



**Executive Summary**  
**INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT REPORT**  
**OF THE**  
**UNIVERSITY OF VENDA**

**(August 2023)**

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## List of acronyms

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| ADU   | Academic Development Unit                                    |
| APMS  | Automated Performance Management System                      |
| APP   | Academic Programme Approval                                  |
| ARISE | Admission, Retention, Instruction Scholarship and Enablement |
| ARC   | Audit and Risk Committee                                     |
| BCDRP | Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan               |
| BUSSE | The Beginning University Survey of Student Engagement        |
| CE    | Community Engagement   |
| CFO   | Chief Financial Officer                                      |
| CHE   | Council on Higher Education                                  |
| CHETL | Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning            |
| DHET  | Department of Higher Education and Training                  |
| DSU   | Disabled Students Movement                                   |
| DVC   | Deputy Vice-Chancellor                                       |
| ED    | Executive Dean   |
| EMC   | Executive Management Committee                               |
| ERP   | Enterprise Resource Planning                                 |
| FTE   | Full Time Equivalent   |
| HEDA  | Higher Education Data Analyzer                               |
| HEIs  | Higher Education Institutions                                |
| HEMIS | Higher Education Information Management Systems              |
| HESA  | Higher Education South Africa                                |
| HEQC  | Higher Education Quality Committee                           |
| HEQF  | Higher Education Qualifications Framework                    |
| HEQSF | Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework                |
| HoD   | Head of Department   |
| HPCSA | Health Professions Council of South Africa                   |
| HR    | Human Resource   |
| IA    | Institutional Audit  |
| ICT   | Information and Communication Technology                     |
| IPQA  | Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance                 |
| IQA   | Institutional Quality Assurance                              |
| IQMS  | Institutional Quality Management System                      |
| IT    | Information Technology                                       |

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ITS    | Integrated Tertiary System                          |
| KPIs   | Key Performance Indicators                          |
| LMS    | Learner Management System                           |
| MIS    | Management Information System                       |
| NDP    | National Development Plan                           |
| NRF    | National Research Foundation                        |
| NQF    | National Qualification Framework                    |
| POPIA  | Protection of Personal Information Act              |
| PoE    | Portfolio of Evidence                               |
| PQM    | Programme Qualification Mix                         |
| QA     | Quality Assurance                                   |
| QMS    | Quality Management System                           |
| RAC    | Registrars Academic Committee                       |
| RMC    | Risk Management Committee                           |
| SANC   | South African Nursing Council                       |
| SAQA   | South African Qualifications Authority              |
| SASSE  | South African Survey of Student Engagement          |
| SENEX  | Executive Committee of the Senate                   |
| SER    | Self-Evaluation Report                              |
| SL     | Service Learning                                    |
| SRC    | Student Representative Council                      |
| STEM   | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics    |
| SWOT   | Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats    |
| THENSA | Technological Higher Education Network South Africa |
| UIGC   | UNIVEN Innovative Growth Company (Pty) Ltd          |
| UN     | United Nation                                       |
| UniVen | University of Venda                                 |
| VC     | Vice-Chancellor and Principal                       |
| VSRC   | Vuwani Science Resource Centre                      |
| WIL    | Work-Integrated Learning                            |

## Executive Summary

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) was established through the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997, as amended) primarily to assure quality in the South African higher education sector and to advise the Minister on aspects of higher education. The National Qualifications Framework Act (No. 67 of 2008, as amended) conferred additional responsibilities on the CHE as the Quality Council for higher education, with overall responsibility for the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). The CHE executes its quality assurance responsibilities through its permanent committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The CHE, through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), exercises its quality assurance function using a variety of mechanisms, one of which is institutional audits that are mandated by the Higher Education Act.

