



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT REPORT
ON THE
NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

(12 July 2024)

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Acronyms

Acronym	Definition	Acronym	Definition
AEON	African Earth Observatory Network	NDP	National Development Plan
ADRI	Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement	NMU	Nelson Mandela University
APC	Assessment of Professional Competence	NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
CESM	Classification of Educational Subject Matter	OIS	Office for Institutional Strategy
CHE	Council on Higher Education	ORHET	Online Resource for Higher Education Transformation
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019	PASS	Professional, Administrative Support and Services
CPD	Continuing Professional Development	PDCA	Plan-Do-Check-Act
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training	POE	Portfolio of Evidence
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid	PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	QA	Quality Advancement
EBET	Faculty of Engineering, the Built Environment and Technology	QAF	Quality Advancement Framework
ETP	Engagement and Transformation Portfolio	QAU	Quality Advancement Unit
HEI	Higher Education Institution	QC	Quality Committee
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee	QEP	Quality Enhancement Plan
HoC	Hub of Convergence	QMS	Quality Management System
HOD	Head of Department	RAM	Resource Allocation Model
HP	Humanising Pedagogy	RMC	Risk Management Committee
HR	Human Resources	RPL	Recognition for Prior Learning
IA	Internal Audit	SCSF	Social Consciousness Sustainable Futures
ICT	Information and communications technology	SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
IF	Institutional Forum	SER	Self-Evaluation Report
IQMS	Institutional Quality Management System	SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely
IT	Information Technology	STLC	Senate Teaching and Learning Committee
KPA	Key Performance Areas	TIMS	Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies
LMS	Learning Management System	VC	Vice-Chancellor and Principal

LT	Learning and Teaching	VUCA	Volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous
MANCO	Management Committee	WIL	Work-Integrated Learning
MBA	Master of Business Administration		

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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 mandated by the Higher Education Act.

The Framework for Institutional Audits (2021) and its attendant Manual for Institutional Audits (2021) 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)¹ 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 the specific context within which each HEI works and 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 and on building reflexive praxis to develop quality cultures in institutions

¹<https://www.che.ac.za/publications/frameworks/quality-assurance-framework-qaf-higher-education-south-africa>

The following principles guided the institutional audit of Nelson Mandela University:

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.
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 and

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 Nelson Mandela University.

A brief overview of the institution

Nelson Mandela University (NMU) was established in January 2005 through the merger of three institutions, but its history dates to 1882, with the foundation of the Port Elizabeth Art School.

NMU is an inclusive university that offers broad and professionally orientated university programmes from the entry-level (higher certificate) to the highest research level (PhD). It is the largest university in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, with six campuses in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) and one campus in George. As the only university in the world to be named after the late President Nelson Mandela, the University is mindful of its responsibility to promote social justice and equality while ensuring its long-term sustainability. Renaming the institution in 2017 to Nelson Mandela University (from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University) provided further impetus to reflect, among others, these values, as is demonstrated in the core University values presented in section 2.2 of the NMU Institutional Audit SER 2022.

The University seeks to position itself intellectually within a differentiated post-school education and training landscape through the following strategic trajectories, which form an integral part of the audit evaluation process:

- Embracing humanising pedagogical approaches and student-centric support that liberate the full potential of its students and enhance holistic student success and demonstrate its presence and effectiveness across the University.
- Re-centring the African continent through its commitment to promoting African scholarship, epistemologies, and systems of thought. The University also aims to achieve this by expanding its partnership footprint on the continent and developing the next generation of African scholars and academics who advance excellence through scholarly contributions.

- Revitalising the humanities and fostering and encouraging transdisciplinary collaboration.
- Positioning the University as the leading Ocean Sciences destination of choice in the country and, in the longer term, on the African continent. The University is proud of this achievement, and the Panel acknowledges this endeavour.
- Transforming health sciences education with the establishment of the tenth medical school in South Africa.
- Repositioning and advancing the praxes of an engaged, transformative university to enhance social responsiveness and raising awareness of these practices across the University.

The panel reflected on the university profile to provide context and scope for the four focus areas. NMU has 261 study programmes spread across seven faculties: the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences, the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Technology, the Faculty of Health Sciences, the Faculty of Law, and the Faculty of Science.

