that the performance of staff responsible for example, for QA, has not yet been reviewed. In interviews with the VC, DVCs, deans, EMTs (governance and leadership), and deputy deans, the lack of a comprehensive quality assurance system was acknowledged. The Panel acknowledges that efforts to put systems, policies, and procedures in place to deal with compliance and non-compliance are clear, but, at the time of the site visit, many of these were still in process for the first time. As indicated in the SER (p. 89) and in interviews with staff, the restructuring of committees in 2020 (SM00033), and the development of committee charters have served to highlight the functions and responsibilities of committees. Nonetheless, as discussed in Focus Area 2, there was unevenness in the entrenchment of these at the time of the site visit.

The SER (p. 89) notes that awards for distinguished practice in teaching and learning, and research have been introduced. Importantly, the University has terminated the cash reward system for research, and research incentives are paid into staff research accounts to promote the UFH's research profile. Previously, research awards were paid into staff members' salaries and did not necessarily translate to increased research production (SER, p. 89). The Panel acknowledges the significance of this change in line with the trajectory towards the University's strategic goals. The impact of these awards is yet to be established.

In short, and based on the narrative presented above, evidence-based, regular, and dedicated governance- and management oversight of the quality assurance systems cannot yet be said to be functional across the University.

Recommendations

34. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a mechanism that addresses academic quality issues in the faculties and in particular those identified by, for example, the DHET and CHE in the previous audit (Recommendations 2 and 16 have reference).

Standard 11: *Planning and processes exist for the reasonable and functional allocation of resources to all components of the institutional quality management system.*

Standard 11 is addressed in the SER (pp. 90-91). The University's budget is overseen by a budget committee, whose membership and charter were streamlined in 2021 to guide its operations. The committee reviews the budgeting process document, analyses requests for budgets to ensure that they are aligned with the University's strategic goals and objectives, and with the priority areas in the operational plans. Budgeting guidelines are sent to divisions and faculties, who use their operational plans to request funding. Induction on budgeting for new staff members is conducted annually (SER, pp. 90-91). However, the University faces significant financial constraints which were voiced in interviews with Council members, in the Vice Chancellor's presentation, and by staff from the Finance Directorate. It was stated in the interviews with University management that money from vacant posts was being used to cover budget shortfalls. The University's financial constraints will continue to impact the quality of the academic project for some time.

From the SER (pp. 90-91) and interviews with a variety of University stakeholders, the Panel was unable to establish how annual budgeting discussions at all institutional levels ensure allocations for the design and implementation of quality assurance measures, for their support, their development and enhancement, and for the monitoring of such measures. It was unclear whether and how budget allocations for the quality management system are made, and how these would reflect the importance of quality management attached at all institutional levels to the provision of appropriate resources (within the overall budgetary constraints).

Nonetheless, the importance of reducing unnecessary expenditure and optimising the use of income (SP 2022-2026; SM00010) was emphasised, with third-stream income being identified as a possible source of income for the University (SER, p. 31). However, there is no policy or plan for how this will be achieved. In the SER (pp. 90-91), the University indicates that greater awareness is needed as to how the University earns its income and of the need to prioritise spending against the strategic goals and objectives. Little mention was made of how the University generates or will generate third-

stream income. Despite this, during campus facilities tours, the Panel noted community engagement projects that may be generating third-stream income, for instance, the UFH Dairy Farm, the Nguni Cow projects, the piggery, and the crop production side whereby vegetables are supplied to local shops.

Although an Academic Workload Model was approved in June 2022, it cannot be said to be consistently applied, nor is there awareness of its existence. As discussed in Standard 3, faculties use dissimilar models, which was confirmed during interviews. As mentioned earlier, academic staff consistently indicated that they have high workloads, however, the Panel was unable to verify this in the absence of an implemented workload model. Given the complexities of the issue, which potentially impacts negatively on the academic project, a model is essential. Executive management indicated that plans were underway to develop a workload model to be applied across the Institution which takes into account staff-student ratios as well as the time required for research and academic administration and in some cases, leadership.

