



Executive Summary
INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT REPORT
ON THE
NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY

(August 2023)

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

APP	Annual Performance Plan
ARAS	Access, Retention, Attainment and Success
ARC	Admission Requirements Committee
ARCC	Audit Risk and Compliance Committee
ASA	Academic Student Associations
BoD	Board of Donors
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CE	Community Engagement
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CIGS	Corporate and Information Governance Services
CRM	Corporate Relations and Marketing
CTL	Centre for Teaching and Learning
CTLF	Centralised Teaching and Learning Functions
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
ED	Executive Director
EE	Employment Equity
EESDF	Employment Equity and Skills Development Forum
eFundi	NWU's learning management system
EPE	External Programme Evaluation
FEMS	Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences
FHS	Faculty of Health Sciences
FiTLP(s)	Faculty-integrated Teaching-Learning Plan(s)
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
FTLS	Faculty Teaching and Learning Support
GM	General Meeting
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communication Technology

IDU	Internal Development Unit (systems and software)
IF	Institutional Forum
IPE	Internal Programme Evaluation
IPSI	Planning and Strategic Intelligence office
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LIS	Library Information Service
LMS	Learning Management System
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDP	National Development Plan
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NWU	North-West University
PCEE	People and Culture and Employment Equity
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
QA	Quality Assurance
Q&APP	Qualification and Academic Programme Planning
QE	Quality Enhancement
QEP	Quality Enhancement Project
QM	Quality Management
QMS	Quality Management System
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAHECEF	South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum
SALA	Student Academic Lifecycle Administration
SC	Student Chapters
SCAS	Senate Committee for Academic Standards
SCD	Student Counselling and Development
SCTL	Senate Committee for Teaching and Learning
SCRI	Senate Committee for Research and Innovation
SENEX	Senate Executive Committee
SET	Science, Engineering and Technology
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SLP	Short Learning Programmes

SLOC	Student Life Oversight Committee
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SOTL	Scholarship of teaching and learning
SRC	Students' Representative Council
STLES	Teaching and Learning Experience Surveys
TL	Teaching and Learning
UCDG	University Capacity Development Grant
UCE	Unit for Continuing Education
UDL	Unit for Distance Learning
UMC	University Management Committee
UTW	Understanding the World
VC	Vice-Chancellor

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)*¹ and its attendant *Manual for Institutional Audits (2021)*² are key instruments to regulate the implementation of institutional audits. These documents are also aligned in important aspects to the new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)³ that was approved by the HEQC and Council in September 2020, and which will be implemented in the medium term by the CHE. Institutional audits are strongly influenced by both the specific context within which each HEI works, and by the national transformational agenda in which higher education functions. The HEQC has identified a need to complete full audits of all HEIs in South Africa. A full audit of an institution determines whether, 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 following principles guided the institutional audit of the North-West 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.

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

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

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

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 North-West University.

Brief Overview of the Institution and the Audit Process

The North-West University (NWU) is a public, traditional University. The University benefited from the first cycle of the CHE institutional audits during 2008-2009, the Quality Enhancement Project of 2014-2016, the nationwide project of aligning qualifications to the requirements of the Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF), and through participation in national programme reviews and standards development. All these experiences have contributed to preparing the NWU effectively for the institutional audit.

The institution was established in 2004 as a university comprising three distinct campuses Potchefstroom, Mafikeng, and Vanderbijlpark, which have very different historical trajectories and are geographically located far apart in different towns. The SER provides detailed

information and data on the NWU's profile. The total enrolment of contact students in 2020 was 44,785, and of distance students, 11,640; the student enrolments in the contact programmes were thus significantly greater than those in the distance programmes. The enrolment, registration, and graduation numbers of the distance students declined between 2018 and 2020, this resulted in an overall decline in the total enrolment and registration numbers in 2020. Most students, 53%, were based at the Potchefstroom campus, 31% were at the Mahikeng campus, and 16% at the Vanderbijlpark campus. Approximately 58% of the contact students were female and 42% were male. Regarding the racial profile of students, 62% were African, 33% White, 4% Coloured, and 1% Indian.

The staff headcount in 2020 was 3,958, comprising 1,580 academic staff and 2,378 support staff. The exact figures of the staff race profile are not provided, but the statistics indicate that most staff members are White, closely followed by African staff members, while the Coloured and Indian staff members are in the relative minority. The staff gender profile shows that the overall female staff complement was slightly higher than that of males, that is, 2,211 compared to 1,747, and that the increase in male staff between 2018 and 2020 was higher than that of female staff members. The lack of a significant increase in African staff, as well as a decrease in female staff during the period of review, will have to be attended to as part of the institution's future strategic plans. The academic staff comprises 34% senior lecturers and 32% lecturers, of these 49.5% have a Doctoral degree and 28% a Master's degree. Questions were raised about the limited growth in research productivity over the 2018-2020 period, particularly the weighted research output per academic (1,75 units). This seemingly low research productivity was attributed to the different components of the research output namely, publications and masters and doctoral graduates. The complete picture includes the areas of improvement for higher degrees that were already captured in the doctoral degree improvement plan submitted to the CHE in September 2021. The time lag created by the national reporting system is such that the figures always reflect year n-2 when released, whilst the institution has updated the in-house data.

Other important perspectives emerge from the institutional profile in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and from the interviews. In his introductory remarks, the Vice-Chancellor, who took office in June 2022, stated that the SER recounts the University's journey from 2014 onwards, a process that changed the three campuses from a generally perceived federal to a unitary model. The University statute, amended in 2017, made this possible. He reported that the University's commitment to quality assurance focuses on student success. To that end, the

University's efforts are geared towards ensuring equitable student experiences across the three campuses in terms of processes, structures, mandate, and responsiveness. The University also responded rapidly to the changes demanded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has given rise to relevant research into students' experiences. Such research, which is based on the ethics of care, focuses on continuous improvements.

When asked about the need to create a common University culture that staff and students alike would embrace, the Vice-Chancellor responded that such a culture relates directly to the University's commitment to transformation, which, in turn, requires to be aligned to a number of aspects including the socio-cultural, demographic, curriculum transformation, equitable staff-student ratios, and creating a sense of inclusivity across campuses. Staff appointment policies embed the principle of inclusiveness which embraces diversity and inclusivity cutting across all institutional businesses, campuses, and residences. This approach requires understanding that the campuses have unique cultural origins which comprise a homeland showpiece, an Afrikaans Christian University steeped in the apartheid culture, and a small satellite campus in the Vaal. Presently all staff belong to one transformed University, that is committed to promoting student equity. The format of this report, like that of the NWU SER, is based on the Focus Areas, Standards, and Guidelines contained in the CHE's *Manual for Institutional Audits*. This report evaluates the information in the NWU's documentation that was gathered through the stakeholder interviews during the site visit, to assess how the information provided responds to the sixteen Standards.

The North-West University's institutional audit was conducted in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, just after many institutions returned to face-to-face activities. However, because many activities remained online, the audit was undertaken partly virtually and partly face-to-face. The panel appreciated the warmth, frankness, and transparency that characterised the engagement with university stakeholders. The panel was impressed by the overwhelming support for the audit process, from the executive management, academic and support staff, students including the other stakeholders we engaged with. The audit commenced with an induction meeting led by the CHE staff members on Wednesday, 4 July 2022. The panel members were briefed on procedural issues relating to the audit process and the tools that would be used. The SER and the Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) were then shared with the panel and the panel chairperson managed the process. Several planning meetings gave the panel time to discuss the allocation of standards and roles and the formulation of the lines of inquiry based on key issues. The upcoming site visit and the questions to be addressed during the

site visit were also discussed. The site visit was conducted from 22-26 August 2022 as planned.

The University and all its stakeholders were well prepared, and the teams for interviewing were assembled as expected and cooperated well with the panel. These teams included the executive and senior management of the University, members of the University Council, Executive Deans, Deputy Deans, Directors, Heads of Department, academic staff, support staff, students, and alumni, among others. A full site visit programme containing all sessions and participants is attached to this report as Appendix B. The review panel consisted of five members with a wide range of expertise and extensive knowledge of the higher education sector in South Africa. They were drawn from various higher education institutions, both public and private. Information about panel members is contained in Appendix A.

This executive summary provides a detailed report of the findings made by the panel and highlights the key commendations and recommendations for each focus area.

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

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

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

The NWU vision, mission and goals use slightly modified terminology, including the 'dream' instead of 'vision' and 'purpose' instead of 'mission'. The strategy statement, 'To transform and position the NWU as a unitary institution of superior academic excellence, with a commitment to social justice,' and the dream 'To be an internationally recognised University in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, social responsiveness and an ethic of care', are quite similar, but these definitions seem to be understood by the stakeholders, which is what matters because their purpose is to galvanise everybody's energy at the University

towards a single goal. The dream (vision) and the strategy were developed through consultation and were communicated widely. Informal discussions around the strategy took place between the top leadership of the NWU and staff members. Students and other stakeholders were consulted as part of the culture of care. Most interviewees, if not all, had clearly been exposed to, understood, and accepted these statements. The six goals in the NWU Strategy cover all business areas and align with the dream.