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

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

1. The primary responsibility for internal quality assurance rests with individual HEIs. Each institution is responsible for the establishment, implementation, maintenance, improvement and enhancement of its own quality management and assurance systems.
2. The uniqueness of each institution's size, shape, location, context and mission is recognised.
3. The value of institutional audits rests on the compilation of credible, contextually relevant and reliable information that is required for internal quality-related planning and self-evaluation, peer review and public reporting (for example, by publishing executive summaries).

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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>

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 University of Venda.

Located in the rural town of Thohoyandou in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province, with a bustling economy, with which it continues to expand its engagement through farming, business, research, and science education, UniVen was established in 1982. The District is largely rural, with the four towns of Thohoyandou, Makhado, Malamulele, and Musina as the principal business centres. Initially operating within the erstwhile Dimani Agricultural School precinct, the construction of its campus for 5,000 students was completed in 1989. The SER describes UniVen as a rural-based institution serving mostly students from rural communities.

Since its inception, UniVen experienced rapid growth in its student enrolment. In an attempt to match this growth with commensurate staffing, UniVen attracted academics from various backgrounds in South Africa. Due to a thinning local pool, by 1994, staff members were increasingly recruited from other African countries and from overseas. Therefore, UniVen started its internationalization programme early in its developmental trajectory, as the campus was infused with staff from diverse nationalities and backgrounds which created a unique atmosphere and a fertile environment for new ideas, the capacity for transformation, and recruitment of international students.

UniVen was launched before the South African democratic revolution as a traditional University offering an increasing scope of courses in the humanities, social sciences, natural, and applied sciences. Due to increasing demand after 1994, UniVen accelerated its growth with increasing STEM courses and was later designated by the former Department of Higher Education and Training, as a comprehensive University without merging with any University of Technology. Prior to its new designation, UniVen had already started to establish a few career-focused programmes, particularly

in science and technology. Although this would have contributed substantially to the transformation required towards being a comprehensive University in line with the ministerial designation, UniVen considered the objective of being a comprehensive University to be sufficiently worthy of being pursued that it retained it among the key objectives of the Strategic Plans 2016-2020 and 2021-2025.

The SER that UniVen provided was less than well presented, with an inconsistent provision of the evidence. The evidence was provided as documents that were embedded in the SER for ease of reference when reading the document. Evidence was also provided in the portfolio of evidence (PoE) folders, to align with the SER. There was also an inconsistent presentation style with some standards presented in narrative, while standard 15 was presented in tabular form without a substantive narrative. However, all that these deficiencies did, was to make it difficult to follow and easily understand the message of the institutional context, the SER, and PoE. As a result, the Panel accepted that they had to interrogate these documents in greater depth and seek corroboration at UniVen, during the site visit to obtain sufficient information.

Panel discussions with various structures during the site visits either confirmed or rejected some of the claims in the SER, as will be discussed in the sections below.

The arrangements for access to the Self Evaluation Report (SER) and other documents constituting the portfolio of evidence (PoE) of the Institutional Audit (IA) of the University of Venda (UniVen) were concluded as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 through Microsoft Teams. After the withdrawal of one member from the original Panel, another was appointed, and this enabled the full functional complement of the final five-member Panel, to retain its original span of higher education experience and background.

During the three weeks from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2022, the CHE facilitated the joint Panel and UniVen development of a four-day site visit schedule from the 22-26 May 2022, consisting of just over 30 sessions. Due to unforeseeable circumstances, including student unrest, the schedule was revised several times during the Panel site visit, but the site visit was concluded satisfactorily.

The following is a summary of the audit Panel commendations and recommendations for the University of Venda.