The SER and interviews with the UFH professors provided insight into the academic vacancies at the University (SER, p. 77) and the practice of 'time on task' for academic work (SER, p. 77). Academics expressed concern about the impact of this employment practice on the quality of the academic project and on the delivery of programmes. Interviews with senior management confirmed the view of the academic project as being potentially compromised due to the high number of sessional/contract staff.

The following were all cited as adding to the negative lived experience of academic staff, and by implication, on the overall quality of the academic project: staff fatigue, despair at the high workloads, frustration with some of the administrative processes in place (or the lack thereof), the high number of vacancies, the persistently high levels of contract academics (who might not always have the interest of the University and students at heart), the frustratingly slow pace of the release of funds for research (which some of the professors indicated resulted in their opting to retain their funds with partner institutions rather than at the UFH), and procurement (e.g. some of the emerging researchers and post-doctoral students reported that due to the slow procurement processes, research funds had been lost). An additional concern, evidenced not only by the security arrangements necessitated by the site visit but also by the non-functional access control at the residences during the Panel walkabout, is the general issue of security. No evidence of a systematic and equitable security plan for the various campuses and sites was found. Given the severity of the security concerns, and taking into account the input by staff and students on this issue, access control on campuses and residences should, at a minimum, be assured so as to ensure the safety of staff and students.

As indicated elsewhere, and from interviews with HODs, senior and junior academics, the practice of appointing HODs on a rotational basis was cited as a source of frustration for both senior and junior academics and may result in departments that are not sufficiently well academically steered to meet the strategic goals.

As a result of these challenges and gaps already mentioned in the University's planning and processes for the reasonable and functional allocation of resources to all components of the institutional quality management system, the Panel concluded that the QM planning and processes were not functional.

Recommendations

35. The Panel recommends that the UFH take clear steps to align all its structures, processes, policies, practices and capacity in an articulated academic plan or framework to infuse quality assurance activities across the University. (Recommendation 7 has reference.)
36. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a systematic and equitable security plan (across all campuses) that includes an implementation strategy and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. A critical element is including consistent monitoring of access control on the campuses and in residences to ensure the safety of its staff and students.
37. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a human resources strategy and attendant policies that pay particular attention to:
 - Criteria and procedures for the appointment of academic Heads of Department.
 - Fast track filling vacant academic positions.
 - Staff wellness interventions to address the needs of both academic and non-academic employees.
 - Develop a range of suitable mechanisms to diagnose and address staff concerns.
38. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a University strategy for the generation of third-stream income, which will be key in comprehensively supporting the financial requirements for the Decade of Renewal.
39. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop and implement a strategy to integrate the work of support divisions and units, and to enable the articulation of coherent and coordinated plans, programmes, and activities in line with supporting the academic project to ensure that resources are effectively and efficiently used.

Standard 12: *The quality assurance system achieves its purpose efficiently and effectively.*

The SER (p. 9) addresses several aspects of Standard 12 and reports on the appointment of an administrator in 2019. Subsequent to this, the updated Statute (SM0005), the installation of the new Council, changes in the management structure, and institution-wide reviews of programmes and staffing, mean that the Institution is presently much better positioned to ensure that controls are in place to manage the various structures that shape and impact on quality. The SER (p. 93) and interviews point the Panel to an Institution where strategic direction and oversight structures are either in place, or about to be approved through the appropriate statutory structures.

Infrastructure problems related to a lack of spending of the budget allocated for infrastructure are identified in the SER (p. 92) and were corroborated in interviews with senior management, the Council members, and infrastructure and facilities personnel. The Panel acknowledges the University's identification of this as a priority, which goes some way towards addressing the concern.

A key challenge identified by the VC is an over-reliance on external providers and general outsourcing rather than building capacity in the University's own facilities department, the consequences of which are detailed in the main report. A critical, unintended consequence resulting from outsourcing practices is the creation of 'bad blood' between the University and, especially, its local service providers, particularly in instances when the University tries to stop outsourcing, which has resulted in security issues and concerns for staff of the University. The time required for the modification of, or the construction of buildings has had consequences for the academic project.

