



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT REPORT**

**ON THE**

**CENTRAL**

**UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

**(8 February 2024)**

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## Acronyms

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
ADS	Academic Development and Support Unit
AGU	Assessment and Graduations Unit
APP	Annual Performance Plan
AMF	Academic Management Forum
CAE	Computer-aided engineering
CASD	Curriculum and Academic Staff Development
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CE	Community Engagement
CELCAT	Corbett Engineering Limited Computer Assisted Timetabling
CGE	Centre for Global Engagement
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CICAM	Centre of Innovation and Commercialisation of Addictive Manufacturing
CILT	Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
CRPM	Centre for Rapid Prototyping and Manufacturing
CUT	The Central University of Technology
FS CUTIS	Free State CUT Innovation Services
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DRIC	Departmental Research and Innovation Committee
DUT	Durban University of Technology
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
ECP	Extended Curriculum Programme
EMC	Extended Management Committee
ERAC	Electronic Resource Access Centre
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning

FabLab / FABLAB	Fabrication Laboratory
FEBIT	Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
FHES	Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences
FHUM	Faculty of Humanities
FMS	Faculty of Management Sciences
FRIC	Faculty Research and Innovation Committee
FTLQE	Faculty Teaching, Learning and Quality Enhancement Committee
FET	Full Time Equivalent
GAET	Graduates Attributes Evaluation Tool
HE	Higher Education
HEDA	Higher Education Data Analyzer
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub Framework
HoD	Head of Department
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
HR	Human Resources Department
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation
IF	Institutional Forum
i-Gym	Idea Gymnasium
IOP	Institutional Operational Plan
IP	Institutional Profile
IPerMS	Integrated Performance Management System
IPQE	Institutional Planning and Quality Enhancement
IQA	Institutional Quality Assurance
IQMS	Institutional Quality Management System
ITS	Integrated Tertiary Software System

KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KRA	Key Result Area
LIS	Library and Information Services
LMS	Learner Management System
MANCOM	Management Committee
MIS	Management Information System
MRC	Medical Research Council
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
NDP	Non Degree Purposes
NRF	National Research Foundation
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
PDTS	Product Development Technology Station
PFRC	Planning, Finance and Resource Committee
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
QAEC	Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
QEU	Quality Enhancement Unit
QEP	Quality Enhancement Project
QES	Quality Enhancement Strategy
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
RAM	Resource Allocation Model
ResOps	Resources and Operations
RIE	Research, Innovation and Engagement
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SAA	Schools Advancement Academy
SAAC	Student Academic Affairs Committee
SACE	South African Council of Education
SMC	School Management Committee
SADAC	Southern African Development Community
SATN	South African Technology Network

SEDA	Small Enterprise Development Agency
SENEX	Executive Committee of Senate
SER	Self -Evaluation Report
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Attainable and Time-bound
SoTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
SP	Strategic Plan
SRC	Students' Representative Council
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STEPS	Strategic Transformation of Educational Programmes and Structures
TIA	Technology Innovation Agency
T&L	Teaching and Learning
TFS	Technikon Free State
TLQEC	Teaching, Learning and Quality Enhancement Committee
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAPQC	University Academic Planning and Quality Committee
UCDG	University Capacity Development Capacity Grant
UoT	University of Technology
ULC	University Languages Committee
UTLC	University Teaching and Learning Committee
VC	Vice-Chancellor and Principal
WIL	Work-Integrated Learning

## 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 Higher Education Quality Committee (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)*<sup>1</sup> and its attendant *Manual for Institutional Audits (2021)*<sup>2</sup> 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)<sup>3</sup> 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, 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, as well as on building reflexive praxis to develop quality cultures in institutions.

The following principles guided the institutional audit of the Central University of Technology:

1. The primary responsibility for internal quality assurance rests with individual HEIs. Each institution is responsible for the establishment, implementation,

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

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

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

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.
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 Central University of Technology.

## **A brief overview of the institution**

The Central University of Technology (CUT) is one of the six universities of technology that comprise the 26 public universities in South Africa. It is located in the Free State Province of



South Africa with two campuses; one located in Bloemfontein, the capital of the province, and the other in Welkom. CUT is a product of the merger between the former Free-State Technikon and Vista University-Welkom Campus. Data from 2021 indicated that this young and small university in South Africa had a student population of 21817. The university has a presence across multiple campuses. In 2019, the Welkom campus had 22% of the student population while the Bloemfontein campus accommodated the remaining 78%. The university is in a province and region of South Africa that shares the major challenges of the country and the continent, such as unemployment, poverty, and inequality. CUT draws most of its students from the Free-State Province and the adjacent provinces of the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, and Gauteng. The province is served by two public universities; CUT and the University of the Free State, also located in Bloemfontein with three campuses, two in Bloemfontein and the other in QwaQwa.