The Annual Performance Plans (APPs), emanating from the Strategic Goals, provide a framework for realising the Strategic Goals *and* enhancing the quality of the University's academic core business. They are:

1. Promote excellent learning and teaching and reposition the NWU to attain the size and shape required by the market direction decisions.
2. Strengthen research and innovation with a strategic focus on impactful globalisation.
3. Integrate and align community engagement with teaching, learning, and research to develop a culture of active citizenship.
4. Develop a clearly differentiated student-value proposition with a focus on creating an inclusive environment aimed at developing students holistically through structured and unstructured co-curricular programmes which are relevant, desirable, and meet students' needs.
5. Attract, develop, and retain excellent staff and create an equitable staff profile.
6. Develop and implement a digital business strategy to create a competitive advantage for the University and ultimately unlock alternative revenue streams.

Four carefully crafted Enablers support the strategic goals:

Enabler 1. Govern, lead, and manage in an agile, collaborative, and integrated way, toward an optimally digitised University environment.

Enabler 2: Establish a holistic and integrated University technology platform to provide a digital future.

Enabler 3: Cultivate and deliver stakeholder-focused platforms to create and grow intentional experiences and brand equity.

Enabler 4: Ensure financial sustainability and optimal performance with due consideration of macroeconomic conditions and a drive towards digital transformation.

Most stakeholders engaged by the panel comfortably linked their roles and functions to the strategy. The goals are also supported by a clear Success Model comprising the Internal, Financial, and External Success Models. In line with an ethic of care, the UMC conducted an organisational climate survey to understand how staff had experienced the strategic restructuring processes. Although the survey outcomes were seemingly mixed, most staff indicated that they were prepared to work towards a unitary institution. The values underpinning the strategy are captured in the NWU *Values Charter* and are prominently displayed on all campuses. The UMC members are required to provide evidence of staff and student conduct and activities that encompass the NWU values. The approval of the Brand Policy (2018) and Corporate Identity of the Unitary University was a significant milestone and gave rise to the new corporate colour, purple.

The NWU defines its stakeholders as ‘those individuals or groups whom we affect through our activities and services, and whose actions and support initiatives also affect our ability to successfully implement our strategy and achieve our goals’(SER). Included in this list are the following: ‘students and parent communities, staff, the Convocation, the Council, DHET, the CHE and the HEQC, national and international peers, statutory and non-statutory bodies, collaboration partners, local communities, and business communities’ (SER, p34).

The leadership is fully aware of the magnitude of transforming the NWU into a truly unitary institution and of the need to involve stakeholders in the governance apparatus. The Council has demonstrated its commitment to its oversight responsibilities by establishing fourteen committees that focus on the critical functional areas and are led by Council committee leaders who have the requisite skills and knowledge. Governance structures strive for a composition reflecting the country's demographics, thus making inclusivity meaningful and visible: the Council and Institutional Forum (IF) members explained how when there are vacancies, both bodies actively engage various stakeholder bodies to nominate or recommend names that would support equity in representation.

The Students Representative Council (SRC) is represented on the Council. However, the SRC members who were interviewed had mixed feelings about their role and agreed that they have opportunities to raise matters of student concern and that Council meetings also improved their understanding of issues critical to the running of the University, but that they were concerned that some issues they raised were not given the necessary attention. In view of the racially segregated past of the campuses, many stakeholders viewed the African leadership

of the Potchefstroom SRC as a significant step towards a unitary NWU. The panel noted this view commendably.

The Convocation is an important stakeholder in the Council and Alumni are elected to the Convocation. In engagements with a group of alumni during the audit, the understanding of the role of the Convocation was surprisingly poor. The Convocation has a dedicated web page where information is regularly updated, and it functions under the Constitution of the Convocation which was reviewed and approved by Council in November 2022. The Convocation holds a General Meeting (GM) every three years, and all Convocation members are invited to attend. The Corporate and Information Governance Department provides secretariat services to the Convocation. The role and relevance of the Convocation are promoted by the Corporate Relations and Marketing Department.

The University's Communication Plan plays an important role in bringing stakeholders on board through messaging that seeks to close gaps in understanding the University's strategy. It provided space for internal and external stakeholder feedback, thus, enriching the consultation process that formed part of the Council-approved Strategy review of 2019. Such reviews take place every five years. Some aspects, however, had to be reviewed before the five-year cycle ended, due to the challenges brought about by COVID-19; a case in point being the ICT strategy, since serious changes needed to be implemented rapidly for the University to continue to deliver its programmes in the new environment. The panel affirms that the NWU Communication Plan has effectively played a crucial role in ensuring that the transformation journey does not leave anyone behind. The Senate and Council regularly review the progress made towards the achievements of the targets in the strategy; this is a standing item at all Council meetings. The VC's almost all-encompassing report to the Council touches on the external environment and indicates the progress towards achieving the strategic goals.

Concerning the qualifications and programme offerings, the NWU has embarked on a review of its PQM. The main aim is to streamline the PQM, producing the 'NWU PQM of the future'. This project will run until 2025 but will be a 'rolling wave type of project', allowing for decisions to be made along the way, followed by implementation if approved. Desired outcomes include optimisation of resources, equitable sharing of workload, and a 'PQM that is agile, responsive, relevant and competitive'. The panel affirms that the institutional project's aim to review its PQM to make it more 'agile, responsive, relevant and competitive' is a positive step. This could just confirm the adage that says, 'less is more'.

The quest to create a competitive advantage in digitized current and future environments is driven by the Digital Business Strategy that is underpinned by a basket of related policies/strategies/plans that seek to minimize and/or avert cybersecurity-related risks e.g. IT Cyber Security Incident Report Plan, IT NWU Cybersecurity Strategy, Disaster Recovery Strategy. On the governance side, various Council committees, like the Audit Risk and Compliance Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Transformation Oversight Committee continuously monitor risks with the aim of putting in place mitigation measures as a part of a broader quality management system.

Recommendations

1. The panel recommends that the NWU should continuously monitor the participation rates of Alumni to ascertain whether participation is commensurate with the extensive administrative and communication support provided for the Convocation's functioning.

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 fulfillment 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).*

In developing the University's dream, vision, and strategy, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the AU's *Agenda 2063*, the *National Development Plan (2030)*, the *Policy Framework on Differentiation in the South African Post-School System*, and the *White Paper for Post-School Education* were used. All these are relevant and up-to-date regulatory policy documents. The NWU *Transformation Charter's* intent aligns with the strategy statement, 'to transform and to position the NWU as a unitary institution of superior academic excellence, with a commitment to social justice' and regional development'. The faculties link their strategies to the University's six strategic goals. The transformation goals cover equity and redress, alignment, diversity, unity and social cohesion, success and quality, transformational leadership, and comparable student experience.

The revised *Transformation Charter* was adopted in 2021 after the broad-based consultations were held, but certain issues remain the subject of constructive debates, e.g., the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in science-related curricula. Similarly, the *Language Policy*, though not

yet fully implemented, is being pursued, with varying approaches and levels of success within faculties. The *Quality Manual* states that the implementation of this policy has to be ‘flexible, functional, redressing language imbalances of the past and promoting multilingualism, access, integration and a sense of belonging’, and it would be unrealistic to expect a uniform, mechanistic implementation of such a policy.

The differentiated PQM and the distance education options contribute to redress by opening access at various NQF Levels and by providing flexible study opportunities. The Student Academic Lifecycle Administration (SALA) can facilitate student/applicant mobility. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy which seems not to be uniformly applied across faculties or departments, is a matter of concern. RPL, correctly applied, is a powerful tool for transformation and redress. According to the SALA leadership, procedures, and processes to admit students via RPL are in place.

The Registrar’s Committee for Teaching and Learning (TL) Agreements manages collaborations between the NWU and other reputable academic institutions and government departments, in line with the NDP 2030’s recommendation that: ‘Institutions should collaborate to build on each other’s strengths’. The ‘Multi-Institutional Study Experiences, discussed in the NWU 2021 APP, underlines the value of such institutional collaborations.

The SER highlights the importance of regularly reviewing internal policy documents: ‘All NWU strategic documents and policies are reviewed regularly (e.g., every three years) or when amendments are made to applicable national legislation.’ Their Policy on the Generation and Approval of Rules, Policies, and Procedures dated 2017 is currently under review and will serve at the September Council meeting for approval. The Records, Archives, and Museums sub-department and the Corporate and Information Governance Services are responsible for running the policy management programme of the NWU. To this end, the senior records officer is responsible for implementing the policy and the SOP that supports the Policy. Council receives quarterly updates on the progress made with the policy review (see documents: Council Policy Review Updates from 2021 and 2022 that served at Council). In summary, with an entrenched culture of reflection, self-evaluation, and periodic commissioned evaluations, the NWU is well-poised to keep its transformation journey on track.