### **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 governance, strategic planning, management, and leadership provide functional support to the core academic functions. This is supported by the institution's constitution and functionality in supporting the core academic functions of the leadership structures, including the Council, the Senate, the Executive Management, erstwhile school boards, the current Faculty, and Departmental boards, and the Institutional Forum. It is also supported by the work done by UniVen in the strategic planning, development of a new operational structure following reflection on the achievements of the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2016-2020, and a new business model wherein the vision, mission, and goals of UniVen are clearly and concisely formulated, with clearly stated vision, mission, and goals, based on engagement with appropriate categories of stakeholders. Additional support is based on a realistic recognition of the context of UniVen in the setting of goals and responsiveness to the needs of its local community. The setting of purpose using the Strategic Plan enables the leadership structures to support academic functions. One limiting factor, however, in supporting the academic project is capacity building at some of the levels of the governance hierarchy and structures. The University Council, for instance, has yet to fully implement an assessment of Council performance in line with King IV, and the new Executive Deans have yet to be afforded the training and required operational empowerment to execute their executive functions since their introduction as part of the new operational model. The Panel is confident that the capacity development planned by UniVen will support the core academic functions to excellence. Although UniVen has had clearly stated vision, mission, and strategic goals in both Strategic Plans 2016-2020 and 2021-2025, which the Council and internal structures had approved after comprehensive stakeholder engagement, two key aspects might have prevented excellence in strategic planning. The first is a perception among the staff of the consultative process as mere information sharing rather than consultation, and the second is the popularization and communication of the Strategic Plans for passionate stakeholder ownership. Be that as it may, there is functional strategic planning in place that has set the vision, mission, and strategic goals after consultation and appropriate approval.

**Commendations:**

- a) The University of Venda Strategic Framework document is provided in three languages, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, and English, considering the language diversity in the Vhembe district.



## **Recommendations:**

- 1) The University of Venda should develop and implement a communication and stakeholder engagement strategy that ensures that the majority of the University community is carried along in the processes for strategy development and implementation. One example could be to commission a climate survey to enable it to assimilate voices from all constituencies of the University for the development of strategies to improve buy-in for UniVen's Strategic Framework.
- 2) The University of Venda should integrate WIL in most of its programs to give effect to its Comprehensive University mission.

**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).*

Alignment of the strategic vision, mission and strategic priorities with the national priorities and context is evident in the academic and cultural life of UniVen which are characterised by comprehensive engagement with local, regional, national, and international contexts, and pursued as the key among the graduate attributes. The SER states that UniVen revises institutional Strategic Plans every five years. These are scheduled revisions aimed at responding to changing circumstances. However, rapid changes in the external environments and the increase in debilitating disruptions in recent times, such as the recent pandemic, load shedding, environmental disasters, and internal and external protest actions might require much more rapid agility such as scheduled mid-term reviews and contingency planning for more rapid response.

The University of Venda Innovative Growth Company (Pty) Ltd, the University of Venda has invested heavily in entrepreneurial partnerships with the community while contributing to the enhancement of the teaching of STEM subjects in several schools, as well as to the technology nativity of the community through the Vuwani Science Centre. These are evidentiary contributions to the fulfilment of national, African, and Global development imperatives.

## **Commendations:**

- b) The University of Venda is commended for being alive to its local, regional, national, and international contexts in its strategic planning.

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

The functional alignment between the quality management system for core academic activities, with the vision, mission, strategic goals, and processes for governance and management are stated in the UniVen annual performance and risk management plans and self-evident from the requirement from lower structures and divisions to develop their plans which emulate the institutional plans. Given that the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 is a new plan which introduces a new set of objectives and development targets, the strategic intent of UniVen will be achieved after operational plans of the lower academic and management structures are developed and when they start to be implemented to support the core academic business. This will depend on the monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of the implementation of these plans. Therefore, given the introduction of new objectives, the performance management system and the policies that support the new Strategic Plan will need to be revised to align with the strategic aspirations of UniVen as articulated in its new Strategic Plan.

**Recommendations:**

- 3) The University of Venda should review the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Strategy and Monitoring and the Director of Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance to avoid role duplication and to balance the centralization and the decentralization that the University desires.
- 4) The University of Venda should review its performance management system and supporting policies in order to align with the UniVen Strategic Planning Framework 2021 - 2025.
- 5) The University of Venda should urgently address editorial reviews in the Strategic Planning Framework 2021-2025. While these may appear to be mere editorial errors, they have monitoring and evaluation implications for important KPIs that are incorrectly presented in the strategic document.