The University also has several learning and teaching, research, and engagement support departments and entities in addition to these seven faculties. Entities are divided into institutes, centres, and units at the institutional or faculty level. There are currently 22 research entities, of which three are institutional entities - two (2) reporting directly to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation, and Internalisation (DVC: RII) and one (1) to the DVC: ETP - 12 centres are based in faculties, there is one (1) faculty-based institute as well as six (6) research units, also based in faculties. There are currently 85 rated researchers at NMU. Of these, 17 are Black (20%), and 68(80%) are White. The gender distribution is 28 females (33%) and 57 males (67%). Therefore, the demographic profile of the established and rated researchers of the University remains predominantly White, middle-aged, and male. There are currently no Black researchers in the A and B categories of the NRF rating at Mandela University. The 12 A-rated and B-rated researchers at the University are White, with only two (2) B-rated researchers being females.

The University had 2 541 permanent employees and 4 197 temporary employees in 2021. This figure includes both PASS and academic staff, with 84% of permanent academics holding a Master's or Doctoral degree. The ratio of PASS to academic staff has fluctuated over the years. Currently, 28% (n=701) of the staff complement are academics, and 72% (n=1 840) are PASS staff, with the ratio of academics to PASS staff being 1:2.6. The fluctuation of the ratio and the greater component of PASS staff is partly a legacy of the merger. Another reason is that the insourcing of non-professional staff in 2017 and 2018 saw the number of non-professional PASS staff grow to 1 467. The University also prioritises the appointment of differently abled staff. Currently, the numbers of staff living with a disability employed at the University are Academics – 18 out of 701 (2.6%) and PASS staff – 45 out of 1840 (2.4%).

Black academics comprise 48% of all permanent academics in the institution, while female academics account for 52%. It should be noted, however, that these colleagues are at the most junior levels of lectureship. 72% and 58% of full professors and associate professors are White appointments, respectively. Disparities exist in transforming science disciplines, senior levels of academia, and research outputs. As several White full and associate professors will be retiring over the next few years, NMU will encounter difficulties in filling faculty vacancies, especially in fields where skills are scarce.

Despite the ratio of PASS and academic staff, another important factor that contributes to improving the quality of learning and teaching is the full-time equivalent (FTE) staff-to-student ratio. The university's student:staff FTE ratio decreased from 31:1 in 2010 to 27:1 in 2019. It then increased again to 28:1 in 2020 and 29:1 in 2021. This is higher than the national average of 27:1 for all contact public universities in 2019. A comparison of the 2020 faculty-specific student:staff FTE ratio compared to the average CESM weighted student to staff FTE ratio for other contact universities depicts that the student-to-staff FTE ratio in the Faculties of Humanities, EBET, and Law is higher than the average for similar faculties in other contact universities in the system. Although most students are enrolled in undergraduate studies, the University's enrolment strategy is centred on increasing the number of students pursuing postgraduate studies.

Honours enrolments declined from 1 205 in 2010 to 756 in 2020, constituting an average annual decline of 4.6%. In some instances, a large portion of this decline can be explained by replacing Honours programmes with postgraduate diplomas. However, a shortage of funding support for Honours students makes it difficult to recruit more students into this critical pipeline for Master's and PhD programmes. Master's enrolments increased from 1 767 in 2010 to 2 076 in 2013 but have declined since, resulting in only 1 539 enrolments in 2020. This is an average annual decrease of 1.4%. PhD enrolments increased from 446 in 2010 to 632 in 2019 but declined sharply to 497 in 2020. The decline in student enrolment numbers in postgraduate (PG) qualifications limits the expansion of the available pool of researchers, innovators, and the next generation of academic staff. Such a decline will impact negatively on the University's subsidy generation since postgraduate enrolments, and graduate outputs are funded at much higher levels than the undergraduate outputs.

In terms of throughput rates, the number of undergraduate students graduating each year has increased significantly. For example, there was a 7.3% increase in UG students who graduated from 2019 to 2020. However, as the PG enrolments declined, so did PG graduation rates. For example, in 2018, there were 1 605 PG graduates, whereas, in 2020, there were 1 421 PG graduates.

The profile summary above has been viewed in relation to NMU's strategic aspirations. These have been developed against the global, continental and NDGs articulated in the United Nations 2030 SDGs, the African Union Agenda 2063, and the South African 2030 NDP. The University's vision, "To be a dynamic African university recognised for its leadership in generating cutting-edge knowledge for a sustainable future", serves as a compass for NMU's strategic actions and governance structures to achieve its mission.

A brief overview of the audit process

Nelson Mandela University (NMU) conducted a timely strategic and reflective exercise to allow the University to focus on its quality management and enhancement systems, including its praxes and how it advances student success. The University gained insight into its integrated student success ecosystem that includes a range of initiatives and services to optimise student success and enhance student and staff experiences.