CUT enrolls mainly undergraduate students who are predominantly African students who speak Sesotho, Setswana, and English. Most of these students are women who comprise 54% of the student population. African students accounted for 20895 of the 21817 registered students in 2021, followed by 448 white students, 421 coloured students, and 21 Indian students. In 2012, Africans constituted 85% of the total student body, and white students were about 10%. Since then, the percentage of African students has increased over the years to 97.4 in 2019 and the number of white students decreased by 3.1% from 77,7% to 17.6% in 2004 (SER, p.42). The population of international students based on the 2020 data, currently sits at 2.1% from a high of 7.8% and these numbers are declining yearly. The bulk of the international students at CUT are from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) with Lesotho accounting for the majority of these students. Most CUT students are enrolled in undergraduate programmes in Science, Engineering, and Technology, followed by Business Management and Education. The lowest enrolments are in the Humanities. On the other hand, the number of research outputs and activities has been growing steadily over the years. CUT in its SER (p.5) argues that there has been a significant increase in CUT research outputs in recent years, from a low base. The number of CUT research publication units grew by an average of 11, 8% per year during the period 2013 to 2017, from 68, 48 to 107, 22 units. CUT's total of 170, 22 units in 2018 put it in 20th place amongst all public universities, up from 21st place in 2017. The total increased to 264 in 2018. When CUT's total research outputs in 2018 are calculated as an average per permanently employed academic staff member, it ranks 18th amongst the 26 universities, with an average research output of 0,9 per capita. Amongst the six universities of technology, CUT is in second place, behind DUT, which had 1,1 output per capita in 2018.

The Panel consisted of four members who engaged with the audit portfolio guided by the framework and manual of Institutional audits published in 2021. The Panel of peers comprised senior academics and administrators from universities of technology and comprehensive universities.

A brief overview of the audit process: a short reflection on the SER, the site visit dates, the structure, and the work of the Panel.

In preparing for this Audit, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) staff inducted the Panel. The chair of the Panel had a separate induction session, on the responsibilities of the chair and expectations. The induction process was helpful and prepared the Panel for the work ahead. In the induction sessions the audit portfolio, which is the Self-Evaluation Report, Institutional Profile, and portfolio of Evidence, was introduced to the Panel. The Panel met online to plan and prepare for the site visit, it agreed on the lines of inquiry, the audit schedule, and how to approach this audit.

The Panel engaged with the Self-evaluation Report (SER), the Portfolio of Evidence (PoE), and interviews that were complemented by the infrastructure inspections at the Bloemfontein and Welkom campuses. The Panel met in person with staff and students on the first two days. On days three, four, and five all the sessions were conducted online. The Panel managed to interview staff, students, and other stakeholders in 25 sessions over five days. The sessions varied in number and were at times large making it necessary to split the groups. In some cases, especially during the student sessions, we met with even larger groups and found it cumbersome to engage as planned. It is important to highlight that the interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. In all the sessions the Panel appreciates the openness and frankness with which staff and students shared their experiences and the audit Panel is grateful to the Institutional Planning and Quality Enhancement team for organising this audit. The audit Panel strove for consensus in reaching judgments during its reflections and made recommendations on areas that needed substantial improvements, even in cases where the practices were deemed functional. The Panel based their findings on evidence amassed from the audit portfolio, confirmed, and triangulated through interviews with various university stakeholders who were interviewed in 25 sessions over five days. The SER produced by CUT formed the basis for the Panel to test the assertions on quality arrangements at the University. The SER was detailed and explained its processes and how the university operated, starting with the policy development and quality arrangement across the University.

The Panel believes that CUT could have better optimized the SER development process to ensure that there were deep reflections on quality arrangements and that its systems, processes, and procedures were geared at managing quality. The SER alone wasn't sufficient to provide the required level of deep reflection, and without the physical site visit and interviews, the Panel could have easily drawn wrong conclusions about CUT's capabilities, risks, institutional culture, and appropriateness of the infrastructure that supports the core business. However, the University is commended for its agility in ensuring that teaching and learning continued during the COVID-19 pandemic when the institution had to operate under challenging conditions. CUT initiated creative and supportive techniques to assist lecturers and students in adapting to an e-learning model. Even practical modules benefited from these innovations. The management of the University wishes to return to contact sessions, but with an adapted model that is supported by the good practices inherited from the online sessions. The support staff seem to understand the requirements of the core business of the institution and support this approach. While there are areas that need attention, the University has done well in ensuring that quality provision in programmes and services is beyond reproach. The Panel conducted its site visit from 1-5 August 2022.

The following is a summary of the audit Panel's commendations and recommendations for the Central University of Technology. There are eleven (11) commendations and twenty-seven (27) recommendations. The commendations are listed using alphabets and the recommendations will be labeled using numerical numbers.