**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.*

Although the understanding and adherence to the different roles and responsibilities of the governance structures, management, and academic leadership have enabled UniVen to function, efficiencies are challenged by perceptions of lack of formal supervision and accounting in the academy, especially from the student viewpoint. Many students believe that instead of following the provision of the approved curriculum and course documents, lecturers are left to conduct the

academic core functions as they see fit and that they are not held to account in this regard. These perceptions are seen as the main cause of the tendency of students to breach the established functional roles due to frustrations and to escalate matters to higher structures or direct matters that can be easily handled within the functional roles of the organisation, to the SRC. The functionality of role understanding, and execution are also challenged by the lack of role capacitation across the academic and management structures, and the SRC. Nevertheless, it enables the implementation of the academic core business and management thereof, to flow through the various structures and facilitate quality management thereof. It has to be said that the degree to which some of the support services understand and execute their business in order to support the core academic function has been severely criticised by the academic rank-and-file and described as self-serving and indifferent to the way it is expected to support the core business. This is addressed in more expanded detail in Standard 11. After establishing that there had been a freezing of academic appointments with the result that there were no lecturers for some modules and students were expected to write examinations without being taught, the Panel also seriously doubted the understanding by these support services of their roles and the purpose of the execution thereof.

#### **Commendations:**

- c) The management of the University of Venda is commended for introducing a new operating model that is focused on academic programmes rather than operational business units. This fundamental academic transformation ensures the prioritization of the academic endeavour.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 6) The University of Venda academic leadership such as Executive Deans, Heads of Academic Departments, and academic project leaders should be appropriately capacitated with the required line management and supervision capacities, and empowered with resources and approval authority, particularly for procurement of supplies required for the academic project to ensure smooth operational delivery of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.

#### **Focus area 2: The design and implementation of the institutional quality management system supports the core academic functions**

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

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

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

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

Of the six areas of the quality management system as listed above, required to be in place, UniVen has adequate governance arrangements, a series of enabling policies with processes, procedures and plans, and instructional products. Evidence suggests that there is a measurement of impact and data management and utilisation to enable the delivery of teaching, learning, research, and community engagement, although these are still largely in infancy. There is, therefore, a quality management system in place at UniVen, despite the need for further establishment and entrenchment of some elements thereof such as the measurement of impact and data management and utilisation to enable the delivery of the teaching, learning, research, and community engagement. The existence of the system is, however, compromised by the degree to which it is readily discerned by the structures within which each of the elements are located, the extent to which the various elements are undertaken, and the degree to which the various structures assume responsibility for these elements. Whereas the SER states that UniVen considers quality to be the business of everybody in the institution, the location of some of the elements is rather diffuse, while the activities in their pursuit are insufficient. For example, the degree to which impact is measured at UniVen is rather low in terms of graduate attributes and destination surveys to establish the trajectory of graduates.

**Recommendations:**

- 7) The University of Venda should consider adopting an inclusive approach to decisions on curriculum delivery in which students are consulted on the modes and approaches to be used in teaching and learning, assessments, and course and lecturer evaluations.
- 8) The University of Venda should conceptualize and establish a complete and coherent institutional quality management system, which can be spearheaded by the IPQA, implemented by CHETL and the four Faculties, and fully enabled by the support functions, and develop mechanisms to ensure that quality is intrinsic to all practices and management of its core functions and operations related to teaching and learning, research and community

engagement.

- 9) The University of Venda should review the policy development process to ensure inclusiveness by considering formal feedback from staff and students.
- 10) The University of Venda should put mechanisms in place to ensure effective monitoring of the implementation of policies to ensure that strategic objectives are achieved as envisaged in the policies.
- 11) The University of Venda should introduce institutional guidelines to allow for consistency across the differential implementation of policies and impact monitoring at Units, Faculties, and Department levels.