Related to the question of human resources allocation discussed above, is the question of the perception of unhealthy relationships between support staff and academics. In interviews, academics at all levels reported a lack of administrative support and of staff reluctant to perform their tasks. The impact of this is felt in both teaching and learning as well as in research.

The University's intention to ensure that its human, financial, and infrastructural resources are fit for purpose was clearly demonstrated to the Panel in the interviews with governance and leadership. Evidence of this commitment was also seen in the elements of the quality management systems and processes the University has started to put in place, although at the time of the site visit it was too early to determine the effectiveness of these. Thus, the University's quality assurance system was not functional at the time of the audit.

Recommendation

40. The Panel recommends that the UFH align structures, processes, policies, practices and capacity with a quality assurance framework and infuse quality assurance activities in the University. (Recommendations 7 and 37 have reference.)

5.4 Focus Area 4: Curriculum development, learning and teaching support the likelihood of student success

Standard 13: *An effective institutional system for programme design, approval, delivery, management and review is in place.*

Policies to guide and direct programme design, approval, delivery, management, and review had been developed (SER, p. 94). Programme design and approval is guided by the Policy on Curriculum Development and Review (SM00045) as well as by the Registrar (Additional Evidence 1). This latter policy was reviewed and approved by the UFH Council in 2021. The Programme Development and Review Policy (SM00042) also gives guidance on programme design, development, and review. Existing programmes are governed by these two policies and additional guidance for programme amendments is provided by the Policy for the Amendment of Programmes (SM00043).

Support for curriculum development is provided by the TLC. A new programme is proposed, or a proposal for the review of a programme is completed (by the proposer) and submitted on a University programme/qualification template (Additional Evidence 2 – example of qualification/ programme submission by the Faculty of Education). The Planning and Quality Assurance Unit checks resourcing and other issues necessary to ensure that a programme is fit for purpose (SER, p. 60). Staff of the TLC and PQA confirmed and explained their roles in the policy implementation processes. In addition, the TLC provided a copy of its mandate (Functional roles of the TLC – Additional Evidence 3).

Regarding the triggers and drivers for curriculum development (programme design and development) and review, in interviews, HODs and senior academics indicated that curriculum development is triggered by a need, which is indicated or suggested by the key stakeholders of the qualification/programme. It is not clear, however, in the absence of data, how this need is identified, although interviewees suggested a matrix of the needs is derived from the labour market and society, and Government policy on higher education priorities and imperatives.

In the SER (p. 95), the Panel noted that curriculum development and review is devolved to faculties and in the Policy on Curriculum Development and Review (SM00045), responsibility for the monitoring of its implementation is allocated to deans and the Teaching and Learning committees at faculty- and institutional levels. The Panel noted that the new job profiles for deans and deputy deans (SM00039) articulate these expectations. At a structural level, some of the systems required are in place. These areas are as yet to be tested given the newness of some of the faculty deans in their portfolios. Their academic seniority and experience is acknowledged, however, the newness of their appointments to leadership positions in the University requires time before the impact can be assessed.

The challenges relating to the PQM have been discussed elsewhere in some detail. However, the challenges relating to the PQM outlined in the SER (pp. 9-10) refer specially to a proliferation of programmes, questions relating to the type of programmes, and a shift in focus from that of a traditional university. As a result of the DHET's expressing concerns, a review of the PQM was undertaken. The need to align the PQM to the institutional vision, the University's multi-campus nature, its implications for resourcing teaching and learning, and equitable access were all yet to be considered. The Panel acknowledges that, through the review of the PQM, the Institution has addressed the concerns raised by the DHET and that there is now alignment between the PQM, CHE accreditation, SAQA registration and the University's IT system and faculty prospectuses for the programmes and modules offered. However, the Panel was of the view that, although the technical work has been achieved, the UFH has yet to fully assess the PQM as expressive of its academic vision. The SER (p. 95) describes the three phases followed by the Institution as it addresses the above concerns. As indicated earlier in this report, the approach has been largely compliance-driven, although at the time of the site visit, the third phase of the review had not yet been completed (SER, p. 95).