The University adopted a continuous improvement ethos and embraced a critical stance to its reflections, identifying areas for improvement, which it intends to address. The self-evaluation report (SER) given to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Panel displays an overview of the extent of the University's quality management system and the aspects it intends to enhance. The Panel used the SER to gain an understanding of the University and assist the Panel during their visit to the University regarding the CHE Institutional Audit. As a result, this report only addresses the situation as it existed at the time of the audit and does not account for any subsequent changes. It documents the Panel's conclusions based on the documentation provided by NMU, as well as information gleaned from the interviews. Interviews with various stakeholders were conducted, and the evidence gathered from these interviews, along with data from the SER, was used to support several commendations and recommendations.

In the context of the CHE Framework for institutional Audits, NMU has demonstrated that crafting Vision 2030 (vision, mission and strategic focus areas or goals) has undertaken an engagement process and was subjected to all relevant approval processes. Various Panel members commented on the process of crafting Vision 2030 throughout all Focus Areas. The University presented inputs from its Listening Campaign, among others, as well as institutional research and data analytics. The Listening Campaign reaffirmed the humanising culture that NMU wishes to engrain into the fabric of the University community. Institutional audits are designed to be developmental and to encourage systemic, continuous improvement of quality management appropriate to the individual institution. The University was able to present efforts and evidence, in most cases, that would enable such improvements.

Staff and students at seemingly all levels recognised and therefore referred to the humanising pedagogy of the institutional project throughout all the sessions, demonstrating that this project and its associated policies have been widely promoted and engrained into its core values. The University seems to take great pride in the elucidation of the humanising itself. The notion of humanising people, processes and systems through the humanities is noticeably emerging as a glossary term visible on staff and students' daily agendas. For the Panel to unequivocally determine its

success, it would require the concept to be implemented in fewer contexts. The Panel recognised the need for concise principles and a common language to enable implementation and effective evaluation.

The future of the University and its successes are strongly linked to achieving the proposed Vision 2030 strategy. The University acknowledges that it is, for many, a reality and a realisation that the future will look different, and change is inevitable as key elements of its Vision are already integral within the University. Throughout the SER, also disrupted by Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), it was evident that the short interval between Vision 2020 and Vision 2030 may have created some delay in revising critical policies and procedures that drive the NMU governance framework. This has been underscored, through questioning, that the policy universe requires further focus and dedication.

The University is instilling a commendable combined assurance philosophy and is understood to be under development. This philosophy is interpreted as the University's governance model that guides staff to have a holistic view of the University. Furthermore, the governance model communicates strongly to all stakeholders that its proposed quality arrangements are integral to further enhancing its governance. From a governance point of view, NMU's key strategic documents receive the attention of the highest decision-making authorities. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are stated in the SER report. For combined assurance to be valued and understood throughout the University and to successfully instil quality, the University will have to focus on its operationalisation.

Through humanising itself through the legacy of Nelson Mandela, this value proposition has the potential to find further expression in key transformational policies, such as the proposed recruitment policy for senior management, including HODs and executive training, to continue to uphold quality and the values of the University as inspired by the legacy of Nelson Mandela. The University is aware that a Performance Management System should be fully functional and coupled with a staff development process. In these processes, the heads of departments and their staff are to develop a plan for staff development and key performance areas. It will be a priority to revise and interconnect the University's enabling policy universe with the supporting

structures and mechanisms as required. Policies are crucial to inform the relevant controls and ensure that the University is equipped with good governance. This environment should also be optimally balanced to provide a space for sound governance and innovation. The University defines the relevant governance structure and the lines and delegation of authority for carrying out institutional operations.

The University expressed several exciting initiatives and strategies towards building a sustainable and growing future. The University understands the need to prioritise and concisely define these strategies so that staff are not overburdened and to mitigate potential unsuccessful implementation due to its limited funding. Prioritising is key to ensuring the success of Vision 2030; the pace of change should not outweigh the ability to adapt to competing and changing demands, as recently witnessed globally during the COVID-19 pandemic. The University's staff appreciates being listened to and will be further encouraged when their wellbeing and everyday challenges are addressed. The University acknowledges that staff well-being is important, combined with its human resources policies, systems and processes. It, therefore, became clear, as the University itself commendably acknowledges, and the Panel recommends, that the workload model requires attention. The University is committed to building an effective academic leadership team, strengthening the role of the quality assurance structures in faculties and ensuring that the communities of practice form an integral part of the Quality Advancement Framework (QAF). The Panel also recommends that the University could equally apply the Quality Advancement (QA) policy and QAF across the University.

