



CONFIDENTIAL

**INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT REPORT
ON THE UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND**

(July 2023)

© Council on Higher Education, South Africa 2023

1 Quintin Brand Street

Persequor Technopark

P.O. Box 94

Brummeria

0020

South Africa

Tel: +27 12 349 3840

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

List of acronyms

APDC	Academic Planning and Development Committee
APS	Academic Points Score
AIRU	Analytics and Institutional Research Unit
AISU	Academic Information and Systems Unit
BIS	Business Intelligence Services Unit
CCDU	Counselling and Careers Development Unit
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHRL	Campus Housing and Residence Life
CIO	Chief Information Officer
CLTD	Centre for Learning and Teaching Development
CPL	Continuous Professional Learning
CoP	Community of Practice
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoAD	Delegation of Authority Document
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EDW	Enterprise Data Warehouse
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning System
ERT	Emergency Remote Teaching
FALF	Female Academic Leadership Fellowship
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
HEMIS	Higher Education Information Management System
HoSs	Heads of Schools
ICAS	Independent Counselling and Advisory Services
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEB	Independent Examinations Board
LMS	Learner Management System
NBT	National Benchmark Test
NRF	National Research Foundation
NSC	National Senior Certificate

O Week	Orientation Week
PIMD	Property and Infrastructure Management Division
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework (draft)
QAPO	Quality and Academic Planning Office
QQR	Quinquennial Review
RAA	Residence Academic Advisor
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SEnC	Student Enrolment Centre
SER	Self-evaluation Report
SET	Senior Executive Team
SMG	Senior Management Group
SoTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
SRC	Student Representative Council
STLC	Senate Teaching and Learning Committee
TLU	Teaching and Learning Unit
URIC	University Research and Innovation Committee
URO	University Research Office
WCCO	Wits Citizenship and Community Outreach Programme
WIL	Work-integrated Learning
WWP	Wits Writing Programme

Contents

- List of acronyms 3**
- Contents 5**
- Executive Summary 6**
 - Focus area 1: Governance, strategic planning, management and leadership support the core academic functions 10
 - Focus area 2: The design and implementation of the institutional quality management system supports the core academic functions..... 12
 - Focus area 3: The coherence and integration of the institutional quality management system supports the core academic functions..... 14
 - Focus area 4: Curriculum development, learning and teaching support the likelihood of student success 15

Executive Summary

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) was established through the Higher Education Act (No. 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 (No. 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 that will be implemented in the medium term by the CHE. Institutional audits are strongly influenced by both the specific context within which each higher education institution (HEI) works, and by the national transformational agenda within which higher education functions. The HEQC has identified a need to fulfil its mandate to conduct full audits of all HEIs in South Africa. A full audit of an institution determines whether or not, and to what extent, an institution's 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 outcomes, as well as on building reflective praxis to develop quality cultures in institutions.

The following principles guided the institutional audit of the University of the Witwatersrand:

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 and 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.

¹ <https://www.che.ac.za/publications/frameworks/framework-institutional-audits-2021>

² <https://www.che.ac.za/publications/frameworks/manual-institutional-audits-2021>

³ <https://www.che.ac.za/publications/frameworks/quality-assurance-framework-qaf-higher-education-south-africa>

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.
8. Institutional audits are a key component of the HEQC's broad-based quality assurance mandate.

Aligned to international practice, the HEQC uses a review methodology consisting of an institutional self-evaluation report (SER), and an external peer review which 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 the Witwatersrand.

Brief overview of the institution

The University of the Witwatersrand was formally established in 1920 and its first students registered in 1922. It thus celebrated its centenary in 2022. It has two major campuses in Johannesburg, one in Braamfontein, the other in Parktown. It also has a rural facility located in Bushbuckridge in the Mpumalanga Province. The *Wits Vision 2022 Strategic Framework* governed the University's strategic planning for the period 2010-2022 (for the last seven-eight years, strategic targets were set and monitored in accordance with annual Institutional Scorecards). A new Strategic Framework has been prepared for the next decade, titled *Wits 2033: The Leading Edge of the Global South*.

There are five faculties comprising in total 34 schools, of which the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management is the largest. During the review period, the senior management of the University resided with the Vice-Chancellor and a Senior Executive Team comprising a Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, three Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Registrar, five Deans, the Dean of Students and the Chief Financial Officer.