In 2022, the University undertook a faculty realignment process (IOP, 2022, SM0009), which looked at disestablishing or merging departments based on the results of the review (SER, P. 10). At the time of the site visit, the focus was still on the academic programmes and the modules that comprise them. Faculties also initiated a module review process and tabled recommendations in respect of all modules being offered at Senate in September 2021. As a result of the work completed to date, the DHET moratorium on programme applications has been lifted (SM00017) and as it currently stands, it may be argued that the PQM (SM00080) is more clearly aligned with the UFH's status as a 'traditional' university and is more coherent than before, as all qualifications offered by the University are HEQSF-aligned. The Panel appreciates the efforts and achievements of the Institution, however, the absence of a University-wide framework required to guide the plans already in place and the

development of new ones is noted. Such a framework will assist the University in addressing the gaps in evidence.

Notwithstanding the development of the Strategic Plan and its associated activities, the Panel found that the focus on actually aligning the PQM and curriculum to the new vision and mission of the University has been minimal. From the SER (pp. 94-95) and engagements with the MEC during the site visit, there is clearly no conceptual and systematic approach and methodology (strategy) for reviewing the PQM and curriculum that is driven by a broader academic plan aligned to the University's vision and mission. Research niche areas are yet to be explicitly identified and the articulation between faculty- and Institution plans are undeveloped. While the IOP for 2022 (SM0009) indicates that plans are underway to attend to this concern, at the time of the audit, the target had not been met. The Panel acknowledges the initiation by the DVC: Teaching and Learning of the assignment to develop programmes in their identified niche areas to the relevant faculties, dealt with some detail in the next Standard 14. Overall, a potentially effective institutional system for programme design, approval, delivery, management and review is in place. However, the effectiveness and impact to the change management imperative of this institutional system could not be fully determined at the time of the audit.

There were clear variations in the approaches to aligning programme development, review and delivery with the new vision, mission and strategic goals of the Institution as described by the deans, deputy deans and HODs, senior academics and lecturers. The interviews highlighted the need for a Teaching and Learning Framework, as has been indicated several times in the preceding standards.

The University has an operating Quality Assurance Policy, which has been discussed in the preceding standards. However, currently, there is no Quality Assurance Framework to enable the integrated quality management of the academic project in the Institution. The potential impact of this has been discussed in the earlier Standards, particularly in Standard 5.

In the SER (p. 60), it is stated that the current version of the policy (Policy on Curriculum Development and Review/Policy on Programme Design and Development and Review [SM00045]) proposes that curricula of existing programmes should be reviewed every three years with more comprehensive reviews scheduled at six-yearly intervals. This report has already identified the gap in implementation of this policy. Presently, it appears that no system is in place to ensure that internal, cyclical reviews of curricula, modules and programmes are undertaken, an issue that is also discussed in Standard 5.

As discussed in Focus Area 3, the current HOD role is restricted in its ability to manage and lead departments/disciplines in innovation, curriculum renewal, programme design and development. Deans and senior academics echoed these sentiments and expressed concerns about the lack of academic competitiveness in the system of appointment of HODs. The MEC informed the Panel that a policy or relevant regulatory instrument for the appointment of HODs was still being developed at the time of the site visit.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown, the shift to remote (online) teaching and learning (including assessments) resulted in a rapid shift in the use of technology in academic activities (SER, p. 96). The main steps followed in shifting to online teaching and learning are summarised in the SER (pp. 96-99). The summary provided indicates a largely responsive approach by the Institution to teaching and learning during the pandemic. However as indicated earlier in the report, much of the support provided relied on the goodwill of the academics concerned, in the absence of the University outlining its requirements. Monitoring of and reflection on the effectiveness of online academic delivery through surveys conducted by the institution was not consistent.

Although the Institution procured proctoring software, it was not able to demonstrate that this had ensured that assessment was effectively monitored and that integrity was maintained across faculties and departments.