**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.*

At inception, UniVen was a small University of 5,000 students. As a result, to meet the demand for higher education, and to support economic growth in the region, it grew rapidly by means of planned and ministerial enrolment plan approval to the current size and shape of roughly 14 820 students in STEM, humanities, and social sciences, health sciences, law, management, and commerce. Unfortunately, matching the growth with the required resources was complicated by internal challenges and external economic factors. Key among these are the appropriate resource allocation, efficient management, and support of their utilization. Given that efficient utilization of available resources is critical for productivity-based enhancement of incomes, the inefficiencies in the allocation and utilization of resources might be diminishing the capacity of UniVen to deliver on its societal and economic obligations. Although the delivery of infrastructural resource support was at one time or another severely compromised by procurement challenges, a number of new infrastructural investments have been concluded such as new residences, yet UniVen remains infrastructurally constrained in many areas such as connectivity, bandwidth, and devices, power and water supply. The procurement challenges, however, continue to plague the core academic project due to lengthy processes excessive centralization, and lack of digital migration and online automation. The provision of human capital resources to support the academic project is also plagued with debilitating talent sourcing inefficiencies and financial constraints which have prevented adequate and appropriate provision for quite some time, resulting in inadequate staffing for core academic project service delivery. It is for these reasons that the Panel considered the support of the core academic functions with resources as needing substantial improvement, in order to ensure commensurate support of the academic project.

## **Recommendations:**

- 12) The University of Venda should manage the rapid growth in student enrolment figures by reviewing the student enrolment plan and urgently addressing the critical gaps in resources identified that risk compromising the academic project.
- 13) The University of Venda should conduct a workload analysis to determine the number of academics that are required to facilitate learning in all accredited programs and fill vacant full-time posts as a matter of urgency because an over-reliance on part-time lecturers impacts the academic project.
- 14) The University of Venda should urgently fill the various vacancies in key administrative positions, including in the Institutional Information and Research/Management Information System sub-unit managing the HEMIS, are filled.
- 15) The University of Venda should implement, in the academic year 2023, a process for budget planning that is consistently applied across the institution to resource the core academic functions of teaching, learning, and research adequately and appropriately.
- 16) The University of Venda should prioritize the availability, maintenance, and functionality of critical structures of teaching and learning such as the library, and computer laboratories. For example, UniVen should as a matter of urgency repair the air conditioning in the library so that the library can be opened again for students, and the University of Venda should develop additional computer laboratories.
- 17) The University of Venda should undertake an independent professional occupational health and safety assessment of the University of Venda commercial farm and implement the recommendations on measures for avoidance of potential occupational injuries.

**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.*

Increasingly, universities collect, manage, and use a wide range of data as part of their quality management systems. UniVen captures data from a number of different sources, including the core activities in teaching and learning, assessment, research, and community engagement. It also utilizes a number of tools as part of the quality management system and analyses the data to inform decision-making processes. The institutional data is captured directly to the Integrated Tertiary

Systems platform by the various core academic project service delivery staff such as academics, academic managers, and academic support services staff. The data is read from the Integrated Tertiary Systems databases and analysed for various purposes such as pass rates, throughput, drop-outs, and submission to external stakeholders such as the Department of Higher Education Science and Technology. For example, UniVen uses the Higher Education Data Analyzer (HEDA) for internal decision-making processes and the Higher Education Management Information Systems (HEMIS) for transferring data to the Department of Higher Education Science and Technology. These are just a few examples to show that UniVen captures data and analyses the data as an integral part of the institutional quality management system to inform consistent and sustainable decision-making and to aid the same decision-making by interested stakeholders. Furthermore, UniVen is starting to enter into collaborations with other Universities on sectoral projects aimed at advancing the usage of data in the enhancement of the quality management systems, such as the Siyaphumelela Project. While the foregoing shows that data collection and usage at UniVen is in place with respect to some indicators, there is a concern with regard to the sufficiency of staff responsible for the management of HEMIS. Data is also captured manually and the systems in place are not automated and thus not used optimally. Human resources and infrastructural issues are matters of concern that may increase operational risks such as errors in data collection as well as cause delays in the processing and sharing of information.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 18) The University of Venda should address the Human Resources and infrastructural shortcomings in connection to the operation and management of HEMIS as a matter of urgency, to match the demand for data and information support that is provided to the core business units and management for decision-making purposes.
- 19) The University of Venda should consider developing a system to regularly assess its core functions through a range of surveys of its stakeholders to improve its services and operations and for strategic planning as well as to improve teaching, student success, the student experience, and differential success rates (Refer also to Standard 8).