The University has a comprehensive data capturing and management system and expertise in management information and data analytics. The University has been impressive in its commitment to data-driven decision-making and has access to a significant amount of data. The Panel recommends that the University could, in future, demonstrate how the data and associated metrics are used to inform decision-making and monitor performance.

The annual budget of the University goes through a designated cycle, where the Resource Allocation Model (RAM) is also defined. Although more transparency could be suggested, the RAM is defined in a hybrid past-tense and present-tense sense,

forming the bulk of the allocation. There are, however, various mechanisms to allocate top-slicing on a strategic basis, which is encouraging, as this allows prioritising aspects specifically related to quality. The University's budget is also allocated for internal reviews. The Academic Workload Policy recognises the challenges in this process and provides clear guidelines for further transparency and devolution. The staff to student ratio of the University identified notable differences across and within faculties. The University acknowledges that for this not to impact quality, continuous planning and focus are a high priority. The University also aims to provide a more holistic approach towards the assimilation of the Policy on Human Resource Development, which provides a mechanism for staff development emanating from recommendations by the Panel.

The Panel recommends that the University increases the consistency of student, alumni and employer feedback across all programmes and modules so that the quality of the educational experience could be further increased. It will also enable the continuous improvement in course quality, experience and design. The University commendably observed that a coherent approach is required for teaching provision, which has implications across various systems. A consistent approach to online and hybrid teaching, which was quickly required during COVID-19, will ensure a predictable and fair trade-off between the two modes of teaching. The numerous and excellent examples of support for innovation in learning and teaching (including curriculum, pedagogy and the use of technology) are commended and should be widely disseminated to all academics and students.

The University is committed to student support and has several initiatives already implemented. The University observed that "not as many reviews of support services have been conducted as is required" and that "this should be addressed through introducing a regular cycle of such reviews". The Panel recommends that these are implemented consistently and in a focused manner; then, these initiatives should have no uneven impact.

An overall concluding paragraph

After concluding the institutional audit of Nelson Mandela University, it is apparent that the vision, mission, and goals of the University are formulated and actively being

implemented, improved, and communicated to various stakeholders internally and externally from the University. This is captured in The Vision 2030 Strategic Planning Framework and Guidelines that Nelson Mandela University has established. The University has a commendable strategy to reaffirm its commitment to improving the state of the world by providing equality in educational opportunities, conducting novel research, and participating in activities that drive change. Through engagements with key internal and external stakeholders, it was observed that the University has clear intention and pride in cultivating a values-driven, transformative institutional culture that honours the legacy of Nelson Mandela. Nelson Mandela's deep compassion for humanity is a key inspiration for Nelson Mandela University's academic expression. The Panel's evaluations, conclusions, recommendations, and commendations are presented in this report considering all aspects presented during the institutional audit. The Panel wishes to congratulate Nelson Mandela University on the efforts and policies currently in place and, by means of this report, wishes to add commendations and recommendations to further improve the quality and focus of the University in its vision.

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 as well as the University's performance against 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.

In the context of the CHE Institutional Audits, NMU has effectively demonstrated its dedication to crafting Vision 2030, which encompasses vision, mission, and Strategic Focus Areas. The engagement process and approval procedures were meticulously followed, garnering positive feedback from Panel members across all Focus Areas for the Vision 2030 crafting process. The University presented valuable insights from its Listening Campaign, institutional research, and data analytics, reinforcing the humanizing culture intended for the University community. Although evidence of effective implementation is premature within the evaluation period, the University has exhibited efforts and provided evidence hinting at potential improvements.

Recognition of the humanizing pedagogy institutional project was widespread among staff and students at various levels, reflecting the project's promotion and integration into core values. The University takes pride in articulating the concept of humanizing itself, with the notion of humanizing people, processes, and systems emerging as a visible term on daily agendas. To unequivocally assess success, the Panel acknowledges the need for broader implementation and emphasizes the importance of concise principles and a common language for effective evaluation.

The University's future success is intricately linked to realizing the proposed Vision 2030 strategy. While acknowledging the reality that the future will look different, the University has faced challenges, including delays in revising critical policies and procedures within the NMU governance framework due to the short interval between Vision 2020 and Vision 2030, exacerbated by the disruptions caused by COVID-19.