Overall, the institutional system for programme design, approval, delivery, management and review is not functional, due to the lack of a common conceptual and systematic approach and methodology (strategy) for reviewing the PQM and curriculum, driven by a broader academic plan aligned to the vision and mission. There is no Quality Assurance Framework that enables the integrated quality management of the academic project in the Institution.

Recommendation

41. The Panel recommends that the UFH implement the systematic, consistent, and cyclical review of curricula and programmes that is not solely reliant on the requirements of external bodies.

Standard 14: *There is evidence-based engagement at various institutional levels, among staff, and staff and students, with:*

- a. *curriculum transformation, curriculum reform, and renewal.*
- b. *learning and teaching innovation; and*
- c. *the role of technology (1) in the curriculum, (2) in the world of work, and (3) in society in general.*

The vision of the new strategic plan is encapsulated in the “Decade of Renewal.” Curriculum transformation, curriculum reform and renewal form part of the strategic goals and objectives for the achievement of the vision (SER, p. 12). It is stated that “The SP 2022/26 was developed as the result of a consultative process that began in 2020, which is detailed in a report that served as background to the SP (SM00010)” (SER, p. 12). There is the expectation therefore that the strategic goals and objectives of curriculum transformation, curriculum reform and renewal are understood and accepted for implementation by the key stakeholders in the institution.

Evidence gathered from the SER (p. 99) and from interviews show some active engagement with the concepts of curriculum transformation, decolonisation, curriculum reform and renewal in seminars and symposia. These are either hosted by the TLC (as a centralised initiative, open to staff and students,) or by faculties or departments. However, there was also no evidence on the extent of participation or on the consistency of engagement with transformative practices.

From the SER (pp. 99-100) and the interviews with the SRC and the general student body (both undergraduate and postgraduate students), students are actively involved in engagements related to curriculum transformation, reform, renewal, and decolonisation. For example, the SER (p. 100) states that “Matters related to teaching and learning innovation and curriculum transformation and decolonisation appear on the agenda of faculty teaching and learning committees and the institutional Teaching and Learning Committee. Students are represented on these structures”. During the interviews, the students confirmed membership and participation in the different academic structures of the Institution. Further, the SER (p. 99) also states that students participated in the seminars described above; moreover, when interviewed by the Panel, the students confirmed participation in these seminars. Furthermore, the Panel was informed that, in at least one of the faculties, students had started submitting PhD theses in isiXhosa, the local (Eastern Cape and UFH) official language, which is a clear example of curriculum reform and decolonisation.

However, although these are examples of active engagement with issues relating to transformation, no institutional framework serves as the basis from which the University engages with these concepts in academic planning. There is also not a common understanding that might guide uptake and drive the implementation. Without an institutional framework for engagement with and the

implementation of these concepts, especially the complex (and in some cases controversial) concept of curriculum transformation, the engagements stated above have resulted in variable understandings and uneven implementation of these concepts.

The University supports and promotes learning and teaching innovation. The mechanisms employed include seminars, colloquia, and the award of research grants focused on teaching and learning, funded through the 2021-2023 UC DP Plan. The impact of such initiatives was not clear in the evidence provided, as discussed earlier in the report.

During the site visit, the Panel viewed venues and spaces for innovative teaching and learning. An example was the Faculty of Science and Agriculture's partnership with a consortium of commercial farmers to run a profit-making dairy and piggery business on the University's Experimental Farm. The University generates some third-stream income from this project (as its profit share) as well as uses the joint business enterprise for teaching learning, and research. This example suggests that while some facilities have the potential to promote innovation, the Panel was unable to determine whether this approach is consistent across programme, faculties, and partnerships.

The institution's response during the Covid-19 pandemic to continuing with the academic project is dealt with in some detail in Standard 13. The shift to remote online teaching and learning meant a focus on the provision of resources (laptops, data) and support in the use of the LMS, which was in place but not heavily used (SER, p, 96). As with many other institutions, academics indicated that they had to resort to using WhatsApp groups in teaching and learning due to poor student attendance online, most likely due to connectivity- and related issues. As discussed in Standard 5, students interviewed indicated unevenness in the delivery of programmes using online methods.