Commendations

- a. The panel commends the University for the adoption and ongoing implementation of the *Transformation Charter* and the *Language Policy*, both of which signal a commitment to efforts to realise the institution's dream and to make a significant contribution towards the decolonisation of education.

Recommendations

2. The panel recommends that the NWU's Monitoring and Evaluation processes should include internal audit reports, from Faculties and departments, that identify the gaps in RPL practices, and possible misalignment to the policy and address identified gaps through a comprehensive improvement plan.

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

The diagram in the 2021 Annual Performance Plan (APP) shows the important links between the Strategy, the APP, and Resourcing (Finance and Risk Assessment). The University's dream and purpose is to translate into faculty-specific visions and missions, which inform the Faculty Integrated Teaching and Learning Plans (FiTLPs) and effectively cascade strategy statements and goals into operational functions and KPIs. The UMC members take responsibility for the implementation of strategy in their sections in both academic and support departments. The UMC's reporting cycle is integral to the monitoring regime.

The re-organising of the functions and responsibilities of the DVCs and Vice-Principals and their physical relocation, undertaken in September 2021, has contributed to the equitable management of the three campuses. Integrated planning thus becomes a mechanism for implementing quality management and assurance: the integrated QMS works with the links between planning, resource allocation, and performance management. The NWU APP (2020) complies with the regulations for *Reporting by Public Higher Education Institutions*. Reports on strategy implementation as well as on environmental shifts or disruptions, like the COVID-19 pandemic, may necessitate further reviews of the strategy and operational plans. Other

strategy reviews are triggered by staff comments received in informal engagements between staff and senior management, including the VC. The strategy review is, thus, always on the Council and UMC meeting agendas. Corporate Relations and Communication (CRM) is yet another important unit in managing conversations around strategy. It contributes to Enabler 3, which speaks to the cultivation and delivery of a stakeholder-focused platform to create and grow institutional experiences and brand equity. The Director of CRM gave an example of communications used to encourage alumni of the three institutions to buy into the unitary institution objective.

The panel discussions with the Council and the UMC corroborated the functioning of governance structures, as described in the SER, and confirmed that its sub-committees can fulfill their oversight roles in Finance, institutional risks, supply chain, infrastructure, etc. Governance training supports members of the Council and its Committees. However, some stakeholder representatives, e.g., Institutional Forum members, claimed they had never received such training. The *NWU Council Quality Manual* informs the benchmarking of Council processes and procedures and provides a way of monitoring their effectiveness and efficiency. The manual also prescribes the reporting and monitoring mechanisms between the Council and the VC, and between the Council, the VC, and the UMC. The VC and the Executive Director of Finance report on the state of the NWU at the four Council meetings per year. The Council confirmed that this structured accountability ensures that there is no confusion in understanding the roles and responsibilities between the Council and Management. An annual induction used to be provided for new Council members, but this practice has recently changed to be more responsive. The induction of Council members takes place at the committee level. Once a Council member becomes part of the Council Committee, they are inducted at that level. If a Council member is not part of the Council Committee, they are inducted separately as required. The panel affirms the evidence-based methodologies (surveys, evaluations) used by the University Council in tackling governance challenges as a positive approach. The NWU Council conducts annual self-evaluation exercises, followed by cyclical external peer reviews that are guided by the Council's *Quality Manual* and the NWU Quality Policy and Rules. These processes all contribute to the upholding of good governance standards.

The Ethics Institute, operating from the VC's Office, manages a Council-approved ethics strategy. A Social and Ethics Committee was established in 2021, in compliance with the Higher Education Act and the Statute. The Ethics Strategic Intent and Ethics Strategy were

approved by the Council in November 2021. The UMC approved an Ethics Management Plan in June 2022. The Code of Ethics was approved by the Council in November 2022. The NWU Code of Ethics, initially approved by the Senate in 2013, was reviewed and consulted in 2020 and put on hold, as per the advice of the Social and Ethics Committee of Council, to allow for the conclusion and approval of the NWU Statement of Strategic Ethical Intent, the NWU Ethics Strategy, and the NWU Ethics Management Plan.

Recommendations

3. The panel recommends that, following the identification of areas of development by the Ethics Institute, the University should consider providing appropriate ethics training for governance, leadership, and management structures in support of the Ethics Strategy.

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

The NWU's clear corporate governance structure distinguishes between governance, management, and academic leadership. To enable the members of the governance and management structures to play their roles and be accountable, the Council approved the *NWU Policy on Delegation, Assignment, and Agency* which works in tandem with the *NWU Statute* and the *NWU Committee Framework*. This framework is informed by the *NWU Policy on the Generation and Approval of Rules, Policies, and Procedures*. The governance of the academic project is thus overseen by the Council and the Senate and its clearly defined subcommittees.

The NWU Council, the highest decision-making body, determines the University's policies and its own procedures for governance. It monitors the University's operational performance and management and oversees risk management. The *Council Quality Manual* defines its roles and responsibilities and those of its committees. The King IV Governance Principles inform the University's governance structures and roles. Core responsibilities and reporting protocols within and between governance structures and the functioning of other stakeholder structures, like the SRC, Institutional Forum, etc., are prescribed in the NWU Statute. Corporate and Information Governance Services (CIGS) support the effective functioning of the NWU's governance and management structures through its responsibilities for meeting administration support, risk and compliance management, and records, archives, and museums

management. The rules for the nomination, election, designation, and appointment of Council members ensure that appointments are based on skills and are sensitive to diversity. The Council implemented a recommendation from an external peer evaluator to improve the skills capacity of Council members. The Council conducts an annual self-evaluation survey for all its committees, which informs the development of its annual improvement plans.

Given the NWU's transformation journey and the reality of its skewed race and gender staff ratios, the NWU implemented various mechanisms to address this challenge. For example, the appointment of prospective employees from non-designated groups follows official approval routes which include the Vice-Chancellor's office. The EE statistics are first determined, at the level of Schools, unit of the faculty, or Support division, rather than the high-level compliance only, because while the faculty structures might be aligned to the EE plan, the School's EE structures might not be aligned. The EE reports and compliance are reported on and monitored by a well-functioning Employment Equity and Skills Development Forum (EESDF) and the PCEE, a committee of the Council, that monitors compliance with the NWU EE Plan as well as the Employment Equity Act.

Recommendations

No recommendations were made for Standard 4

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 a minimum of:*

- (i) governance arrangements*
- (ii) policies*
- (iii) processes, procedures and plans*
- (iv) instructional products*
- (v) measurement of impact*
- (vi) data management and utilization, as these give effect to the delivery of the HEI's core functions.*

The NWU's quality management system (QMS) focuses strongly on social justice and the recognition of diversity. The QMS is designed to achieve transformation based on the University's integrated and unitary vision. The transformation objectives, driven through the *Transformation Charter*, all seem to have been understood and internalised by the University community, both academic and support. The University has also established clear governance and management structures to achieve these goals.

The coherence of the QMS was evident from interviewees' responses on how quality management is understood and implemented at the NWU. The notions that underpin how quality is contextualised include: *'fitness for and of purpose, value for money, client needs and satisfaction, affordability, the transformation of the students and the institution, meeting international benchmarks and sustainability of processes*. It was, therefore, important for the panel to also evaluate quality management through these notions. The University management indicated how conditions were created to enable a functioning and coherent QMS across all three campuses and through different management portfolios.

The *Quality Policy* is the framework through which the NWU implements its QMS for the three core academic functions. The policy clearly outlines lines of authority and accountability for implementing the University's quality management systems. The responsibility for quality management resides in the faculties through their sub-structures, Schools, research entities, campuses, and all support departments. Due to its multi-campus nature, the University has strongly emphasised developing a quality culture *across* all campuses. The Quality Enhancement (QE) Unit, together with the *Quality Policy*, and the quality reviews of programmes and services, in both the academic and support environments, are examples of well-established quality mechanisms. The University Management and Council provide visible and active support for quality management. The Council members explained their role in

supporting the University's transformation objectives and quality management processes. The good practices shared by the Council and the UMC included the annual self-evaluation exercise to improve governance.

The comprehensiveness of the quality manuals, and the fact that quality management is regarded as a continuous improvement cycle were noted. A risk-based approach is taken for resourcing quality improvement plans, that is, resources are allocated to improvement actions that address the most significant risks to the quality of the academic project. Tabling the quality improvement plans at the relevant committees, including the Senate and UMC, is good practice. The SER demonstrates how the University has engaged with the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) outcomes and other quality-related external evaluations.