The Panel appreciates the monitoring of enrolment targets and other key performance indicators against the six-year enrolment plans approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The Panel also acknowledges NMU's effort to fully review its systems, processes, structures, policies and practices to enhance sustainability. As mentioned in the Organisational Redesign Process document developed in 2018, NMU views the periodical review of its organisational design as a vital part of its continuous improvement processes. It also provides an opportunity to holistically review and assess whether organisational structures, workflows, procedures, and systems are fit for purpose and strategically aligned. The advantage for NMU is, amongst others, improved efficiencies and enhanced organisational agility

to enable the University to respond to the complexities inherent in emerging and unknown futures. Furthermore, the high-level plan provided NMU with a sound methodology to be implemented as part of the overarching review of Vision 2020 and the roll-out of the institutional sustainability plan. The Panel would request evidence that it has been implemented to ensure that academic staff are not confronted with potential inefficiencies regarding information and communications technology (ICT) and human resource policies, procedures, and systems; identified during cross-evaluation.

Commendations:

- a. The University is commended for its inclusive engagement processes to enliven the legacy of its iconic namesake, Nelson Mandela, as expressed in Vision 2030. Students, employees, alumni, and other external stakeholders' voices informed and shaped the strategy. A series of review processes, institutional research, data analytics and important projects in a coherent and integrated manner supported this engagement.
- b. The University is commended for instilling a humanising culture. The idea of humanising people, processes, and systems through the lens of Humanities is emerging as a glossary term visible on the daily agendas of staff and students. NMU is beginning to leverage the Nelson Mandela identity. This concept and its connectedness with Nelson Mandela can become the nexus to differentiate and position the University in South Africa, nationally and globally.

Recommendations:

1. The Panel recommends that NMU review its planning capacity across the University and investing resources and training opportunities to develop key stakeholders, including Heads of Academic Departments, to translate Vision 2030 into actionable objectives, align the budgets, and monitor the milestones and targets.
2. The Panel recommends that NMU initiate an external review of its planning and governance arrangements within the next three years to coincide with a mid-term review of its Vision 2030. This review should align with the combined assurance

philosophy and provide reasonable assurance that NMU's strategic planning processes promote institutional agility and integration

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

The Panel reviewed this standard following the evidence put forward and the opportunity to engage with the NMU community regarding the alignment of Vision 2030 with national priorities and context as well as sectoral, regional, continental and global imperatives.

The Panel acknowledges the content and alignment of Vision 2030 with the latest policies and documents that shaped the strategic intent of NMU. The Panel observed that translating Vision 2030 into actionable objectives and targets is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely (SMART) and will position NMU well. The Panel expresses that since such translation will promote the socialisation of the Vision, buy-in at the faculty level and within key support functions is imperative. The integration with NMU's combined assurance philosophy and global imperatives was demonstrated in Section 3.1.2 of the SER.

Commendations:

- c. The University is commended for the Ocean Sciences Five-Year Strategy that should result in the evolution of transdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at advancing knowledge in oceans and culture, oceans and economy, ocean health, ocean governance, and marine protection.

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.

Like other NMU professional support units, the QA unit within the Learning and Teaching Collaborative for Success has a specific mandate, which includes promoting excellence, evaluating and assessing institutional practice against set criteria and standards. This includes reporting on areas of concern and dealing with identified institutional risks. The Quality Committee supports the QA Unit, which provides strategic leadership and direction in developing and implementing an integrated quality advancement philosophy and framework that underpins the promotion of excellence at all levels.

The panel reviewed this standard against NMU's stated philosophy of combined assurance. At the time of the review, it is evident that this philosophy was newly introduced and limited evidence could be made available of its effectiveness. The Panel acknowledged the need for further integration and alignment in regard to NMU's quality assurance arrangements and supports the approach of combined assurance. The recommendations highlight the immediate areas that if not addressed may prohibit NMU from giving rise to such a needed philosophy.

Recommendations:

3. The Panel recommends that NMU prioritise the translation (cascading) and implementation of Vision 2030 through the relevant frameworks and its commitment to combined assurance. The quarterly reports to the Office of the Vice-Chancellor are key to retaining transparency and alignment.
4. The Panel recommends that NMU review the QAF and Quality Advancement Policy annually in accordance with its commitment and apply it consistently

across the university so that its policies establish communities of practice as an integral part of the QAF

5. The Panel recommends that NMU urgently review its key policies, procedures, practices and systems to express Vision 2030, as some policies may contradict the essence of what NMU wishes to achieve.
6. The Panel recommends that NMU consolidate the survey outcomes and the quality review outcomes at the faculty, department and programme levels into an institutional quality improvement plan with assigned accountabilities, linked to the performance management system and combined assurance and risk management philosophy of NMU

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.*

NMU has made a progressive movement towards a combined assurance philosophy. As stated in the SER, NMU refers to combined assurance as a process adopted and applied by the University to provide an integrated and coordinated approach to all assurance activities, to optimise the assurance coverage from management, internal and external assurance providers on the risk areas affecting the University, supporting the integrity of the organisation's external reports.