In the SER, it is stated that the UFH follows a hybrid or blended model of teaching and learning (SER, p. 100). Representatives of the TLC confirmed and elaborated on the support they provide, but evidence on the scope of support across faculties and consistency in the uptake across the institution was not available.

Recommendations

42. The Panel recommends that the UFH provide systematic and comprehensive training on innovative ways to promote student participation in online learning. (Recommendation 28 has reference.)

43. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a comprehensive and holistic staff development plan for academic staff as teachers, inter alia, one that focuses on systematic and comprehensive training on innovative ways to promote student participation in online learning. (Recommendation 9 has reference.)

Standard 15: *The students' exposure to learning and teaching at the institution, across all sites and modes of provision, is experienced as positive and enabling of their success.*

From the SER (p. 15) and responses by relevant University staff (DVC Teaching and Learning, managers in the Registrar's Office and the Deanery (and HODs), it became clear that up to 2022, there had been several challenges with respect to student admission and registration. The University confirms in the SER (p. 15) that online registrations have not yet been fully automated, and that there is a need to develop a comprehensive online system that (a) reduces bottlenecks and (b) creates synergy between the central academic administration office and faculties and departments (SER, p. 58). Automation, as identified by the Institution, will extend to the full life cycle of the student, and include a tracking system from application to graduation and beyond. The scope and implications of the manual process were observed during the campus tour, where the Panel was given access to where records are kept. The registrar confirmed in the EMT that manual registration may continue due to the Institution's context but that the commitment to automation has already yielded positive results in the number of applications received to date.

The Institution's larger digitisation project forms the undergird for the archiving project which the University has prioritised. Automation will provide the Institution with a more efficient way to access student records and minimise inconsistencies as identified in the SER (p. 58). However, this process was still being implemented during the site visit.

UFH has a Late Registration Policy and Procedures, developed in 2008 that is thus very outdated (SM00040). Disparities have been identified and the Institution recognises the need for these to be addressed. Late registration has the potential to impact on access, necessitating urgent revision of the policy.

The University has a set of Principles and Procedures for Academic Monitoring, Exclusion and Appeals (SM00015), which were approved in September 2021 (SER, p. 63), but there is no policy in place. Old processes led to irregularities due to this function straddling the central Academic Administration Office and the faculties. The effectiveness of the system, the use of templates, and

the application of principles and procedures is yet to find full effect across this area. The Panel did not have access to evidence of its effectiveness.

The student voice is addressed through two statutory bodies established to address systemic service delivery concerns that shape their university experience. Students can address their challenges through the Student Support Services Committee and the SRC. As discussed elsewhere, SRC leaders are represented in governance structures (FTLQACs, SENEX and Council), and non-SRC undergraduate, and postgraduate students confirmed their satisfaction with the representation of students in academic management and governance structures of the institution.

The absence of a teaching and learning- and quality assurance-framework, as well as academic understaffing have been flagged as major risks to the academic project earlier on in the report. As discussed in Standard 13, inconsistencies in curriculum reform, pedagogical practices and quality control need to be systematically addressed and the recommendations in Standard 13 are reiterated here. The Panel acknowledges the students' assertion that their UFH curricula made them ready and competitive in the world of work, nationally and globally. However, given the small sample of student / graduate population canvassed, this assertion ought not to be overstated and further investigation is warranted.

With respect to the permanent academic staff-student ratio, head count ratios ranged from 1:42 (in 2017) to 1: 49 (in 2021), while the full time equivalent (FTE) ratios ranged from 1: 31 (in 2017) to 1:35 (in 2021) (SER, p. 39). Although in the SER (p. 39) it is suggested that the ratios do not necessarily indicate a risk to academic quality because temporary academic staff are hired, the Panel reiterates the risks of an over-reliance on these appointees.