Documented policies, procedures, and rules regulating enrolment planning, recruitment, and re-admission of students, as well as credit accumulation and transfer (CAT). Enrolment planning and management contribute significantly to reaching enrolment targets, especially in the commerce, and the science, engineering, and technology (SET) streams, and in the achievement of student equity targets. Reaching equity targets is a product of combined efforts of student recruitment, faculties, and the admissions office. The enrolment plan is monitored and reported through the University APP. However, declining enrolment trends for both contact- and distance provisioning modes are a matter of concern. Some areas of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) have been decentralised to faculties, while others are centralised in the Student Academic Life-cycle Administration (SALA) environment. The rules governing the decentralised and centralised functions are outlined in the policies, practices, and processes relating to CAT, which appear to be well coordinated and managed.

Appropriately conceived student governance structures function across campuses. Management and student leaders confirmed the effectiveness of these governance arrangements. Campus-level student structures are consistent regarding the training, orientation, and performance evaluation of student representatives. Student campus councils effectively address academic matters that affect student learning. Student representatives also participate effectively in committees such as the Senate, where they can express their concerns about matters affecting student experience. Furthermore, student representatives involved in faculty-level committees can effectively contribute to decision-making.

Quality management arrangements for short learning programmes (SLPs) are documented in a quality manual and applied by the Unit for Continuing Education (UCE), the division responsible for providing SLPs. The UCE reports to the Business School, which provides academic oversight of the UCE, and operationalises the *Policy on Continuing Education*. The UCE is supported by the Executive Deans in the Continuing Education Advisory Committee. Standard operating procedures guide the management, planning, and review of SLPs. The UCE has a feedback system for soliciting participants' input regarding quality, clearly a good practice. The UCE's quality manual outlines the roles and responsibilities of the different divisions and how each unit contributes to the University's delivery of continuing education.

Teaching and Learning

The University's T&L Strategy (2020-2025) aims to advance quality delivery in teaching, learning and assessment. In keeping with its strong transformational focus, the strategy's values ensure responsive and innovative pedagogical approaches across delivery modes and campuses. Its implementation is supported by relevant policies. The University strategy is contextualised and cascaded through Faculty-integrated Teaching and Learning Plans (FiTLPs), examples of which were provided. This good practice is noted.

The adopted multimodal approach enables equitable access to the provision of quality teaching and learning across campuses. The panel came to understand the quality arrangements of the multimodal approach – and the students' experiences, including distance provisioning. The University had already adopted the blended mode of delivery before the COVID-19 pandemic, but it had not been fully implemented. During the pandemic, the transition to emergency teaching, learning, and assessment meant accelerating the adoption of blended learning and other modalities.

A multimodal approach was retained as students were phased back into campuses after the pandemic. The multimodal approach (i) assists the faculties in managing the numbers attending face-to-face lectures, (ii) provides options for students to attend either in person or virtually, (iii) allows for the rotation of lecturers from across the campuses, and (iv) optimises the University's integrated and unitary approach. The same quality standards and arrangements are maintained for all modes of delivery. The panel asked how equitable student experience was ensured, how student attendance of lectures was monitored and how the faculties ensured that at-risk students were monitored: the panel encourages the University to

implement effective monitoring measures to ensure sustained student engagement in academic activities.

Relevant processes support the policy on recognition of prior learning (RPL). RPL is a decentralised function managed by the faculties. RPL uptake is low. Some faculties attribute the low uptake to the nature of certain professional programmes where RPL is not possible. The panel recommends that RPL should become a mechanism for widening access to programmes. The low interest and potential barriers should be investigated and remedied.

Assessment

The approved policy on *Teaching, Learning and Assessment* regulates assessment practices. Its implementation is complemented by rules and regulations published in the NWU General Academic Rules and Faculty yearbooks.

Moderation of assessment is critical to evaluating student learning fairly. In this regard, rules are outlined for teaching, learning, and assessment. The moderator appointment process is documented in Faculty quality manuals. In addition to moderation practices, the following QA mechanisms assure the quality of assessments: continuous capacity development of lecturers, the promotion of academic integrity through the relevant policy and rules, and procedures for designing, approving, monitoring, and reviewing the assessment strategies for modules and programmes. Stakeholders are aware of the *Teaching, Learning, and Assessment* policy and its associated rules and regulations. Faculty examination committees check the quality of examinations. The examination committee, a sub-committee of the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee, reports to the Faculty Board. Assessment quality is also checked and confirmed through external and internal programme evaluations and/or subject-in-program evaluations. Academic staff confirmed that assessment practices are harmonised across campuses offering the same modules.

Research

Quality assurance mechanisms for Research and Innovation, at the central and Faculty levels, include reviews of research-based masters and doctoral programmes, internal and external evaluation of research entities, peer review of research output, and quality reviews of the research and innovation support departments. Research integrity and ethics are fundamental to assuring the quality of research. The University has formalised a *Research Ethics Policy*,

and a *Policy on Academic Integrity* and established a Senate Committee for Research Ethics as well as Faculty committees for Research Ethics. A code of conduct guides ethical research conduct.

Community Engagement

Several University structures and mechanisms drive community engagement as a core function. Some centralised systems include the *Policy on Community Engagement* (CE) to guide quality arrangements, the Office for Community Engagement, and the post of DVC: Community Engagement. The strategy for community engagement is underpinned by a philosophy of 'engaged scholarship', which guides the integration of research, teaching, and learning in the engagement activities. The actual management, implementation, and coordination of community engagement activities have been decentralised to the faculty level under the oversight of Deputy Deans for Community Engagement (CE) in bigger Faculties or a designated individual fulfilling the role in smaller faculties. There are also designated Faculty committees that support the CE and stakeholder relationships of the faculty across the board. Faculty committees for community and stakeholder engagement coordinate, monitor, and report CE activities, which the panel affirms as good practice.

The challenges posed by substantial academic workloads were noted, and how that constrains certain staff members from participating fully in community engagement activities. High workload levels affect some faculties more than others: the Faculty of Education appears to have a very high teaching workload. The University provided examples of community engagement projects including the University Law Clinics at the Mahikeng and Potchefstroom campuses, which provide free and efficient legal services to the communities in their vicinity. On the Mahikeng campus, the mobile animal health vehicle provides services to neighbouring communities. Some projects are well coordinated and managed; others appear to operate independently and in silos. The panel noted the number of CE projects that implement the University's social engagement goal in the surrounding communities.

Faculties such as Law, Humanities, Economics and Management Sciences encourage and manage staff participation in CE through staff performance agreements. The Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences has a community impact strategy. The University has adopted a shared database for CE reporting. The implementation of the shared database only commenced in 2021 and is currently applied across all reporting units including support units

and faculties and Student Life. A standard operating procedure has also been developed to support the process of capturing projects on the database.

The University is also a member of the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF). In summary, governance arrangements support the quality management of the University's core functions and are underpinned by relevant policies, procedures, and committee structures.

Commendations

- b The panel commends the approach taken by the University to elevate the significance of community engagement as one of its core functions, the appointment of Deputy Deans for community engagement in selected faculties and the appointment of a DVC: Community Engagement as these structures will provide the required strategic leadership, oversight of community engagement and suitable resourcing, as well as introducing the governance arrangements to support the implementation and sustainability of the core function of community engagement.

Recommendations

4. The panel recommends that the University should consider implementing measures, in the short term, to mitigate the declining enrolment trends, as this could affect the University's future sustainability.
5. The panel recommends that the University should implement effective monitoring measures for the multimodal approach, in the short to medium term, to monitor students' engagement in academic activities, and at-risk students in particular.
6. The panel recommends that the University should, in the medium term, address the constraints identified in the SER relating to perceived high staff workloads that affect the full participation of staff in community engagement activities.
7. The panel recommends that the University should investigate, in the medium term, the possible barriers influencing the uptake of the RPL initiatives in the University and implement innovative ways of promoting it as one of the possible access and articulation mechanisms in the University.

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's five-year strategy (2019-2023) guides staff allocation to resource the academic project effectively. The UMC monitors the strategy annually and accommodates emerging priorities such as the 2020-2021 pandemic challenges. Given the University's transformation and diversity goals, the panel enquired how effectively the strategy addresses the transformation of the staff profile and what the implications are for achieving the equity targets. The decline in the number of female staff and insufficient growth in the number of African staff members was acknowledged. The Vice-Chancellor, Council, and others identified the University's remuneration practices and the geographical location of the Mahikeng campus as the main barriers to achieving the targeted equity profile.

The library and information services support quality learning, teaching, and research activities. A tour of the three libraries revealed various fit-for-purpose study spaces. The libraries' cleanliness, a noticeable feature on all the campuses, and the friendly professional library staff were noted. A quality manual guides the delivery of library services, including staff and student training in support of the academic project. Students and academic staff alike expressed satisfaction with the library services. The unitary vision is evident in the quality of the library facilities across campuses.