According to its Institutional Profile, Wits had 42 172 registered students (by "headcount") in 2021: 36 000 were full-time students; 39.8% were postgraduate students; 49% were registered in the "STEM" environment; 69.2% were African, 14.3% were White, 11.7% were Indian and 4.1% were Coloured; 8.7% were international students; 56.5% were female; 52% were from quintile 5 and private schools, 6% from quintile 1 schools (up from 4% in 2017) and 9% from quintile 2 schools; 23% of undergraduate students (of which slightly more than half are first years) and 4% of postgraduate students were in a residence owned or leased by the University. For 66% of the students, English is not their home language.

Based on data captured in the Institutional Profile, the throughput rates of undergraduate students are generally unsatisfactory; those of Postgraduate Diploma programmes satisfactory, those of Honours programmes very good and those of Master's programmes unsatisfactory (doctoral programmes were not considered for this audit).

There were 9 291 staff employed at the institution in 2021 (a best estimate measured according to "HEMIS staff headcount", down from 10 217 employed in 2020). Of these, 52% were academics and 48% were support staff. Of the academic staff, 34% were full-time (permanent

and temporary) and 66% were part-time. In 2020, White staff comprised 51.6%, African staff 32%, Indian staff 10.8% and Coloured staff 5.6% of the permanent academic staff headcount of 1 217. Of these 50.5% were female. In 2020, White staff comprised 41.5%, African staff 39.2%, Indian staff 16.7% and Coloured staff 2.6% of the temporary academic staff headcount of 4 324. Of these 54% were female.

In 2020, African staff comprised 82.6%, White staff 6.9%, Indian staff 5.7% and Coloured staff 4.8% of the permanent support staff complement. Of these 54.7% were female. In 2020, African staff comprised 68.6%, White staff 17.7%, Coloured staff 7.7% and Indian staff 6% of the temporary support staff complement. Of these 61% were female.

In the period 2017-2021, the FTE ratio of permanent academic staff to students remained constant, rising by one from 27 to 28, despite a huge increase in the number of students who enrolled at the institution. The FTE ratio of all academic staff to students also remained constant, rising by one from 13 to 14.

The institution defines itself as a research-intensive University. Between 2012 and 2021, the output of research by researchers affiliated to the institution, measured in terms of both Scopus and the Web of Science indices, doubled. There are 434 NRF rated scholars in the institution, of which 27 are A-rated. It has six DTI-NRF Centres of Excellence.

The institution is financially sound and the services, facilities and infrastructure on its campuses shown to the Panel are well maintained and fit for purpose. It has sophisticated information and communications technology and a capacity for data analytics.

Brief overview of the audit process

The Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand signed off on its Self-evaluation Report (SER) for the period 2015-2021 on 27 May 2022. The SER, the Institutional Profile and a Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) were provided to the CHE's audit Panel.

The Panel underwent a CHE training session in June 2022 and thereafter commenced with its reading of the documentation provided. The Panel members met virtually on many occasions between July-September 2022 to familiarise themselves with each other; to elect a deputy chairperson; to agree on a site visit schedule (in collaboration with the institution) and the interviewees for each session during the site visit; to allocate focus areas to groups within the Panel for deeper reading by a group; to identify lines of inquiry in respect of each standard of a focus area. The lines of inquiry thus identified were translated into questions and a set of questions for each interview session was agreed upon, and questions allocated to each Panel member. This process was completed on 20 September, which left six days for each Panel member to prepare appropriately for the site visit.

The Panel found the SER to be fairly comprehensive, with a wealth of information on the institution (though in some cases additional evidence provided to the Panel demonstrated that the SER did not do justice to the institution). However, the Panel had some concerns with it: it was descriptive for the most part rather than analytical and critically self-reflective; its discursive, unstructured format created an impression that topics of discussion were inserted in the SER as they came up rather than carefully placed within a coherent narrative; the "reflections" sections after each standard often contained completely new information; often it provided descriptive generalisations (e.g., "a reasonable rate", "multitude of initiatives", "significant numbers") where real data duly analysed and reflected upon were required (possibly in appendices); a detailed

organogram of the organisational and management structure of the institution was only provided on request; the Panel struggled to gain access to documents embedded through hyperlinks in the SER and to other documents listed in the PoE, so alternative access had to be established, while some additional documents had to be requested.

The Institutional Profile was fairly comprehensive, although the Panel found that it did not reflect trends and patterns as required by the CHE's *Manual for Institutional Audits*.

The site visit took place from 26-30 September 2022. Sessions were conducted virtually from Monday-Wednesday. On Thursday and Friday, most Panel members were present at the institution in person apart from two who continued to participate virtually. A total of 29 sessions were conducted with a wide range of interviewees, from the Vice-Chancellor and Council members to staff and students and to alumni and stakeholders of the institution. Only two individuals, both students, requested separate interviews with the Panel. Demonstrations of technology assisting with essential data provision and with learning and teaching were held on Thursday 29 September and a physical tour of the facilities took place on Friday 30 September. The Panel was satisfied that the facilities presented to the Panel at the Braamfontein and Parktown campuses by staff were of a standard and a quality to support the Wits vision of an institution dedicated intensively to research, academic excellence and the promotion of an ethos of innovation.