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

Two of the ways commonly used to monitor the quality management system by universities, based on the evidence gathered, including conducting self-evaluation reviews and surveys, are evident in the SER, albeit not all-together presented to support the notion of monitoring and evaluation of the capacity of UniVen for quality management. In both approaches, the functionality of monitoring and evaluation of the capacity of UniVen for quality management is clearly compromised. On the use of reviews, the SER admits that these have been largely curtailed by the limitations in the functionality

of the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance unit, which has the responsibility of facilitating the conducting of reviews, which was caused by delays in the replacement of the Director when the former Director retired. However, since the new Director has now been employed, it is hoped that reviews will resume for both Academic and Administrative Departments so as to contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the capacity of UniVen for quality management. On the use of surveys to monitor the capacity of UniVen for quality management, the SER states that UniVen does not currently conduct any of the surveys that can be used to determine its capacity for quality management. What can be celebrated however is that a staff satisfaction survey was conducted in 2020, and there are plans to conduct surveys such as the Beginning University Survey of Student Engagement (BUSSE) and the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE). In the entire SER and from the Panel site visit engagements, no evidence-based institutional-level strategy was put forward for monitoring the capacity of UniVen for quality management. There is therefore very little doubt that the monitoring of the capacity of UniVen for quality management needs substantial improvement.

#### **Recommendations:**

Refer to Recommendations 10, 11, and 20, as well as Recommendations 3 and 5.

#### **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 purpose of this standard is to establish whether a relationship exists between governance, policies, processes, procedures and plans, instructional products, impact assessment, and data management and utilisation. It is necessary to show the existence of such a relationship, based on evidence, and to show that it is coherent, reasonable, functional, and meaningfully structured. UniVen reasonably supports its governance with legal, statutory, and delegation arrangements as evidenced. Relating to policy, the SER has abundantly supported the synergy between governance and policy with the formulation of plans in lower structures, policies, and procedures that flow



seamlessly from and align with the strategic and allied institutional plans. While the evidence shows the existence of such policies, there were substantial reports of sporadic inconsistent implementation across the University. What is of significant importance though is that these have given rise not only to approved curricula, and learning materials, but also provision is made for continuous improvement of these instructional products. It has already been noted that due to the employment of the new Director of IPQA in August 2021, policy-driven resumption of reviews is imminent, and that the University is planning to commence the implementation of surveys aimed at monitoring the capacity of UniVen for quality management. The absence of a revised policy with standard operating procedures for the use of data for decision-making points to a small but significant gap in the relationship between policies and data usage for decision-making. Overall, therefore the relationship between the six components of the quality management system is broken only between policy provision and the use of data for decision making. However, this relationship can be described as coherent, reasonable, functional, and meaningfully structured because the operational and business models align with it and also because there are expectations for a top-to-bottom alignment. For example, now that the new strategy is in place, other policies, and plans of lower-level structures are expected to be reviewed to align. This will surely ensure that they are coherent, reasonable, functional, and meaningfully structured. Additional fragmentation and lack of coherence arise from the existence yet disparate functioning of Departmental and Faculty quality assurance committees without an institutional one to oversee them. Equally fragmented is the monitoring and evaluation system, and its feedback for reporting, remedial and corrective action. These also gave rise to a lack of clarity in the strategy for the implementation and functioning of the quality management system. For example, the implementation of many policies is left to the Departmental experts, in matters whose competence should be the institutional level committee. Generally, there is suboptimal resourcing of the system. For example, the IPQA remained without a director for a long time, in this way severely compromising the scheduled cyclic reviews of programmes and the units which offer the programmes. At best the budgeting process and human resource staffing and talent sourcing functions can be characterized as indifferent to the planned work and needs of these units. These matters are discussed further in standards 11 and 13. Using the foregoing analysis, it is concluded that the relationship between the components of the quality management system exists, although it is fragmented at certain nodes, and with respect to the support of the academy, with the result that it fails to function as designed and expected.