The panel reviewed the policies and procedures to provide assurance that the combined assurance philosophy is embedded into the DNA of NMU, as stated in Standard 3, limited evidence was made available during the time of review and a full review of all policies is critical to give expression to this philosophy. Several policies are dated and still refer to old practices, leaving NMU with an opportune time to promote full integration and become an exemplar for all higher education institutions and future policy development.

Recommendations:

7. The Panel recommends that NMU review the combined assurance philosophy to ensure that such a statement is fully embedded in the University's governance structures, considering the role of quality management in its alignment with risk Management.
8. The Panel recommends that NMU review the Risk Management Policy, particularly the governance structures and roles and responsibilities, to express the quality reviews work and alignment with potential risk and promote a combined assurance philosophy.

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.*

Based on the University's own SER and reflection, the University has already begun to address enrolment planning by i) improving the oversight and reporting during selections and registrations, ii) developing a funding policy plan and model to attract

postgraduate students; iii) increasing research associates and supervisory capacity; iv) identifying niche areas (such as Marine and Ocean Sciences) and actively recruiting and supporting students in these areas; and v) reviewing its policies and procedures to better strategic alignment. These areas of improvement and developmental plans were further elaborated upon during the Panel discussions.

The focus of the panel was on enrolment management as a tool to ensure that Ministerial targets as set are met to promote a diverse student body. The mapping of a fully-fledged, and integrated student recruitment, placement process and reward programme will address not only over enrolment in certain disciplines but also assist in maintaining the right staff-student ratios and equitable workload among all staff levels.

NMU did acknowledge that the position of the QA unit will be addressed, however, the panel observed that the QA unit's functions stretch beyond its location and at times lack a coherent and integrated understanding of all processes, systems policies and procedures that should underscore quality assurance arrangements. The development of workload models, enrolment management, student and curriculum related policies seem to have the quality lens as a matter of last resort.

Commendation

- d. The University is commended for its approach to experimental and co-curricular learning and its variety of student programmes.

Recommendations:

9. The Panel recommends that NMU implement a well-defined mechanism for enrolment management and tracking to mitigate against over-enrolment, which has impacted resources, support and government reporting.
10. The Panel recommends that NMU establish a coherent student recruitment, placement and reward (bursary) process, strategy and monitoring system to

attract and retain students with the requested funding and supervisory capacity and to promote a student-centred and responsive culture.

11. The Panel recommends that NMU prioritise the PQM viability analysis based on a set of sustainable, relevant principles and strategically aligned with NMU's mandate.
12. The Panel recommends that NMU develop of more nuanced data analytics to underscore the modes of learning and teaching, especially online, to provide evidence-based support for at-risk students and how it affects throughput rates and graduate readiness.
13. The Panel recommends that NMU establish a standardised approach for the design and development of online material across the various programmes and modules, that should be regularly reviewed for best practices to instil quality in all its offerings.
14. The Panel recommends that NMU develop an integrated and coherent institutional quality improvement plan to ensure that all feedback from surveys (staff, students, alumni and employers) and reviews (modules, programme, departmental, faculty and institutional) are analysed and trends presented. This improvement plan should form the basis of the combined assurance philosophy of NMU.

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 University has identified that its staff/student ratio is an area of concern. This was further highlighted during the audit visit, where a sense of staff burnout and high workload were raised and linked to financial constraints. In addition, the University is aware that a Performance Management System should be put in place to create a positive and stimulating environment in which employees can operate effectively, achieve success and satisfaction in their work, and contribute to the achievement of

the University's strategic and operational priorities

Two critical areas of improvement also identified by NMU are the academic workload model and the lack of relevant and up-to-date HR policies that keep abreast with the changing higher education landscape. A key, contentious policy, is the implementation of the performance management system. The NMU staff do not only question the validity of the system but have lost trust in the ability of the university to fully implement such a much-needed system to promote a sense of belonging for all NMU staff.