## **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. These standards are:

**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.*

The Panel noted that the current vision, mission, and strategy as expressed in Vision 2030 are clearly stated, widely consulted, and enjoy great support from staff, students, and stakeholders. The Panel was informed in interviews that the vision and mission of the university are a product of extensive internal and external stakeholder engagements. The vision and mission have also been approved by appropriate governance structures. The Panel also observed technological innovations in several disciplines, including the catalytic work on the Fourth Industrial Revolution within the province and beyond.

One of the stated risks at the University pertained to the institutional culture that the council and management were not addressing issues about mistrust, victimization, and harassment. Staff members, in interviews, indicated that the mistrust stemmed from the higher offices and cascaded down in a form of instilling fear, where bullying, victimization, and harassment were reported as rife in the lower levels of staff. This atmosphere tends to work against the university's core values of integrity, customer service diversity, innovation, and excellence. To address this challenge, the Panel is of the view that CUT should create avenues to enable staff to engage in reflexive opportunities that go beyond the prevailing compliance culture.

**Commendation a)**

The Panel commends the University in the manner that it mobilised its staff and students in crafting its strategy, for the comprehensive consultations and use of different platforms to engage the university community to ensure their buy-in, in the development of Vision 2030.

**Recommendation 1)**

The Panel recommends that both Management and the Council urgently devise methods of creating an institutional culture where diversity of opinions is nurtured and find ways of eliminating the culture of fear amongst its stakeholders.

## **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).*

During the visit to the Bloemfontein campus, the Panel was exposed to several innovative projects that illustrated that the University has made great strides in technology. The staff also reported on their research projects and their engagement with communities through projects. These good practices include the use of technologies in improving agricultural practices, designing devices to improve people's health, and developing a generation of future technology-savvy individuals through the schools' projects.

The University asserts that its PQM is aligned with the National Scarce Skills Act in its development of new programmes (SER p.67). However, the Panel noted that the PQM has limited programmes that are aligned with the national needs as outlined in the National Development Plan. There was also a shortage of programmes that speak to the continental and Sustainable Development Goals.

Most staff are engaged in projects that could either be defined as Community Engagement, Service Learning, Global Engagement, or Work Integrated Learning (WIL). The challenge is that there is no common understanding of what each structure entails. Even though Community Engagement is one of the missions of the University, the Panel gained an impression from interviews that the role of engagement with communities is not clearly understood nor fully integrated into the systems of the university.

## **Commendation b)**

The Panel commends the University for engendering a deep appreciation of the role of technology within the province through its programmes, research, organising conferences on 4IR, and working with the school system to develop a generation of technology-savvy individuals.

### **Commendation c)**

The Panel commends CUT for its engagement in projects that have a major impact on creating the visibility of the University amongst the community and global stakeholders whilst positioning it as an international player in community-oriented innovations.

### **Recommendation 2)**

The Panel recommends that CUT urgently convenes its stakeholders to review its PQM and offerings to ensure alignment with its technology mandate and the National Development Plan, Agenda 2063, Sustainable Development Goals, and the Free State provincial plans in key sectors of the economy and those that may influence social development in the country.

### **Recommendation 3)**

The Panel recommends that CUT develops policies and guidelines to standardise the community and global engagements as well as service learning and WIL.

### **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.*

It is the Panel's view, gathered from interviews with staff and students, that the plans of the University are not aligned with the quality management systems of the Institution, and they are not reflected nor implemented. This was further confirmed in deliberations with staff and students, as the Panel was unable to draw a link between Vision 2030, the implementation plans, and their alignment with quality management systems at the University. As part of its aspirations to fulfill its vision, the University commits to attracting quality students and staff who will be supported in their development. It is the Panel's view that the relationship between the institution's goals and its quality management systems is not clearly articulated and will encourage the University to find ways of aligning its plan to its quality systems and demonstrate how this is enacted in all its campuses.

Although research is an important mission of the University, the Panel was made aware that postgraduate students from faculties that research animals and human subjects are currently

obtaining ethical approvals from approved health committees based at the University of the Free State (SER.p.105). The Panel noted with concern that there is currently no Research Ethics Policy or Committee at CUT. It is only recently that the University is considering establishing its committee on research ethics on animals and humans. The Panel notes the developments with respect to the appointment of a Research Ethics Officer and the developments that will lead to the establishment of a Research Ethics Committee and the development of a policy to regulate human and animal research ethics at the university.

Student protests were identified as a major risk because they were extremely disruptive and affected the operations, as well as compromising the safety and health of the individuals. This risk was outlined in CUT's risk register against the strategic goals of the institution. Although this risk was mentioned during interviews, the SER was silent on the matter. During interviews, the Panel was informed that at the beginning of every year, students held protests against the non-payment of the NSFAS allowances.

In interviews with senior leadership of the University, the Panel was made aware that the University has aspirations to go the multi-modal route by introducing distance provisions in select disciplines, the Panel is of the view that this aspiration needs to be discussed with the DHET first for ministerial permission.

#### **Recommendation 4)**

The Panel recommends that CUT carefully manages its enrolments to ensure that issues of shape and size are not compromised by unintended growth, in areas such as the humanities, at the expense of qualifications in faculties that comply with the mandate of the University of Technology.