### **Recommendations:**

- 20) The University of Venda should address the staff shortages in the quality assurance unit, IPQA. With the current capacity, it is unlikely that the directorate can deliver efficiently and effectively on its internal quality management mandate.
- 21) The University of Venda should fast-track the rolling out of the business partnership model,

to increase the impact of the support provided by CHETL. The model will contribute to the integration of the academic and support quality functions to the benefit of the University, and the enhancement of the attainment of strategic quality objectives.

- 22) It is recommended that the University of Venda's mechanisms for enhancing the coherence and meaningfully structured relationship between the components of the institutional quality management system be documented, implemented, and reported to facilitate monitoring and evaluation.
- 23) The University of Venda should establish quality assurance committees within each of the non-academic as well as academic support functions to make sure that these functions support the quality of the academic core functions. The University of Venda should establish an institutional-level quality assurance committee to provide oversight and seamless functioning of the institutional quality management system for the core business, academic support, and non-academic support functions.

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

The University of Venda makes the point that the governance and oversight of its quality management system are as much located in the structures such as committees and organizational units where these exist, as it is in the offices of the staff who preside over the structures, so that where committees exist, the office bearers who preside over the structures bear the responsibility, and where the structures do not exist the oversight responsibility is borne by designated office bearers. The SER identifies a plethora of committees and organizational structures. These committees assemble regularly to review the quality management business of the core academic functions and support functions using reports. Because these reports are critical in the management of the quality of the core academic functions, since the content would ordinarily respond to the stated target deliverables, together with the minutes, they would have provided the required evidence to show that regular and dedicated governance and management oversight of the quality assurance system exists. Despite requesting such reports, they were never provided. As it is now, the existence of regular and dedicated governance and management oversight of the quality assurance system is based only on the existence of the structures and office bearers. It is not enough to show that the regular governance and management oversight of the quality assurance system exists. The evidence of minutes of some of the committees indicates regular oversight. Examples of the quality assurance system reports would have provided evidence that the committee governance system is dedicated to the quality assurance system. It is therefore concluded that regular governance and oversight of the UniVen quality management system needs improvement because the structures and office bearers are in place and also because there is some evidence of regular meetings, although it is not certain that the business of these meetings is substantively the governance and

oversight of its quality management system.

**Commendations:**

- d) While it has done well to design and enact a performance management system aimed at developing and enhancing a performance culture as expected, the University of Venda is commended for having developed the system in-house to be responsive to how it rewards and celebrates good performance.

**Recommendations:**

- 24) The University of Venda should quell the view expressed by students that 'academics are left to do what they want' at the University of Venda, while academics hold firm the expression of the SER that line managers hold their direct reports accountable for performing their functions and duties, the University of Venda should demonstrate transparent functionality of the line management for students, for example, by integrating the accountability into the class representative system in which academics and students account to each other while being able to escalate academic issues to academic line managers.
- 25) The University of Venda should ensure management and governance oversight of the academic quality assurance system, the University of Venda should consider designing standard reports as standing items in the agenda of academic quality assurance structures where the key performance indicators identified in the various components of the IQMS are regularly reported, monitored, and evaluated.