The Panel was able to reflect on each day's sessions and to find time to prepare a feedback document. A feedback session on preliminary findings of the Panel was held with the Vice-Chancellor and his senior executive team at 12:30 on Friday 30 September. The Panel is satisfied that the site visit was well managed, that participation in the discussions was lively and uninhibited and that the tight schedule was adhered to.

Conclusion

The institutional quality audit conducted by the CHE on the University of the Witwatersrand as part of a national quality audit of all higher education institutions in South Africa was an intensive exercise, for the institution and for the Panel who conducted the audit on behalf of the CHE. For the institution, the process started in June 2021 and was concluded after the site visit on 26-30 September 2022. The Panel started its process of preparation and review in June 2022 and was deeply involved until the end of October 2022, when the draft report on the institutional audit was handed over to the CHE.

The entire audit process was rigorous and proved to be stimulating and fruitful. Engagements were at all times conducted in an atmosphere of collegiality and mutual respect and was a learning experience for all concerned. The Panel wishes to thank the Vice-Chancellor and his staff for how the audit was prepared and institutionally managed. The Panel also wishes to express its appreciation to the staff of the CHE for their assistance and guidance during the entire audit process.

The quality management system of the University of the Witwatersrand was measured in terms of four Focus Areas, each comprising four Standards. The Panel assessed the quality management system against each of the 16 Standards in accordance with a four-point scale as provided for in the CHE's *Manual for Institutional Audits*.

What follows is a summary of the audit Panel's commendations and recommendations for the

University of the Witwatersrand.

It should be noted that in the discussion of the standards under each of the four Focus Areas, concerns are raised that do not all translate into formal recommendations. Concerns arose either from the inadequate manner in which the institution's quality management system was presented in the SER (and accompanying documents) or from a comparison of the information provided in the documentary evidence with evidence provided by interviewees during the site visit. It was considered important that these concerns should be captured in the report so that the institution is properly advised about perceptions around its quality management system (of its staff and students and of the audit Panel) beyond what was formally reflected in its SER, its PoE and its Institutional Profile. This does not mean that all these concerns can or should be translated into recommendations that the institution would be required to respond to formally through an Improvement Plan submitted to the CHE. Only those concerns in respect of which it is deemed essential that they be formally addressed in order to contribute to an improved quality management system have been captured in formal recommendations. It should therefore be noted that where a Standard is reproduced in the executive summary without commendation or recommendation, this is not an oversight.

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

The four standards in Focus Area 1 concentrate on the role that an institution's *governance, strategic planning* (as contained in its *vision, mission and strategic goals*), *management and academic leadership* play in its quality management in order to enhance the likelihood of student success and to improve the quality of learning, teaching and research engagement, as well as accommodating the results of constructive, integrated community engagement.

Standard 1

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

Recommendation

1. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand considers better alignment of its institutional planning documents from the strategic plan to the multi-year- and annual plans, and that goals, targets and performance indicators are built in from the level of the strategic plan to ensure that the long-term goals are met. Reflection should be built in at the end of each multi-year plan to demonstrate the quality cycle: what was achieved, what was not achieved, what needs to be carried forward and what progress has been made towards the long-term goals. In the absence of such an institutionalised quality cycle, the University might not meet the quality dimension of "fitness for purpose".

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).

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand considers the development of a strategic framework for transformation in all its dimensions. This will enable it to establish a coherent approach to transformation goals and the resources and means required to achieve those goals, to regularly monitor and evaluate the achievement of the goals and decide what mitigation measures can be adopted when goals are not met.

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.

Commendation

- a. The University of the Witwatersrand is commended for its strategic decision to invest significant resources in strengthening the capacity of the Quality and Academic Planning Office (QAPO) to provide professional support to academic and support entities engaged in quality assurance activities, especially in relation to curriculum development and quality reviews.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand considers adopting an internal communication strategy in respect of planning and policy instruments that creates a sense of ownership of such instruments among academic and support staff, such that regular engagement on their implementation and their efficiency and effectiveness enhances the quality management system.

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.

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 utilisation*

as these give effect to the delivery of the HEI's core functions.