#### **Recommendation 5)**

The Panel recommends that CUT, in the short term, establish a strong and coherent relationship between its institutional goals and quality management systems.

**Recommendation 6)**

The Panel recommends that the University should urgently develop a Research Ethics Policy to guide animal and human research ethics as well as establish committees that ensure that ethical practices are adhered to at the University.

**Recommendation 7)**

The Panel recommends that the University should put strategies in place to identify and resolve issues leading to student protests to mitigate the risk of disruptions and delays in commencing the academic year.

**Recommendation 8)**

The Panel recommends that CUT seek permission from DHET to offer distance mode programmes as well as ensure that all distance mode programmes are appropriately accredited and registered.

**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.*

CUT has a functional Council, Senate, and Institutional Forum that meets at designated periods and considers agenda items as presented. The relationship between the Executive Management and Council was cited as cordial, and the Council plays its oversight role as mandated by the law and statutes of the University. The SER (p.72) outlines the operationalisation of the plans starting with the Annual Performance Plan, which is a University contract with the council, and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) where clear activities and timeframes are agreed upon as part of managing performance at the University. Key role players in the process are the Council which provides oversight and holds management accountable.

The Panel noted with concern that most of the employees in the leadership of the University were in acting positions. During our visit to CUT, the Vice-Chancellor (VC) was being



interviewed and there was an expectation that the appointment of the new VC would bring stability to the University's management. Despite the absence of a substantive VC at the University, the Panel was able to establish that the process functioned well, and the management of the University took this responsibility seriously and had reflected on it weekly, since the departure of the Vice-Chancellor, to afford the acting incumbent opportunities to reflect on performance and other challenges, such as student funding and internationalisation, as a collective.

The SER pointed out that the VC delegated the responsibilities of planning, performance monitoring, and reporting to four executive managers at the University. The managers coordinated and discussed performance matters periodically. During their sessions, they discussed issues relating to the alignment of quarterly targets in the APP, as well as achievements against proposed mitigation strategies, and presented high-level reports on strategic issues. The reports were then signed off and submitted to the Institutional Planning and Quality Enhancement unit.

As indicated in the Vision 2020 and Strategic Plan 2010-2015 and subsequent plans, the University has been grappling with ineffective identification and management of strategic risks. The University Risk registers also pointed out that principles of good governance are not always followed at the University, which does pose a serious concern with respect to operations and the reputation of the University. The Panel was informed in interviews that the Council instructed management to use vacant positions to fund salary increases. This is a practice that might make it difficult for the University to fill staff vacancies and may jeopardise the academic project.

#### **Recommendation 9)**

The Panel recommends that the university urgently create appropriate mechanisms to prioritize the appointment of senior leadership in management and academic roles at the university to mitigate the risks to the academic enterprise.

#### **Recommendation 10)**

The Panel recommends that the University should continuously monitor and adhere to good corporate governance principles to minimise risks to its operations and reputation.

### **Recommendation 11)**

The Panel recommends that matters about conflict of interest and in-kind benefits to council members be continuously monitored to comply with earlier recommendations made by the CHE on these matters.

### **Recommendation 12)**

The Panel recommends that CUT should also monitor the risks presented by its decision to increase staff salaries using vacancies, as this is not sustainable, and find ways of mitigating this risk.

## **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. These standards are:

### **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.*

The Panel noted that CUT has a suite of policies and governance arrangements, processes, and procedures. The policies govern research, teaching, and learning, including engaged scholarship. The University does acknowledge in the SER (p.85) that although there is traction with respect to ensuring that there is formidable institutional quality management, in interviews the panel was unable to establish the assertion as it was appraised that there was still a lack of overt implementation of the quality policy to ensure that institutional quality assurance, enhancement and promotion is adhered to and there is an environment that provides opportunities to reflect on the quality of provisioning. In the engagements with executive management, the Panel noted that policies at the University are to be reviewed every three years. This practice has not been adhered to, and in some cases, COVID-19 has been cited as responsible for the delays experienced in this area. The Panel would like to impress on the University to consider revising policies every five years, not later.

Quality governance at the University is deemed to be in good stead, as there are existing committees that meet to regulate quality at the University and do receive appropriate reports from the faculties and administrative and professional services that support the academic projects at the University. There is a functional planning regime at CUT that has detailed plans and processes that are duly approved. The Deans are responsible for ensuring that the university offers accredited and registered programmes, the Panel was able to gather from interviews and documentation provided that CUT has a robust system when it comes to programme accreditation and that most of its programmes in the Engineering and Health Sciences possess a favourable accreditation status with the professional bodies. The University invested a great deal of time and resources in running a mock trial audit that was chaired by a respectable external administrative leader and quality specialist. The audit provided the University with the opportunity to introspect on its quality assurance and enhancement processes. The Panel believes that there is a pervasive culture of compliance that views these ventures as opportunities for deep reflection.