The University's information and communication technology (ICT) services provide critical support to the quality of the academic project. ICT services drive the digital transformation strategy, including the infrastructure for the multimodal approach for the core academic activities. The success of the HyFlex approach depends on providing an encompassing IT infrastructure ecosystem on campus *and* in the residences. The UMC and other stakeholders apprised the panel of the financial commitments required to upgrade lecture facilities to make them 'HyFlex compatible'. Its resource-allocation model provides equitable provision across campuses. Examples of HyFlex-compatible lecture halls were visited at the Potchefstroom and Mahikeng campuses. This progress by the University, especially considering the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, is noted. Lecture hall refurbishments are planned across all campuses. ICT support was and is crucial to the functioning of the LMS and eFundi, both during and after the pandemic. The provision of ICT support during the COVID-19

lockdown enabled teaching and learning to continue, and, even after students returned to campuses, the same support helped foster a multimodal approach to phasing students back to campus, ensuring a safe continuation of academic activities. ICT is guided by the *NWU Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Governance Policy*, and an IT committee oversees its services. ICT is accountable to the UMC and to the Council's IT governance committee. The support and guidance of the governance and management committees are essential to the University's digital future, and to achieving an integrated technology ecosystem. Failure to complete the technology ecosystem exposes the University to risks.

High-quality teaching and learning are further enabled through various academic staff development opportunities, which include the academic induction programme, continuous professional development and the institutional teaching excellence awards. The University has made various staff professional development opportunities available across all campuses and via different delivery modes (face-to-face, online, and blended). The panel notes the critical role played by the FTLS directorate during and after the pandemic in training and supporting academics to manage remote learning and teaching. CTL support to staff facilitates innovative learning and teaching. Academic staff development is key to empowering staff to use the multimodal approach the University has adopted.

Commendations

- a. The University is commended on the quality of its library facilities across all campuses as it demonstrates management's commitment towards ensuring the equitable quality of provisioning and support services across the three campuses, for libraries that are designed to cater for most of the needs of students and the progress made since 2017, via their annual budget process, to ensure the provision of equitable student resources across some campuses and faculties.

Recommendations

8. The panel recommends that NWU implement continuous and targeted professional development opportunities that will empower academic and support staff to facilitate the multimodal approach that the University has adopted.
9. The panel recommends that the University should put adequate monitoring and reporting mechanisms in place to ensure equitable delivery of quality learning and teaching using the multimodal approach.

10. The panel recommends that the University should conduct a continual risk assessment of the multimodal approach to identify potential risks that may hinder the provisioning of equitable quality learning and teaching for the various modes of delivery.

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 IT department oversees multiple data systems which comprise a business enterprise system that provides support for evidence-based decision-making. Access to this data is managed and protected. The University has identified a lack of integration between data systems as requiring further development within a new data architecture framework, which will create a robust digital technology ecosystem.

The Integrated Planning and Strategic Intelligence Office (IPSI) provides business intelligence data for institutional planning and decision-making. Controlled access to this data is available to all staff. Strategic Intelligence works with the QE unit on comprehensive quality-management reporting. The People and Culture department explained how data generated by the IPSI supports human resource-related decision-making; the IPSI's productivity model points to where Human Resources are most needed to support the academic project. The panel noted this good practice by the University in developing and implementing the Productivity Model as a tool to support decision-making in the faculties and the People and Culture environment.

The control measures adopted in the SALA office for capturing data and managing students' records were explained. Because the SALA office contains vital records, it requires rigorous controls to mitigate risks of possible unauthorised access and tampering with student and University records. The panel encourages the SALA office to continue improving its rigorous mitigating controls. Various other internal strategies, such as those for disaster recovery and cyber security, mitigate the risks of cyber-attacks and ensure business continuity. An annual external review of the ICT security policies, processes and practices helps to mitigate various risks. The also panel noted the funding constraints that resulted in a partial implementation of the disaster recovery strategy, and the University's decision to escalate this risk to the risk register.

Recommendations

11. The panel recommends that the NWU should integrate the various data systems, in the medium term, and implement a robust digital technology ecosystem that will enhance a seamless user experience, and the University's dream of being a unitary institution.
12. The panel recommends that the NWU should review and address the funding constraints that have led to the disaster recovery strategy's partial implementation, in the short term, to safeguard against potentially significant risks of institutional memory loss due to cyberattacks or other data threats.

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

Several structures ensure that the governance and management of institutional information and archives support the quality management of the core academic activities. Such systems include a Records, Archives, and Museum Management Policy, an information governance framework, and an information management committee. Having structures for the secure management of university information is good practice, especially given the institution's multi-campus context. The University also has a NWU Policy and Rules on Data and Information Security, which indicates that the NWU views data and information security to be of paramount importance for the good governance and effective and efficient management and administration of the University.

The archiving of quality manuals and quality evaluation reports is managed per the prescripts of the Records Management. Corporate and Information Governance Services (CIGS) is responsible for information governance and management. Implementing the framework and developing the related policies and rules is an ongoing process. The University acknowledges the challenge posed by the decentralised and numerous filing systems that result in fragmented reporting. However, the University has a File Plan and retention schedule. The challenge is to ensure compliance with the File Plan and Retention Schedule.

The NWU intranet provides all relevant information and institutional knowledge pertaining to policies, procedures, guidelines, quality manuals, frameworks, and governance documents and reports. Decision-makers at all institutional levels can request further access to reliable,

up-to-date data and institutional knowledge via various electronic filing systems on the quality management of the core academic activities.

During the pandemic, the QM systems and processes were duly maintained, and academic activities were continually monitored via quality enhancement activities.

Commendation

- d. The University is commended for establishing the structures for the governance and management of university information to safeguard data integrity and improve operational efficiency and effectiveness, given the institution's multi-campus context.

Recommendations

13. The panel recommends that the University explore solutions for electronic record management systems to ensure consistency and centralisation of records to facilitate access and ensure compliance with the Records, Archives, and Museums Management Policy.

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

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

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

The NWU's Quality Management System (QMS) fits the purpose of designing and implementing performance management for academic and support staff. The *Quality Policy* recognises that the responsibility for quality assurance and quality management lies with the

relevant faculties, and with all their sub-structures across campuses. The *Quality Management System Manual* highlights the coherent, reasonable, functional, and meaningfully structured relationships among all faculties and support units. They collectively support student success, improve the quality of learning, teaching, and research engagement, and accommodate the results of constructive integrated community engagement in accordance with the NWU's dream and purpose. From inception, the NWU QMS has been designed to be both holistic and evolving.

The Integrated Planning and Strategic Intelligence Office (IPSI) consists of seven staff members and has representation on several steering, planning and Quality committees inter alia, the University Budget Committee and the Senate Committee for Academic Standards. The work of the IPSI is integral to the QM work undertaken by the faculties and support units.

Support departments such as the Quality Enhancement (QE) office form an integral part of the core business and play an essential role in achieving best practices in all areas. Starting from the 'Shewhart Cycle' methodology, the quality rules mandate a continuous cycle of setting standards for critical activities, judging achievements against these standards, planning for improvement, and acting to implement the desired changes. Faculties and support departments thus continually evaluate their own performance and improve where needed.

The Q&APP staff provided guidance to faculties when they conceptualised new programmes, giving expert advice on the University's overall vision, including the financial viability, budget allocations, and the resources necessary. Decisions were also informed by the evaluation and review reports coordinated by the QE unit. Reconceptualised programmes and subjects are tabled at the SCAS for approval (of which QE forms part). QE staff are represented in various decision-making structures, such as the Senate, hence their ability to advise on which teaching and learning, research, and community engagement activities would yield the best and most cost-effective student benefit.

The NWU's QE unit works according to policies and procedures that ensure fairness and transparency in delivering the core functions across campuses. The discussion of Standards 9 and 10 illustrated the distributed nature of responsibilities for quality management that ensures the equitable distribution of materials and resources. The curriculum too is harmonised across campuses, which guarantees equity in educational standards and module

delivery. A fair distribution of postgraduate students across campuses ensures that all the campuses access a fair share of equipment and funding. The panel affirms the good practice by the NWU QE unit for their high-quality deliverables, such as personal service provision and maintaining consistency across all three campuses, despite staff challenges. The NWU's QMS can safely be regarded as robust and appropriately designed to protect the integrity of academic scholarship.

The performance of academic staff is managed by a performance-management system that holds staff to account for the management of quality in their functional areas: 'together with their staff members, the performance management system holds the relevant line managers to account for the achievement of allocated outcomes and goals, through mid-year and year-end performance appraisals. In this process, individual agreements between the director/deputy director/line manager and the staff member concerned consider both the developmental interventions and the studies which the incumbent requires, as well as the faculty/departmental targets, outputs, and outcomes for the year ahead. The formal annual performance agreement is contracted and signed by both parties. Every academic activity is given a percentage and accounted for in workloads that are aligned with performance management. Participants perceive the performance agreement process as a fair system.

As noted in the NWU's *Performance Management Policy* (2019) and performance evaluation process, participants confirmed that staff who achieve beyond the initially agreed-upon Performance Areas are considered for a performance bonus. Following an interview between the line manager and the employee, underperforming staff members are counselled, and University interventions are recommended and implemented. In the spirit of sound employee relations, stalemates are referred to the Employee Relations (ER) division for an all-inclusive dialogue designed to support employees to perform better. Identified gaps in performance inform the individual training needs process.