Commendation

- b. The University of the Witwatersrand is commended for the quality management of its research. The governance arrangements in place and the implementation of policies, plans and processes by the URO support the sustained high quantity and quality of research output. The URO has demonstrated high levels of competence in its data management, its measurement of research impact on scholarship and on society, its reviews of research entities (with QAPO), its facilitation of research collaboration in Africa and elsewhere and the opportunities it provides for research development (with CLTD).

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand considers drafting an enabling, University-wide community engagement framework or policy. Such a policy could account for such matters as clear objectives and principles underlying a variety of community engagement activities, of institutional roles and responsibilities, and of multi- and trans-disciplinary activities; minimum statutory-, ethical-, and health and safety compliance; student supervision and appropriate student conduct while on community service; resourcing; and curricula and assessment requirements. Such a policy could bring coherence to this core academic function and incorporate a database of community engagement activities, as envisaged by the institution, without inhibiting its many high-value projects.
5. It is recommended that the institution considers the adoption of an institutional internationalisation strategy to promote and coordinate the enhancement of the

institution's international profile among staff and students in its academic core functions and in line with its ambition to be a leading research and education partner in the Global South. The strategy could build on the institution's promotion of innovation in its envisaged new strategic plan to be innovative in its use of technology, and to expose its students to a learning experience which has an international dimension.

6. It is recommended that the institution considers introducing regular reviews of academic support and service entities to give structure to current review activities, and to do so in a format that is similar to the QQRs conducted for academic entities. This would establish coherence in a quality management system that acknowledges that everyone in the institution, not only academic and academic support staff, is responsible for student success and a quality student experience.

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.

Recommendations

7. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand considers applying human-, financial- and infrastructural resources in its strategic planning processes to the library complex. State-of-the-art libraries should be central to an institution committed to an ethos of research intensity, academic excellence and innovation, and its strategic planning should reflect this.
8. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand considers a thorough review of its performance management system, to establish a system which clearly differentiates between minimum standards and excellence, and which attaches positive and negative consequences to performance in a transparent manner that is acceptable to – and has the buy-in of – the stakeholders.
9. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand considers means to achieve a clear connection between its workload management policy and its application to individual staff members in a manner that is recognised as consistent, equitable and transparent within a broader strategic and quality management framework acceptable to the stakeholders.
10. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand should develop an institutional staffing policy that complements its *Wits 2033: The Leading Edge of the Global South* strategic plan in a manner that establishes a coherent framework for the recruitment, appointment and retention of full-time (permanent and temporary) and part-time academic staff in pursuit of its strategic plan.

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.

Commendation

- c. The University of the Witwatersrand is commended for its recognition of the importance of using credible and reliable data to serve as an evidence base for its decision-making processes at different levels of the University and for its quality management system. The Business Intelligence Services Unit, comprising skilled data scientists and engineers, supports all faculties, schools and service departments with data for various academic and operational purposes.

Recommendation

11. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand considers the development of common definitions to prevent data discrepancies between BIS and the faculties and schools.

Standard 8

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

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

The four standards in Focus Area 3 concentrate on the coherence and integration of the various components comprising the institutional quality management system and on how these work in concert to support the likelihood of student success and improve the quality of learning, teaching and research engagement, as well as accommodating the results of constructive integrated community engagement in accordance with the institution's mission.

Standard 9

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

Standard 10

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

Standard 11

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

Standard 12

The quality assurance system achieves its purpose efficiently and effectively.

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

The four standards in Focus Area 4 concentrate on how effectively the institutional quality management system enhances the likelihood of student success, improves learning and teaching and supports the scholarship of learning and teaching. These standards drill down in greater detail in Focus Area 2.

Standard 13

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

Commendation

- d. The University of the Witwatersrand is commended for its establishment of the thorough QQRs, the value of which was attested to by faculty deans and HoSs, despite their onerous nature, as building a culture of academic quality.

Recommendation

12. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand, given the institution's own concern about the lack of review of existing programmes that are not accredited by professional bodies, consider wide stakeholder consultation on the most effective and efficient way to include existing programmes in their quality review processes to ensure that students are not disadvantaged in any way.

Standard 14

There is evidence-based engagement at various institutional levels, among staff, and among 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.*

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.

Recommendations

13. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand considers using the Faculty of Health Sciences' algorithm for admission, that weights school quintiles 1-3, as a model that could be scaled across all faculties, which might mean more student support has to be made available.
14. It is recommended that the University of the Witwatersrand considers evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the duplicated student support and development services as well as staff development within faculties and at institutional level. It might be that they are effective in that they are targeted at a particular faculty but they might simultaneously not be efficient or subject to an integrated approach. Where there is necessary duplication, communities of practice might need to be formed to ensure that a common understanding is developed regarding good principles and practice in, e.g., teaching, counselling and advising.

Standard 16

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