### **Recommendation 13)**

The Panel would like to impress on the University to consider reviewing policies and related documents such as models and frameworks in five years, not later.

#### **Recommendation 14)**

The Panel recommends that CUT develops an overarching policy on quality assurance, enhancement, and promotion that will drive the opportunities to reflect on the quality of provisioning.

#### **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.*

The Panel gathered through triangulation that the institution has appropriate infrastructure to enable research, enhance teaching and learning, and support community engagement, however, the growing student numbers and staff complement put a lot of pressure on the infrastructure. The University is on an upward growth trajectory with respect to the development of staff at all levels. A considerable percentage of academic and instructional staff have gained their apex qualification and there has been a significant growth in master's holders at the university in the last five years. The Panel is encouraged to note that the staff onboarding, talent management, and skill development initiatives are bearing the desired fruits. Staff members continue to improve their qualifications and competencies in teaching by engaging in several programmes designed by the university to catapult staff development.

With respect to infrastructure CUT still suffers from a chronic shortage of office space, for lecturers and staff, laboratories, and lecture halls. In the SER (p.112) the Panel was informed that the library does not adequately cater to students' and lecturer's demands. The SER (p.112) continues to indicate that this situation has caused conflict among lecturers and other colleagues struggling to secure space for teaching and learning projects. This situation has been cited in interviews as rife in the Welkom campus as the university has not completed the infrastructural development that was initiated more than five years ago; it is still progressing at a snail's pace. From the physical site visit, granted the current state of the available infrastructure, the Panel is convinced that CUT has an appropriate infrastructure for the activities it has set out to do with respect to the academic project, however, there is an urgent need for improvements to be made in securing library space, in as much as there are a few areas in infrastructural development that need fast tracking, to minimise overcrowding in facilities such as the library and computer labs.

Another area of great concern, mainly for academic staff, was the high workload. The inequitable work allocation and high workload were a recurring theme throughout the interviews with academics. Given the low numbers of academic staff, CUT is relying on part-time and contract staff, which places huge risks on the academic project. The casualization of staff affects the quality of teaching and learning. When academics are overloaded, they tend to focus on Teaching and Learning to the detriment of their research and community engagement responsibilities. In interviews, the Panel struggled to get consensus on the workloads as senior academic leaders denied that their staff was overloaded, whereas staff maintained that they tend to carry more workloads than envisaged due to unproductive strategies in dealing with staffing and deployment of appropriate resources in this area.

#### **Recommendation 15)**

The Panel recommends that the University consider adopting ways of fast-tracking the planned infrastructure developments to ensure that the current overcrowding in lecture venues, library, and computer labs is alleviated urgently to ensure that the core academic programmes and student experience are not further compromised by the delays.

#### **Recommendation 16)**

The Panel recommends that the University urgently address staff workload and investigate the contradictory views on workload allocation between Heads of Departments (HODs) and teaching staff to resolve the perceived challenges in this area. In addition, CUT should consider the revision of the workload model that will ensure that matters such as community engagement are also factored in and rewarded in the performance management of staff.

#### **Recommendation 17)**

The Panel recommends that CUT focus on finding strategies for recruiting more academic staff to address the understaffing within the academic departments.

## **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 Panel noted that CUT makes its decisions from credible and reliable data which is systematically captured, employed and analysed as an integral part of the institutional decision-making processes. In its SER, the University made assertions that it uses both qualitative and quantitative data to reflect on academic programmes, staff performance and other administrative processes within the University (p.119). The Panel was able to examine both the graduation survey results and the registration surveys that were conducted recently. The graduation survey collected data on course outcomes, coursework emphasis, Work Integrated Learning (WIL) experience and perspectives on CUT services and student experience. Another example of the use and usefulness of data collected was evident in the registration survey. It yielded critical information that aided the Teaching and Learning portfolio to adjust practices to meet statutory enrolment targets in 2021 and 2022. The Panel has confirmed in interviews that the available systems such as Student I Enabler, Integrated Tertiary Software System and Power Higher Education Data Analyser (HEDA) are examples of systems that CUT draws from to inform data-driven decisions. The Panel is pleased that CUT has well-functioning systems and instruments that collect credible and reliable data that form part of their decision-making processes that aim to improve the quality of provisioning at the University. The linking of financial systems with student data which has led to prompt reflection of payments made by students to their accounts was found to be commendable.

### **Commendation d)**

The Panel commends the University for going beyond the port of call in sourcing appropriate ICT systems that are very efficient for managing, interpreting and reporting systems that assist management in engaging in evidence-based decision-making; these innovations have improved the student experiences especially when it comes to prompt reflections of payments made by students into their accounts.