The system encourages the mentoring of junior staff to plot their vertical academic mobility. Staff development, guided by the *Learning and Development Policy*, includes but is not limited to formal studies, induction, and orientation, internship programmes, leadership and management development, mentoring, and skills development. Budgeting processes include funds that are ring-fenced for staff development in accordance with the professional development plans agreed on in performance management conversations.

The performance management system, coupled with workload allocation, is a valuable tool to ensure fairness and accountability for the University. A simplistic approach to equity in staff workload would not be feasible (SER, p169). Even though the workload system has variances, it influences staff performance appraisals. Where tensions between workload and performance management scores arise, the University allows for open discussions with staff and line managers, signifying NWU's rights-based ethos and good-faith approach.

Recommendations

- 14 The panel recommends that the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be aligned with the institution's Annual Performance Plan (APP).

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

A reciprocal and integrated relationship between quality assurance governance and management oversight clearly underpins the delivery of the core academic functions. The Senate is responsible for regulating all TL, research, and academic support functions, and for determining the policies and rules affecting academic matters. Several committees are delegated with sundry responsibilities within the system, this all-inclusive and multidimensional approach has deepened the quality assurance system.

The quality management system for the core academic areas is clearly coherent, and the unitary model adopted, with one Dean and one Faculty aligned across campuses and networked upwards to the Senate, has created an approach that positively measures and deepens quality. Faculties across campuses have aligned their assessment practices.

The NWU's commitment to multimodal and multilingual learning provisions was affirmed at the 2018 annual NWU strategic planning workshop. Emphasis was placed on faculties' adherence to the NWU strategic agenda, market directions in terms of teaching and learning innovation, financial viability assurance, and sustainable target markets. A focus on student access, retention, and success would receive attention as would a better mix of commerce- and Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) offerings, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) planning as well as the necessary financial investment required.

Three central teaching and learning approaches have been incorporated into the TL innovations: (1) Hybrid learning, (2) HyFlex learning, and (3) Blended approaches. Though a predominantly blended learning approach was the strategy before the COVID-19 pandemic, NWU now practices a hybrid model. Not everyone is seemingly clear about adherence to quality management in this approach (versus in a face-to-face approach), but for others, closing the quality loop and maintaining a high standard is their utmost priority: stringent moderation processes ensure that continuous assessment practices comply with QM standards. Formal assessment reviews, conducted across faculties, further monitor the quality of assessments. The panel commends the NWU Teaching and Learning office for identifying and planning training and orientation for middle managers in the TL environment to play a critical role in ensuring the academic integrity of their offerings. The evidence demonstrates a quality assurance system dedicated to good governance and effective management oversight. The Central Teaching and Learning (CTL) unit alluded to working with instructional developers and desktop publication teams to ensure adherence to quality assurance standards at each level of the programme offerings.

Furthermore, the QE unit coordinates all review processes for programmes and support units, commencing with self-evaluations, peer reviews, and then reflecting on areas for improvement, and monitoring the implementation of the improvement plans. Where improvement plans depend on financial support, the QE unit engages with the financial teams. The QM system provides quality support in curriculum design: an ethics of care and a transparent system facilitate buy-in from staff and students. However, the unit is seemingly understaffed. The unit has consequently begun working in multidisciplinary teams to address capacity challenges. The appointment of quality coordinators in faculties at the three campuses remains a challenge due to budget constraints.

Quality assurance is institutionalised at all levels of the University. The QE unit's activities demonstrate a commitment to ongoing quality enhancement. For instance, the comprehensive module teaching files, which are critical to effective teaching, are kept up to date centrally so that lecturers from different campuses can access them, thus ensuring the harmonisation of modules and their content.

Recommendation

15. The panel recommends that the NWU should increase staff capacity to provide more significant support to students experiencing challenges with online teaching and learning and adjusting to new technological developments such as hybrid or blended learning.

Standard 11: *Planning and processes exist for the reasonable and functional allocation of resources to all components of the institutional quality management system (IQMS) based on available evidence.*

Each organisational unit is responsible for its financial management, including planning, budgeting, and funding, as required by the present standard. Since 2021, financial management has become a key performance area for all deputy directors. Each director, as an approver, has final control of expenditures on the financial system in line with the University's 'schedule of authority'. The NWU's financial guideline document supports departments with their financial planning, and control mechanisms to keep record of every financial transaction.

Since 2017, the University has clearly made good progress, through the annual per campus and Faculty budget process, to provide and ensure equitable student resources. The inclusive budgetary process aligns Human Resources and Finances with the APP, which commits to planning for the equitable distribution of resources. Nonetheless, the following concerns still need addressing, the equitable distribution of (a) senior staff across campuses; (b) ICT infrastructure capacity and systems; and (c) financial resources to drive additional community engagement projects that are integrated into the curriculum.

Faculties have embraced the hybrid learning mode that combines physical and remote classes to maximise the use of resources. Hybrid teaching includes different types of electronic content, such as videos and teaching notes, resulting in good learning outcomes. The hybrid/HyFlex approach supports the TL process under changing conditions and regulatory demands. The hybrid initiative arose from the first NWU Virtual Colloquium, *Imagining the transitions: The future of TL @ NWU*, in August 2021, where students recommended that the NWU support staff and students become more self-directed, and invest more in the training of support staff to ensure the successful delivery of the hybrid mode. Academics (including CTL and other TL support staff) indicate that the University needs to develop a new model for

HyFLex TL delivery as part of its broader commitment to digital transformation.

ICT's imperatives are to complement innovation in learning, support the management of workload, and address delimiting factors. The core purpose of the IT strategy is that ICT becomes the market differentiator for multimodal approaches in TL, research, and business processes in general. ICT services support the digital transformation strategy and provide user-support for its services, but some faculties indicate that there is still room for improvement. The Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) states that 'adequate and appropriate ICT facilities for students and staff are challenging. The significant barriers were lack of applicable software, inadequate computers, slow speed, unpredictable internet, unavailability of the latest ICT equipment, lack of expert technical staff, poor administrative support, and turnover time for insufficient support in the faculty.

The Student Counselling and Development (SCD) offices, situated on all three campuses, serve to deepen the interface with students and the standardising of services to students which commenced in 2019. In keeping with the Access, Retention, Attainment, and Success (ARAS) framework, the University provided free data and computers to all students during the Covid-19 pandemic, remote working period. The framework, which creates a systemic approach to student access, retention, attainment, and success, is based on four fundamental principles: flexibility, inclusion, co-responsibility, and creating strategic and beneficial partnerships. Students deemed at risk per the University's progression model were identified and supported through timeous interventions. Support services such as libraries and workshops on research were intense from the outset.

Indeed, before, during, and after the Covid-19 remote working period, the University has been hands-on in providing ICT support services. The ICT unit, Finance, Writing Centres, and Student Counselling units all enjoy cordial and amicable relations with academic staff who willingly refer students to these support services. All these activities were budgeted for from the University's emergency funds. During the lockdown, the University also provided equipment and data to staff to communicate with students while working remotely, ensuring continued quality support for students.

Recommendations

16. The panel recommends that the NWU should allow students to evaluate the hybrid

model for possible improvements, given its newness and longevity as the new normal for an enhanced student experience.

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

The University's quality assurance system clearly informs its core academic activities effectively and efficiently, deploying staff and technology to (1) facilitate effective budgeting and reporting processes, (2) support the activities undertaken by Corporate Relations and Marketing (CRM), (3) provide stakeholder feedback mechanisms, and (4) inculcate an ethics of care for students and staff.

The University has deployed the IDU software for budgeting and reporting and all managers have access to IDU via their financial planner. As the budget information is captured and available on an account (activity) level, the consolidation of budgeted information is also completed accurately on summary levels (School, department, Faculty, division, NWU) in real-time. The excellent relationship between the financial administration and directors was evident and created stability, transparency, and open communication. This area of improvement is integrating the different systems to monitor better budget planning and actual expenditure.

The financial officers and financial accountants allocated to each organisational unit oversee all spending against an approved budget. All expenditure is approved as per the delegation of authority. From 2020, the financial planning teams prepare a monthly financial report for notice and discussion with the relevant support manager. These reports enable the manager to identify any risks and concerns that need attention (over- and underspending) and to ensure sufficient financial resources are available to reach the agreed outputs and to make informed decisions.

However, not all managers are equally committed to engaging with the prepared financial statements. Some managers seemingly do not use the current statements in decision-making processes that have budgetary implications. That said, the panel noted that NWU has automated online reports that can be extracted at any time by financial planners. A financial information automation project has been requested to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of financial decision-making. The project's purpose is to generate financial statements in a format that makes them a valuable management tool. The Financial Planning Department

adjusts the financial reporting methodology to be more user-friendly, since most senior managers do not have sound financial backgrounds, but still must manage large budgets. The proposed financial reporting methodology will be client-friendly. To ensure the appropriate use of allocated financial resources, Internal Audit conducts yearly audits on accounts, especially those concerning external funds or international accounts.