Commendations:

- e. The University is commended for the state-of-the-art learning and teaching spaces it has upgraded and developed throughout its various campuses.

Recommendations:

- 15. The Panel recommends that NMU prioritise the review of its resource allocation model, which is putting severe strain on academics and their ability to deliver quality teaching and to balance the time allocated between teaching and their research priorities.
- 16. The Panel recommends that NMU urgently roll out the performance management system to all levels within NMU and aligned to NMU's cascaded strategic objectives to faculty and support department levels (see recommendation in Focus Area 1).

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.*

It is evident from the various dashboards as well as the student monitoring system (RADAR) that NMU has developed a strong culture of data analytics and use of data in planning, forecasting and student tracking, such as enrolment patterns, student/staff ratios, retention rates, graduate outcomes, financial viability, and space utilisation

patterns.

Recommendations:

17. The panel recommends that a comprehensive business intelligence strategy and deployment plan be developed by SIDA, accompanied by a socialisation plan for data analytics, its strategic value and an easy how-to guide to use institutional data.

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

The Panel acknowledges the quality management monitoring process and the related policies; however, further effort is required for these policies to be coherently implemented across the organisation. The Panel noted several improvement areas identified by the University's SER under Focus Area 1.

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the policy universe requires attention, some policies, especially Human Resource related policies are dated. To an extent, this promotes policy tension between the strategy and its execution. People, systems and processes are governed through the Council-approved policies, and the disconnect between the aspirations and the reality faced by staff may limit the pace of change required to give expression to Vision 2030.

Recommendations:

18. The Panel strongly recommends that the university management prioritise the full spectrum of quality assurance and quality promotion and enhancement on the Management and the Senate agenda. Policies and procedures must be reviewed from the number of policies developed and their effectiveness and purpose. Quality must be a lived experience on the ground, and staff must be equipped with the right processes, guidelines, and procedures to build and sustain a quality culture. The Panel cautions against the proliferation of policies and procedures as it contributes to the disconnectedness of academic staff, but

recommends fewer impactful policies that are aligned with the vision and address the core functions of quality.

19. The Panel recommends that NMU establish a dedicated capacity development programme to ensure that all stakeholders thoroughly understand how quality is assured, managed and monitored and how feedback should be communicated and utilised effectively to enhance the academic project.

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 to accommodate 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 QAF establishes the University-wide structure for periodic assessment and improvement of QA processes both internal to the University, particularly at the Faculty level, and external to the University, usually at the Professional Body level (QAF:16). The QAF also establishes responsibility and accountability at reportedly all levels, namely: Council, MANCO, Senate, Executive Deans/Faculty Boards, PASS staff, QAU. The Performance Management and Development Policy (IRC601.31) is implemented down to the level of the Dean and is specifically aimed at QA portfolios.

Recommendations:

20. The Panel recommends that NMU initiate a coherent approach for implementing the QAF and the QA policy across the university to foreground the systems, processes, and structures of quality assurance and promotion.
21. The Panel recommends that NMU implement a performance management system, particularly regarding the continuous improvement initiatives and QA, and to instil a transparent and fair approach considering Ad-Hominem Promotions.

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

The Policy for appointing Deputy Deans, Directors of Schools and Heads of Department (IRC601.14) sets out the clear lines of authority regarding QA processes and the re-design of such processes. There is, therefore, a large dependence on QA on the implementation/oversight of the Dean.

Recommendations:

22. The Panel recommends that NMU review the QA unit and its effectiveness towards implementing the QAF to facilitate continuous improvement, monitor the planned actions and keep the University abreast of the progress (Ref recommendation 26).

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

The Academic Workload Policy (IRC306.01) recognises the challenges of the workload allocation process and provides clear guidelines for transparency and devolution. As previously reported, the University acknowledges that the staff: student ratio is currently not ideal across and within faculties and challenges teaching quality. The University commendably provided some figures regarding the staff: student ratios,

for example, in Electrical Engineering, the ratio is 1:13 (one staff member for 13 students), and in Engineering and the EBET faculty, 1:33 and 1:109 respectively.

Recommendations:

23. The Panel recommends that NMU conduct a full investigation into the RAM and the principles associated with workload allocation planning to reconceptualise its functionalities in line with the current realities and the high staff: student ratios.
24. The Panel recommends that NMU schedule a detailed HOD training process that covers a broad understanding of how departments generate income, how income is converted into TIU, TOU and ROU and how it feeds into the RAM and, ultimately, the allocation of work. The principles of work allocation are a critical part of the HOD training programme, considering that the current handover processes to new HODs are inadequate.