## **Standard 8:**

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

The Panel believes that CUT has matured in the use and interpretation of its data sets to make decisions on quality matters. From the interviews, senior executive management illustrated in more ways than one, that their surveys do yield data that is used for making sound decisions to improve compliance and, in some cases to improve processes and quality at the University. A typical example given during interviews was that when CUT failed to meet the enrolment targets during the COVID-19 years, they were able to glean from their data and decided to make study offers on time as one of the strategies to mitigate that risk.

As much as the University staff appreciated the move to online learning, they were concerned about some unethical practices that students were engaged in. Academics and management were of the view that venue-based exams do preserve the integrity of examinations, while students insisted that they wanted to be assessed online because they have been studying online. This misunderstanding created a rift between students and management.

## **Commendation e)**

The Panel commends CUT for its detailed data governance processes that stem from the Data Governance Framework and delegation of authority to ensure that various data custodians collect, disseminate, and secure the data of the University.

## **Recommendation 18)**

The Panel recommends that CUT addresses the issues raised by students against the proctoring tools for online assessment monitoring.

## **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. These standards are:

**Standard 9:**

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

The CUT Institutional Quality Management system (IQMS) is based on a solid reporting regime and regularly there is a recognition that it is functional, coherent, and meaningfully structured. However, the Panel suggests that CUT needs to adopt a strategic approach to manage these operations effectively and efficiently. There is a need for the integration of the planning and execution of internal and external quality reviews. Although the quality assurance of the professional bodies receives prominence in the review at the University, the Panel did not get the impression that the same efforts were given to those programmes that are not in the purview of professional bodies.

From the SER and interviews, the Panel noted that the staff allocation model that may have an impact on IQMS was last approved in 2015. It was also noted that there were some inconsistencies in adhering to policy and procedures at the University. The Panel was made aware of the lack of uniformity and continuity in reporting on quality assurance matters. It was reported in interviews that some qualifications that were not quality assured by professional bodies may not benefit from the cycle of programme reviews as no framework guided the implementation of the quality assurance process in such programmes.

**Commendation f)**

The Panel commends CUT for developing and adhering to an internal quality assurance framework alongside the frameworks of professional bodies.

**Recommendation 19)**

The Panel recommends that CUT should integrate the planning and execution of internal and external quality reviews.



### **Recommendation 20)**

The Panel recommends that the University should consider undertaking a policy review process on how internal reviews will be conducted on qualifications that do not fall under the ambit of professional bodies.

### **Recommendation 21)**

The Panel recommends that CUT should ensure that there is consistency and continuity in reporting on quality assurance matters in its committees at the University.

### **Standard 10:**

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

The university has pockets of good practice that is celebrated annually through the Vice Chancellor's Excellence Awards on vibrant innovative and reflective teaching, research, and community engagement. The Panel believes that there are several great innovations, especially in the research, teaching, learning and engaged scholarship areas. Some notable contributions include the 25% growth in research output in quarters 1 and 2 of 2020, as reported in the interviews, for example, the application for the provisional patent registration on respiratory systems as a mitigation measure to the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom. The Council and its committees hold the Executives accountable (SER, p.138). The Vice-Chancellor and members of the executive report periodically to the Council, quarterly, on the core academic activities.

The SER, p 134, asserts that the Council and its committees hold the Executives accountable. The Vice-Chancellor and members of the executive do report periodically to the Council every quarter, on the core academic activities. In interviews with council members, the Panel was appraised that meetings of the council were held quarterly. In these meetings, members of the university management presented reports on specific targets and issues that needed the Council's approval. The Panel, in its engagements with Council members, was assured that the risk register does come to the Audit and Risk Committee of Council and that the council monitors the enterprise risk register.

## **Standard 11:**

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

The University asserts that the Executive Management Committee (EMC), Senate and Senex take responsibility for the governance, management and oversight of the quality assurance. The Panel concedes that there are appropriate governance structures that engage meaningfully with quality and quality enhancement at the University. In addition, the University states that there are clear lines of authority in the supervision of teaching by HODs in academic departments (SER, p.133). The mandate of HoDs involves conducting class visits, considering the outcomes of lecturer evaluations by students, adjudicating the quality of teaching materials, assessments, and moderations and developing improvement plans to address perceived challenges relating to the modules and programmes of the department. This process is one major contributor to ensuring that there is effective management of quality assurance of the academic programme. Lecturer evaluations by students provide added lenses on the perceived quality of learning materials and the effectiveness of the assessment and moderation processes of the University. However, this process does not provide any indication of the employability of students.

In interviews with executive management, the Panel noted that NSFAS presented a major challenge to institutional sustainability because of the unresolved payments due to the University and that NSFAS had induced disruptions to the academic project through the late payments of stipends and housing allowances. However, the SER is silent on the matter despite it being mentioned by most of the people interviewed. The Panel is encouraged by the resilience and determination of the executive management to find speedy resolutions to these matters and seek the DHET counsel on some of these sticky matters. However, the university must reinforce quality management at the institution and on the management of the NSFAS debt, arresting corrupt practices in the claiming and distribution of these government resources to students and other vendors, to ensure that the limited resources are appropriately dispersed.