Corporate Relations and Marketing (CRM) harnesses relationships between the NWU and its core stakeholders for value creation. These stakeholder engagements focus on using allocated resources to support quality and benefit NWU's stakeholders. The CRM is required to table its APP at the UMC for endorsement and recommendation to other governance structures such as the Senate and Council. The division also tables its strategies, procedures, policies, and rules at the Council and other relevant sub-structures.

Importantly, stakeholder feedback is central to programme improvement and partly affects the life cycle of a programme: if issues with content or presenters are raised, the school Directors are informed. For instance, students evaluate teaching and the quality of discussion during remote classes. The scores of the presenters are compared. Since the evaluations are linked to the KPIs, they impact remuneration. This evaluation is done for every intake and every lecturer.

An essential part of ensuring quality at the NWU requires that any student behaviour which might compromise the institution's academic integrity is managed fairly and procedurally. Student misdemeanors of any nature are subject to judicial processes. Participants confirmed that the University is hands-on in its ethics of care when addressing student transgressions. For instance, an academic misconduct case may be sent to an internal academic investigator or to a specialist for postgraduate investigations. There are rehabilitation processes for students found responsible for misconduct (e.g., gender-based violence) so that the student is better informed after going through the judicial services. Once at that stage, 4th-year law students support both perpetrator and victim since both need advice on how the proceedings will unfold. Even after the hearing, assistance remains available. Misconduct is often a cry for help; rehabilitation is usually undertaken via community service.

Commendations

- e. The panel commends the NWU for taking a rehabilitative rather than a retributive route for students guilty of academic and non-academic misconduct or misdemeanors.

Recommendations

17. The panel recommends that the training of all Finance managers should be strengthened and offered continuously to enhance their financial skills and knowledge, and to ensure that they are relevant, current and fit for purpose.

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

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

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

The NWU's system for designing and developing new academic programmes and changing existing ones is well-established and integrated. At the *macro* level, the Teaching and Learning Strategy (2020) and the Curriculum Plan, consisting of the eight Faculty Integrated Teaching and Learning Plans (FiTLPs), provide the map for the TL journeys. This system is an instrument for guiding the transformation, responsiveness, and sustainable quality promotion of the academic offering. At the *meso* level, the Qualification and Academic Programme Planning (Q&APP) unit guides the faculties through the process of new programme approvals, including the situational audit, ensuring that all internal and external quality assurance standards are met. Also, at the *meso* level, the QE office provides the cyclical evaluation of programmes. At the *micro* level, the CTL supports and advises academic staff on curriculum design and delivery. In short, the systems at each level are aligned and effective. There is still room for improvement in (i) managing the complexity of the interrelationships between the different units, (ii) tracking the progress of new programme requests from conceptualisation to approval and beyond, (iii) recording the changes to existing programmes (iv) providing informed feedback on submissions, and (v) allowing in-depth discussions on the submissions of the relevant committees. In designing new programmes/modules, the CTL and Q&APP help

the Faculty or School to focus on both quality and alignment with the stated strategic intention. This collaborative approach allows for the designing of a particular programme or module in dedicated training sessions over a period of 3-4 days.

For the external programme evaluations (EPEs), the QE office collects the portfolio of documents which will allow the review panel to provide commendations and recommendations, based on the CHE programme accreditation criteria. Assessing the viability of a new programme is critical in the approval process, but the extent to which viability is reviewed in the EPEs is unclear. The PoE did not include EPE reports that were more recent than 2018. However, from the FiTLPs, there *is* evidence of subject in programme evaluations and external programme evaluations for programmes of concern during 2020/1. The programme evaluation schedule also identifies time frames for the evaluation of modules in undergraduate programmes, as well as in the honours and structured master's programmes, but no departmental evaluations seem to be included. Given the PQM size and the TL strategy emphasis, the 'fully mature' evaluation process has not effectively limited programme proliferation and the best use of resources over the five-year reporting period. While there is evidence of new programmes and modules, nothing addresses the removal of programmes or modules.

The NWU's readiness and responsiveness under the leadership of the DVC: TL during the times of significant disruption were evident during 2020-2022 and were attributed to several strategies and approaches already in place. The faculty-based contingency plans developed during the disruptions in 2016 and 2018 necessitated remote teaching, learning, assessment, and training for – and the adoption of – blended learning modes, as well as the effective and extensive use of the learning management system, eFundi. The *COVID-19 Assessment Review: Institutional Report (April 2022)* confirms that faculties and support departments were committed to and proactive in implementing the contingency plans for a quality academic offering, an effective student experience, and the integrity of continuous assessment.

An ethic of care was evident in the communication from the DVC:TL and in the attentiveness to the expectations, anxieties and queries of colleagues and students. The NWU has been exemplary in investigating concerns about the integrity and validity of assessments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, stringent moderation ensured that continuous assessment practices adhered to the quality management processes. The risk of dishonesty in online assessments was partially addressed through proctoring systems and workshops on setting effective online

assessments.

Commendations

- f. The involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including students, in the institutional system for designing, developing, and evaluating programmes is commended by the panel.

Recommendations

18. The panel recommends that the challenges relating to the integration (SER, p.181) and complexity (SER, p.145) of the institutional multi-campus structure and multimodal approach should be identified, understood, and addressed to further improve the effectiveness of the institutional system for designing, developing and evaluating programmes.

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 integrated and collaborative approach to programme-planning, design, review, and evaluation, and ongoing programme improvement, occurs through consultation and engagement with various stakeholders, and throughout the life cycle of a programme or curriculum. This approach is evident in the development of the FiTLPs which aligns the faculty's strategic goals with those of the University, determining the action plans required, and how Faculty progress will be monitored. While the FiTLPs are being drafted, senior curriculum specialist(s) from CTL may provide advice and support. The impact of this collaborative approach to curriculum challenges has meant that more departments and faculties have engaged with CTL since 2020/1.

Following approval of the plans, the CTL engages with the academic staff to implement them.

Progress is monitored via the annual performance reports, discussed at the Senate Committee for Teaching and Learning. The FiTLPs prove valuable in strategic discussions, and in planning for and negotiations about staffing, budgeting, resources, and infrastructure, and each Faculty's needs and priorities receive the attention of relevant stakeholder committees. Since inconsistencies or deviations from the FiTLP may impact the faculty budget and resources, the motivation to have clear, informed, and well-motivated plans is strong.

The alignment of the PQM offerings after the 2017 NWU restructuring is impressive. The unitary offering of modules across the three campuses powerfully promotes collaboration among colleagues and contributes to a sense of belonging to NWU as a University (as opposed to a particular campus). In addition, the PQM review project underway will position NWU favourably in the provision of multimodal education and for ensuring high-quality and responsive academic offerings.

The University-wide, multi-faceted approach towards transforming the curriculum and student experience is commendable. It has included a change of the TL mindset, the decolonisation of the curriculum, and the development of frameworks that enable various kinds of transformation. Evidence in the FiTLPs points to discussions around the transformation of the curriculum, and student experiences confirm that each Faculty has made an opportunity to determine their immediate priorities, sometimes through staff and student surveys. The progress towards realising these priorities are reflected in the annual *Curriculum Transformation and Alignment* reports and the *Integrated Teaching and Learning Report* (both since 2018).

Multimodal provision at NWU opens up the doors of learning as widely as possible. The multimodal concept, which was originally understood in terms of contact- and distance modes of delivery, has expanded to include three different modalities in the TL environment – face-to-face, online, and hybrid. This shift will not compromise the CHE accreditation of the academic programmes, provided that no more than 30% of the offering is online. IT has been instrumental in supporting multimodal TL through the learning management system, eFundi, assessment platforms, and the roll-out of the Hyflex technology. The multimodal approach was, and is, the key to integrating the three campuses and transforming the student experience: more self-directed learning is encouraged. The use of African languages in multimodal teaching and learning is actively developing and empowering those languages for academic purposes, and the Hyflex technology, together with a rotational model for the face-

to-face experience, promotes a more equitable learning experience for all.

NWU commendably aspires to be the leading provider of multimodal education in South Africa and has made progress towards this goal since 2018. Insights from staff and student experience during 2020-2022 strengthen the University's goals of multimodal education and digital transformation in TL. So, for example, more TL spaces are being equipped with Hyflex technology to promote inclusivity and interaction during class, regardless of where the student is located. More professional development opportunities are available for staff to enrich their teaching and learning capabilities. Some room for improvement remains concerning transforming the curriculum and addressing the differentiation in students' preferred modes of communication and cognition, but this is recognised as an ongoing effort.