During the campus tour, several teaching and learning facilities on the various campuses were visited. These included but were not limited to the sound rooms, Archives Centre; Gallery Centre; libraries; lecture theatres; computer laboratories; Science and Technology laboratories; and the University Farm. The Panel found the facilities sufficiently resourced for effective teaching and learning. While the quality of the facilities is not in question, there are significant limitations in infrastructure and facilities for teaching and learning, as noted in the SER (p. 40-42), a sentiment echoed by the VC during his interview with the Panel.

As discussed in Standard 13, the quality of teaching and learning at faculty level is controlled by the FTLQACs. The University has a Policy on the Assessment and Moderation of Student Learning (SM00047) and a Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses (SM00048), which requires

staff to provide feedback on the insights derived from student evaluations. These policies also require that staff focus on how courses and teaching approaches can and will be modified or have to explain why student suggestions are not feasible. With the high proportion of contract academic staff, such expectations have limited currency.

In addition to providing academic support services to academic staff, as described in Standards 13 and 14, the TLC also provides student academic support services. There are several forms of such support which are also described in Standard 5. The academic support services include supplemental instruction (SI), tutorials, academic writing, and Peer Assisted Student Services (PASS) (SER, p. 61). Interviews with academic support staff as well as with students confirmed what was presented in the SER. However, as stated also in Standard 5, from the evidence available, no framework for student academic support exists, and the different forms of academic support operate in silos, with little evidence of how these align to programme/curriculum/module-specific needs. Therefore, with respect to measures or indicators of academic support, alignment to the curriculum, differentiation of level of study and student abilities, the nature and quality of the academic support services provided by the institution are difficult to determine.

The data in Table 17 of the SER (p. 29) indicates that the institutional throughput was better than the national average performance of public universities in South Africa during the period 2017 to 2022. However, there was also a large increase in dropout rates (from 0 to 33.4% during the period 2017 to 2020). The undergraduate student success rates, which ranged from 83.2 to 86.5% (in the period 2017 to 2022: Table 23, SER, p. 32) are not ideal. The SER (p. 84-85) states that the task of student tracking is devolved to faculties, supported by the Academic Administration Office. The University has acknowledged that a system to support tracking is lacking and is being developed: a task team has been established and is currently conducting a benchmarking exercise on what is currently available and used in higher education in South Africa. The actual performance data of undergraduate students (pass rates, dropout rates) over the period 2017 to 2022 is not ideal. The student success rates may be impacted by various limiting factors some of which have been indicated in the narrative of this report. These include heavy teaching workloads for academic staff, the absence of a performance management system, the absence of a clear teaching and learning strategy, as well as the negative impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning. Student support services, both social and academic seem acceptable, but a better, more holistic delivery of student support services could be achieved if support were more integrated.

The SER (p. 101) indicates that satisfaction surveys (of student, staff, and alumni) are administered by the PQA. Although the results of student surveys are generally positive, this must be measured against the very low rate of response (2% of the total student population; SER, p. 64).

While some questions in the interviews with SRC members, current students and recent graduates elicited positive reports, in general, the survey responses indicated some unevenness in delivery across sites, subjects, programmes, and years of study, as discussed in Standard 5. The apparent contradiction between student input in interviews and the survey results can be reconciled by a combination of the fact that the response rates of the student satisfaction surveys were low (SER, p. 64-65) and that the evidence gathered by the Panel was based on a once-off single point in time survey of a small sample of current and recent past students.

The Panel is of the view that the University must undertake a deeper critique of its student success and dropout data. The methodology for conducting student satisfaction surveys must be improved to increase the validity of the results. Survey results should be triangulated with other methods used to assess the quality of teaching and learning, such as the results of the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses (see Standard 13 and below). Further, it is not clear from the policies (discussed in Standard 13) how the results of the evaluation of students' learning experience are used in programme, curriculum and module reviews to effect improvement.

The University has recently appointed a Dean: Student Affairs who is a member of the executive team, a positive step. Unfortunately, the capacity for effective delivery of service by the Dean: Student Affairs is restricted by the high turnover of staff, and a high proportion of vacancies occupied by temporary staff (SER, p. 62-63).