In the area of planning of the academic workload, the University asserts in the SER, (p. 131), that the annual planning of the academic workload is based on a 2015 academic workload model based on the DHET principles of equitable distribution of work. In terms of workload

allocations, the instruction/research (or academic) staff member is defined as someone who spends at least fifty per cent (50%) of his/her official time on duty instructing students, conducting research, and participating in community engagement activities. In terms of specifics, the average number of periods allocated per student, per semester, is thus calculated as  $12/1.33 = 9$  periods/student/semester. The current workload model does not include community engagement, which raises concerns, particularly that staff is expected to engage in some community engagement activities, and this is considered during performance reviews, without an indication of the time allocated on the timetable to academics for this activity.

### **Recommendation 22)**

The Panel recommends that CUT considers a more sophisticated planning and resource distribution framework that takes into consideration student numbers in faculties, subsidy received from teaching, research, and other income streams to promote performance-driven allocations and well-considered cross-subsidization within the core academic functions.

### **Recommendation 23)**

The Panel recommends that the CUT executive management continues to find constructive strategies for engaging with the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) debt to the University to ensure that the quality of provisioning the student experience and student success is not compromised by these operational risks.

### **Recommendation 24)**

The Panel recommends that the University revives and fast-tracks the implementation of the project that was meant to ensure appropriate physical space for students to study, and that office space for staff is sought and provided for in support of the academic programme.

### **Standard 12:**

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

The Panel can confirm that CUT has functional governance structures that meet as scheduled and take responsibility for discussing and approving matters brought before the committees of the University. The only concern that the Panel had in engaging with this area relates to the collapsing of the Senate with the Dean's committee. During 2020 and 2021, the Deans seem

to have been major stakeholders with executive management in making decisions on the academic project.

There was a lack of evidence to indicate to the Panel that the consultative processes were followed, to support student placements. There should be narrow and broad consultation within the institution and the industry. Investment in ICT at CUT is evident in the learning management system. The Panel was appraised that there are regular reporting forums with respect to planning and the various portfolio leaders serving in the Higher Education Portfolio Committees of government to provide performance reports to university structures periodically.

CUT has made big investments in ICT, especially in the E-Thuto Learning management system that enabled the University to efficiently continue with its academic programme during the COVID-19 disruptions and comply with the Disaster Management Act as amended in 2020. CUT in the technology space has proven to be efficient and effective in the deployment of learning devices for students and teaching devices for staff. In relation to investments around data capturing, storage and analysis there is an array of software deployed to ensure that there is an efficient and effective capturing, storage, securing and use of data for decision-making at the University. The Panel believes that CUT has the appropriate infrastructure and technology to ensure that management receives credible data and takes appropriate decisions in support of the core academic project. The Panel made a few commendations on the verification and validation provided by ASC III to Valpac and being able to deal with payments to student accounts in real-time.

The Panel has noted that the project on space allocation for staff and students was not fully implemented according to the first and second-quarter reports of the Resource and Operations portfolio to the Extended Committee Meeting in 2020. The delays are attributed to the total shutdown of the country through the Disaster Management Act (no 57) of 2002 as amended in 2020.

Adherence to quality assurance thereof is a concern since there is limited accountability exhibited in some departments. In the absence of a substantive staff complement and industry participation, this infringes on the throughput rates of the institution. More importantly, this will eventually affect the livelihood of undergraduate students who may not graduate. This is perhaps due to the university emphasizing research, which generates income for the institution, to the detriment of undergraduate students where capacity is required nationally,

to fill the skills gap. Community engagement does not come across strongly since it is not formally part of academic duties. This key performance indicator is essential for academics to interact with the community directly or through professional bodies. Thus, community engagement becomes necessary where the application of knowledge and skills is tested in real-time, to solve basic, everyday challenges and contribute to the adherence to quality assurance in the application, as in the context of a University of Technology such as CUT.

## **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. These standards are:

### ***Standard 13:***

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

While there is recognition that the University has a strong planning regime and processes for resource distributions, it was not clear from these reports and interviews how different academic units are provided with sufficient resources to execute their responsibilities as the Panel was not appraised of any objective resource allocation model.

The Panel established through interviews that the staff-student ratio at CUT is not conducive to an effective teaching and learning process, because huge classes, limited lecturing space, overcrowding in the library and computer labs and the limited number of academics are issues that need urgent attention by the University. The growing number of contract academic staff members who may not be available to complete specific deliverables needs to be monitored and managed responsibly. The added concern is the current ratio of part-time vs full-time permanent appointments made, with part-time and contract staff not being as committed, in the interest of the academic project. There is no firm turn-around time to make new appointments to fill vacancies, to avoid the appointment of part-time and contract staff. The Panel thinks that programmes governed by professional bodies pay special attention to

graduate attributes needed in professional disciplines. The same vigour on graduate attributes is also applied in programmes that are not governed by professional bodies.