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

The QAU has the central QA task for the University, and the Academic Planning office is concerned with the design of Programmes. These two are proposed to be merged, which will be greatly encouraged as long as any concerns from the Academic Planning office are duly addressed.

Recommendations:

25. The Panel recommends that NMU review the functioning of the QAU, including but not limited to capacitating the unit, administering the PQM, conducting reviews at various levels, having a voice in relevant committee structures and ensuring that the reviews and improvements find expression in Faculty and other relevant plans (Ref recommendation 23).

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.*

An effective institutional system for programme design, approval, delivery, management, and review is currently in place at the NMU. Regarding the design of system implementation, the system monitoring and the system's continuous review and improvement (Guideline 13.4), NMU's response to the pandemic in 2020 and looking into 2021 were the only compulsory guidelines.

Commendations:

- f. The university is commended for integrating the carpe diem approach towards programme development processes. This reputable framework systematically brings good pedagogical principles into the planning process.

Recommendations:

- 26 The Panel recommends that NMU provide more support for academics who are developing new programmes and that these programmes be developed in line with the procedures for programme design and development, approval, delivery (including assessment) and programme reviews.
- 27 The Panel recommends that NMU provide more effective and efficient forms of student feedback, especially regarding closing the feedback loop and its consistent application. This includes consulting students even if the process is voluntary, as both students and staff would benefit from a well-developed student feedback policy.
- 28 The Panel recommends that NMU examine the mechanisms for incorporating student feedback into programme development and review cycles to ensure that student feedback forms an essential part of all structures. Furthermore, the Panel

recommends providing evidence of student contributions as a requirement for signing off on new programmes.

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

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

The Panel recognises that for evidence-based engagement to be effective, it must be adaptable to specific disciplinary and local contexts. NMU should, therefore, ensure that this adaptability does not lead to the uneven implementation of evidence-based engagement in various contexts.

Commendations:

- g. The University is commended for a widespread commitment to the concept of humanising pedagogy, a term that has percolated throughout the institution for over a decade.

Recommendations:

- 29 The Panel recommends that NMU incorporate open education principles into existing governance mechanisms and develop a separate open education policy to realise the value of open education.
- 30 The Panel recommends that NMU adopt a humanising pedagogy that is more accurate and suitable to describing NMU's approach as a humanising philosophy rather than humanising pedagogy.
- 31 The Panel recommends that NMU clarify ownership and ensure that all organisational structures work together coherently to make digitally mediated teaching and learning practices possible.
- 32 The Panel recommends that NMU develop a shared language and produce guidelines to support academics' decision-making, and make it possible to assess how humanising pedagogy is practised and is succeeding in the university.

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.*

NMU provides adequate student support opportunities organised centrally by faculty, the department and individuals. The leadership team of NMU takes student support seriously, often mentioning the significant percentage of students from low-quintile schools and on NSFAS funding. Attention was focused on student support before the pandemic and intensified when COVID-19 required changes in the teaching mode. Feedback such as that the pandemic was a blessing in disguise because it forced the University to support students in the digital age was identified during discussions.

Commendations:

- h. The University is commended for its commitment to a data-driven approach to supporting vulnerable students with barriers to learning.

Recommendations:

- 33 The Panel recommends that NMU initiate an institutional research project looking at all the student support offerings available starting in the pre-COVID-19 period, including the analysis and up-take of the student support offerings and student experiences.
- 34 The Panel recommends that NMU initiate an institutional-wide awareness programme to mitigate frustrations due to limited knowledge of the student support opportunities available.
- 35 The Panel recommends that NMU build on its commitment to data collection and develop automated systems whereby specific student groups are targeted with information regarding the kinds of support they are likely to need or find useful.

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

NMU has strong linkages to the industry in its region – through, for example, sustainability science, medical science, ocean science, revitalisation of the humanities and others. The linkage with industry aims to ensure that contradictions (in learning and teaching or research and innovation) are seen in a more positive light as complementary. NMU's awareness of, and ongoing relationship with, the local industry is a thread that contended throughout the process.

Commendations:

- i. The University is commended for its Afro-centric solutions infused by engaged community-oriented scholarship and activities.

Recommendations:

- 36 The Panel recommends that NMU solicit regular employer feedback regarding graduate attributes, workplace professionalism, and general hard and soft skills. Such feedback should then be included in the appropriate course and programme planning processes in measurable ways.