As discussed above, and in the SER (p. 25), an average of 60% of students at the UFH reside in university accommodation and university-leased residences. To reiterate, there is general concern about the quality of security evidenced, not only in the SER but also in interviews with staff, students, and the SRC.

The campus tour provided the Panel with insights into the Healthcare and Counselling Services available to students. The facilities have essential resources, including nursing staff, clinical psychologists, a visiting medical doctor, and a university ambulance. The Panel visited a clinic at the Alice campus and met with some of the healthcare staff and observed healthcare facilities there.

The SRC representatives indicated in the interviews that they were generally satisfied with the non-academic support services provided to students by the different sectors of the Institution. However, after engagement with the units/portfolios providing non-academic support services described above, the Panel concluded that the integration in the provision of non-academic support is insufficient. The staff in the non-academic support services were unable to confirm that their portfolios worked in concert to serve the students across the course of their learning trajectory. As a result, the Panel's impression was that the different portfolios work in silos and that there was no evidence of an integrated approach to student development and support premised on the embodied student.

In summary, both a teaching and learning- and a quality assurance framework are lacking, and if devised, would serve to ensure the consistent implementation of curriculum reform and review, the improvement of pedagogical practices, and overall quality management. The Panel acknowledges that the resources for effective academic delivery are limited. Heavy teaching workloads and an overreliance on temporary academic staff may pose significant academic risks. A Student Support and Development Plan and Framework that holistically addresses the total student experience and takes account of the student's life cycle is yet to be developed.

Recommendations

44. The Panel recommends that the UFH prioritise the implementation of an equitable Workload Model and Policy, which accounts for reasonable staff-student ratios, the time required for research, and community engagement, a recommendation made earlier.
45. The Panel recommends that the UFH review and develop student support- and development policies, guidelines, and standard operating procedures. (Recommendations 9 and 28 have reference.)
46. The Panel recommends that the UFH develop an Integrated Student Support and Development Plan and Framework that breaks down the silos between portfolios and addresses the total student experience holistically, taking into account the student's whole life cycle, considering a differentiated approach to student needs at each phase of the academic trajectory.

Standard 16: *Institutions engage with and reflect on the employability of their graduates in a changing world.*

Evidence in the SER (pp. 102-103) shows that the institution periodically engages with its alumni, organised in Regional Chapters of the UFH Convocation. The SER states that the “University actively endeavours to engage with past students’ Regional Chapters of the Convocation (sic). Evidence of the commitment of past students to the UFH is seen in the fact that the Gauteng Chapter of the UFH Convocation raised R568 000 to pay for student debt” (SER (p. 103). The Institution acknowledges that alumni engagement has been limited and requires improvement.

A graduate tracer study from the Eastern Cape (SM00073) was last conducted in 2015 in partnership with Rhodes University. The results of this study, which were only available in 2016, showed that 19% of the UFH graduates had entered the private sector at the time the study was conducted. A clear majority (52%) were employed in the public sector. However, the study results showed that the response rates were low, and as such they cannot be used to measure institutional (UFH) relevance, impact or contribution to the scarce skills needs locally or nationally.

The SER (pp. 102-103) states that the 2015 tracer study was the only one conducted to date. The Institution has prioritised graduate tracer studies going forward. The University acknowledges that more can be done to gain insight into the pathways alumni have taken so as to better understand the quality of its programmes and to position itself as an institution of choice. It is stated in the SER that graduate employability initiatives are supported by the UCDP (2021-2023) (SM00049). However, the institution recognises that further investment is required to ensure that such initiatives are sustainable.

Overall, the institution engages with alumni in a manner that limits its ability to reflect on the employability of its graduates in a changing world. Very few graduate tracer studies have been conducted, and the University has no framework and attendant guidelines for conducting such studies.

Recommendation

- 47.** The Panel recommends that the UFH develop a framework for the implementation of graduate tracer studies that will guide the effective

design, implementation, and interpretation (and use of) findings of such studies.