### **Commendation g)**

The Panel commends the University for the processes that they have put in place for monitoring and evaluating graduate attributes.

### **Recommendation 25)**

The Panel recommends that student engagement in quality assurance should be looked at to ensure that the student's voice is included in programme reviews.

### **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.*

The Panel noted that there are formal structures within CUT that include curriculum transformation, reform and renewal as agenda points in their meetings. Students are all represented in all spheres of university life. The Student Representative Council (SRC) serves as the voice of students at CUT in different structures of the University. However, the effect of students and their roles in these structures is not clear. CUT went the extra mile to ensure that students and staff are trained in using technologies during COVID-19. These efforts were complemented by the decolonisation of the curriculum project that fast-tracked the development of Lexicons to facilitate learning and epistemological access to enable students to engage meaningfully with content in identified disciplines. The Panel was made aware that diversity in the classroom is valued and there is a project underway for developing curriculum content in Sesotho. The Panel believes that e-learning has been seamlessly integrated at the University to compensate for the academic years lost during the pandemic, and staff and students were orientated and trained in the use of new tools for teaching and learning.

### **Commendation h)**

The Panel commends CUT for developing a well-defined e-learning strategy that supported, guided, and provided direction in the implementation and optimization of blended learning strategies. This was coupled with staff development on teaching and learning through the promotion of the Scholarship for Teaching and Learning (SoTL), particularly during COVID-19 disruptions.

### **Commendation i)**

The Panel commends the University for establishing the Lexicon project that introduced innovative ways of ensuring that students continuously engage meaningfully with content in identified disciplines. Subsequently, this ensures that the language barrier is minimised as part of its transformation strategy and curriculum reform.

### **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.*

Opportunities for students to reflect and provide feedback on the quality of teaching and learning, and their experience on the content of modules are all registered and facilitated by the CILT. The function of the evaluation of the teaching quality by students occurs separately in CUT's LMS. It is noted that feedback reports are generated and submitted to HoDs. These evaluation reports are included as part of the performance management evaluation of academic staff, therefore, HoDs are then expected to discuss the results with the individual lecturers. The aspects included in the student evaluations are Student participation, Treatment by lecturer, Relationship, Students' rights, Assessments and Fairness.

Graduate attributes are an important component of the University strategy (vision 2030). The Graduate Attributes Evaluation Tool (GAET) tool was developed to assist students to develop the employability skills required when entering the workplace. The annual graduate opinion surveys provided valuable feedback on the quality of teaching and learning. During the interviews with the Deans, emphasis was placed on the value of the GAET. The results from the surveys are discussed with various sections of the University and are also presented to

the Senate for approval and included in the resolution register for tracking until the issues are resolved.

The Panel was encouraged to note that the University has internal systems for the placement of students with industry and other partners involved in the training of students for the world of work. This is an area where student throughput rates tend to be impacted negatively when there is no focused attention on the placement of students. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is required, without exception, in every qualification offered at CUT, thereby ensuring that the programmes are relevant to the industry. Academic departments are expected to develop programmes and guidelines for WIL, to ensure that the preparation of students for the world of work is not compromised. Even though WIL is a critical component in all practical programmes, the coordination of WIL is not uniform despite the presence of WIL procedures (SER p.91). The Panel noted that in some faculties WIL is coordinated by the HoD's and in other departments, part-time lecturers are assigned to oversee WIL matters. Hence, this might call for the standardisation of practices where necessary and desirable. Despite the availability of the WIL Procedures (SER p.91) document, it is not applied consistently across the departments and faculties.

#### **Commendation j)**

The Panel commends CUT on developing the Graduate Attributes Evaluation Tool (GAET) for conducting surveys that provide feedback on student experience and the manner the University has managed the graduate attributes in line with the regulatory and professional bodies' prescripts.

#### **Recommendation 26)**

The Panel recommends that CUT ensures that the standard operating procedures as outlined in WIL Procedures are adhered to across the University.

#### **Recommendation 27)**

The Panel recommends that CUT fortify its processes to ensure that narrow and broad consultations are held, within the faculties internally and the industry externally, on student placements to minimise the negative impact this might have on institutional throughput rates.



**Standard 16:**

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

The Panel notes the efforts of CUT in sustaining an alumni office that oversees the continued engagements with alumni and their involvement and support of the University in the placement of students and serving in advisory bodies. The Panel believes that the University can go the extra mile to undertake research better engage in reflecting on the employability and/or other economic activities of its graduates, and act on the results of its findings.

The Panel believes that the Institution engages with and reflects on the employability of its graduates in a changing world. CUT has created support groups within its alumni to deal with the challenges of placing students. The panel would like to encourage that the University also pays greater attention to engaging its alumni and stakeholders in curriculum processes.

The University has a work placement system that ensures that students have industry experience and are exposed to the world of work and industry. In its SER there were reflections that several graduates spent a considerable time in some disciplines without being absorbed by the industries.