Each Faculty Board is supported by its Teaching and Learning Committee, a forum for engagement and discussions by staff and students on all matters regarding Faculty teaching, learning, and assessment. Staff representation in the TLC includes the subject group heads, programme leaders, and senior curriculum specialists from CTL. Student representation in the TLC includes students from each year's group, per year's group, and per programme. Their engagement in the committee makes the faculty aware of students' changing needs and helps students understand the TL strategy and the FiTLP. Students recognise that an ethics of care is at the heart of the student experience at NWU. Unfortunately, while NWU values students' input, students do not recognise the full value of their feedback, given the limited participation feedback surveys. A lack of follow-up discussion with students about the impact of their input may be a reason.

NWU is a multilingual University, and multilingualism in TL is intended to promote epistemological access, inclusion, and curriculum renewal. Guided by the NWU *Language Policy* (2018), Faculty Language Plans indicate the language of instruction and the support provided in the other languages. The multimodal approach offers a more equitable student experience with the language of instruction for the face-to-face sessions varying, depending on the language of preference of the presenter, and interpreting into the other languages being offered for online sessions.

The *Language Policy* itself states principles for the provision of multilingualism in different University environments, including administration, meetings, events, communication,

research and development, and organised student life. The Language Directorate produces comprehensive annual reports on the achievements and challenges of implementing the Faculty Language Plans and on its activities. Themed, cross-curricular events, such as the annual language awareness week, celebrate multilingualism and diversity at NWU. The low participation in this brave space for experiencing and understanding diversity requires further investigation. With a strong strategic intelligence department, the faculties, schools, and departments have access to the necessary information to track the quantitative indicators for success for an academic offering and to identify areas for further research or curriculum development.

Commendations

- g. The thematic review of assessment during 2020-2021 is commendable from the perspective of the engagement and collaboration of all faculties and support units in a research-based and evidence-informed investigation which led to a book publication.

Recommendations

19. The panel recommends that the NWU should introduce a template for structuring the FiTLPs, which are indispensable for positioning the faculties.
20. The panel recommends that the NWU reformulate the multi-modal education in the T&L Strategy and the Digital Business Strategy to reflect on the role of technology in the curriculum.
21. The panel recommends that the NWU Language Directorate monitor and report on the achievements and challenges of all environments concerning multilingualism.

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.*

The annual Student Teaching and Learning Experience surveys (STLES) provide feedback per Faculty and per school on students' exposure to teaching and learning. However, it was unclear whether they were also used to obtain feedback on the quality and comparability of the student experience across the three campuses. A significant shift in overall student satisfaction occurred between 2018 and 2019, and this shift has been maintained even during the remote teaching, learning and assessment periods. This noteworthy shift coincides with

implementing the March 2017 decision to restructure the NWU as an integrated unitary institution, that now focuses on creating a quality and comparable student experience in teaching and learning across all campuses.

The multi modal approach to TL has meant that students *experience* the alignment of the three campuses as a single University. The language surveys and audits provide a feel of the language dynamics on each campus and the role of language in the students' experience of inclusivity and belonging.

In addition to the STLES, module feedback, and lecturer feedback surveys are conducted towards the end of the delivery of the module with each cohort of students. All programme evaluations include interviews with the students and graduates, and the improvement plans need to address the student feedback. Currently, faculties monitor student success using various approaches, but plans are underway for a coordinated approach through the new student information system.

Teaching and learning are generally experienced by the students as positive and enabling. During 2020-2021, students experienced challenges with understanding concepts, connectivity, and data provision, and there was a clear call for more face-to-face lectures. The surveys mentioned excellent professors and lecturers, high-quality programmes, an ethic of care, and campus safety as the best attributes. Graduates acknowledge that the culturally diverse student experience at NWU has been critical in preparing them for diversity in the world of work. Graduates with significant service-learning components feel well-prepared for their world of work, while others think they would have benefited from more preparation for the world of work.

Student success is captured holistically through the ARAS framework for student access, retention, attainment, and success, which also highlights four key principles for a student's overall success that is, flexibility, inclusion, co-responsibility, and partnerships. The framework supports the NWU's commitment to fostering a value-driven institution that fosters an ethic of care. The use of the ARAS framework to monitor student success in terms of its key indicators is worth following up on.

The SALA department works directly with the ARAS principles, starting at the point when a learner enquires about studies at NWU. As part of the drive toward a more inclusive student experience and creating a stronger sense of belonging for all students pursuing studies at NWU, the new student information system will focus on each student as an individual rather than as a number contributing to quotas and targets.

Faculties are made aware of the challenges experienced by students through the academic student associations (ASAs) or student chapters (SCs). The University welcomes student participation in decision-making structures as this ensures that first-hand accounts of students' successes, challenges, and needs can be conveyed and heard by the relevant role players. During the disruptive 2020-2021 period, hearing the student voice through the participation of the Chairman of the SRC on the NWU COVID-19 Response Team was crucial. The new student information system will also allow for grievances or complaints to be logged through an online portal, for services to be rated, for chat-bots to assist with queries, and for the timing and quality of responses to be monitored to improve service delivery.

Visible progress in improving students' inclusivity and sense of belonging is evident. For example, accrediting private accommodation on campus has allowed students in such accommodation to be more integrated into student life. Promoting awareness and participation among the off-campus students of the cross-curricular themed events (such as gender awareness week and sporting activities) also helps with integration. Postgraduate students without a dedicated workspace or lab now also feel a greater sense of belonging in the various, well-considered workspaces in the library.

Culture surveys, conducted every four years, allow staff to reflect on the restructuring of the NWU and its impact on the staff and student experience, the NWU values, and the NWU institutional culture. Such surveys only provide a snapshot of the perceptions and experiences at a particular moment in time and the University understands that these may evolve as the NWU adapts to changes in the higher education context and the world. The design of the cultural interventions is informed by the feedback from the culture surveys, thereby potentially contributing to wider participation. Institution-wide colloquia allow for stakeholder engagement on the NWU's key commitments, which seem to have become a broadly shared understanding. However, the extent to which there is a culture of creating brave spaces for open conversation and debate on these key commitments remains unclear.

The NWU *Policy on Staff Learning and Development* is being implemented through a range of developmental programmes, including staff induction, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL), and continuous professional development through leadership and management, mentoring, and developing specific skills for the HE space. It is noted that there are relevant and adequate incentives for all staff to pursue postgraduate studies at the NWU or elsewhere.

The NWU believes that recognising teaching excellence helps raise the importance and value of teaching and learning. Although the promotion of academics based solely on excellent teaching is not explicit in the *Policy on the Promotion of Academic Employees*, the University has introduced various awards to promote scholarship or research in teaching and learning as well as innovation and excellence in teaching practice. Faculties also established their teaching excellence awards, the criteria for which are aligned with Faculty specific strategic goals, and in response to student success and student experience. This provides an interrelationship between the FiTLPs and the impact of these actions in driving TL initiatives. All these awards at the NWU form part of a broader package of recognition of teaching and learning, and include TL grants, SOTL allocations, UCDG grants, and invitations to participate in TL conferences. The golden thread woven through all these forms of recognition is the broader NWU TL strategic goals. The panel confirms the initiatives in faculties and support environments to create meaningful, developmental, and equitable student experiences.

Recommendations

22. The panel recommends that the NWU should continue to monitor the student experience on the adoption of multimodal and multilingual approaches in teaching and learning.
23. The panel recommends that the NWU should monitor student success more holistically, possibly using the ARAS framework.

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

The annual Graduate Destination Survey is the main source of data on graduate employability. Conducted since 2016, it focuses on four areas the employment found, time frames, duration, and relation to the programme of study. Such data is shared with all stakeholders. Faculty-

specific graduate surveys and interaction with alumni, employers, advisory boards, and industry stakeholders also provide relevant information.

Some of the skills required by graduates include foundational literacies, transferable skills, and character traits. UNIVERSUM provides feedback on the skills needed for the world of work. Other sources of data and information are the programme reviews (IPEs and EPEs). Various initiatives align themselves with the skills and attributes in the TL strategy including the UTW modules, service learning, and work-integrated learning opportunities. It is unclear how the survey findings inform the investment in, design of, and uptake of the various initiatives.

Through the alumni, certain Faculty and industry partnerships have been established. Some benefits include allowing alumni access to real-world data for project work, opportunities for joining the service-learning component, and participating in community engagement projects. Alumni are invited to offer advice to students and help prepare them for the world of work.

The Convocation provides a platform for alumni to remain active in university affairs. While significant progress has been made along the journey to a unitary, multi-campus University, membership, and participation in the Convocation do not yet reflect this. Some alumni are apprehensive about joining since there are perceptions of elitism in the convocation.

Commendations

- h. The panel commends the institution for establishing, valuing, and nurturing its relationships and partnerships with the alumni for mutual benefit by preparing students for the transition from University to the world of work, offering students a responsive curriculum and programmes, and attracting alumni back to the NWU for further studies.

Recommendations

24. It is recommended that Faculties should include alumni in their advisory committee or board to provide input on the responsiveness and quality of the academic programmes.