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

Key resources required for the implementation of the quality management system of the core academic business include personnel, finances, infrastructure, and time, and these require planning and processes for the reasonable and functional allocation of human, financial, infrastructure, IT, and workload to all components of the institutional quality management system. For the allocation of financial resources, the budgeting processes are described in the SER. For supporting the core academic functions with human capital, staff planning processes were described in the Panel site visit engagements. For supporting the core business with infrastructure, IT and infrastructure planning are cited in the SER. However, for supporting the core business with time management there is no workload allocation policy at UniVen. The lived experiences of core academic functions describe the human capital planning as indifferent to the needs of the core academic functions, responding mainly to the regulations stipulated by the Employment Equity Plan and Labour Relations

Act. In a similar fashion, the lived experience of the core academic functions describes the support of the Department of Finance in resource allocation and procurement as indifferent to the needs of the core business. Both the human resources and Departments of Finance are said to put Departments through excessively long processes that yield results too late to be of any significant support to the core academic functions. The budgeting process in particular is a complex mixture of incremental and activity-based budgeting methods, and as a result, fails to respond to planned core academic projects. There is therefore no doubt that the planning processes exist, albeit unresponsive to the needs of the core academic functions.

**Recommendations:**

- 26) The University of Venda should consider linking the planning and budgeting functions in order to ensure that financial resources meet the needs of the academic core business for quality educational provision. In this regard, therefore, the University of Venda is encouraged to use a budgeting model that allocates resources based on strategic projects that have been planned and approved for each budgeting cycle.
- 27) The University of Venda should develop and annually review staffing plans that are based on an approved academic workload allocation model. In this regard, the University of Venda should develop an academic workload allocation model that takes into consideration realistic demands on academics and enables them to provide high-quality teaching and learning and a high-quality student learning experience.
- 28) The University of Venda should allocate resources to the implementation, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and improvement plans identified in the various components of the IQMS, such as the risk register, annual performance plan (APP), and improvement plans developed and approved following academic reviews.
- 29) As part of implementing the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, the University of Venda should follow through with the controls and mitigating actions identified in the risk register, requiring responsible executives to report quarterly on progress in line with the University of Venda quarterly reporting culture.
- 30) To provide high-impact support to the academic core business, the responsiveness and turn-around time of the non-academic support functions of the human resources and Departments of Finance need urgent and significant improvement. It is recommended that these functions urgently migrate to the digital and online systems which are available at the University of Venda, such as ITS.

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

Achievement of the purpose of the quality management system is evaluated in this report in terms of fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose, tracing fitness for purpose to the vision, mission, the strategic objectives, and the chosen contexts of UniVen while tracing fitness of purpose to the possible impacts of the manner in which the quality management system is supported with resources. All resources are utilized for the allocated purposes. Examples include human resources, financial resources, infrastructure, and IT. However, the staff capacity provided is insufficient to support the academic project. Instead, the University provides part-time staff, who are often poorly aligned with the academic project, and this is where the fitness for, and of purpose breaks down. The deployment of resources to the purposes has already been problematized in terms of the excessively long turn-around times, the centralization of processes even though Executive Deans are now in place, and the use of manual processes even though the resources for the digital migration and online automation are in place. Similarly, while staffing plans are in place, the inadequate response to staffing needs in terms of workload allocation policy and praxis has been problematized. On the other hand, the academic outcomes, such as pass rates, and throughputs, suggest that in spite of the poor fitness of purpose in resource allocation and utilization, there is overall enhancement in the fitness for purpose. The performance management system is utilized to evaluate the degree to which human resources, are productively utilized at UniVen. The assessment of the impact of the quality management system in terms of the limited stakeholder surveys is not enough to guarantee that the results show fitness for the strategic purposes. The quality management system therefore requires substantial improvement before it achieves fitness of purpose and fitness for purpose.

**Recommendations:**

- 31) The University of Venda should review its talent management plan and staffing profile to ensure decreased dependency on part-time academics with a view to the elimination thereof and achieving staff-to-student ratios that are commensurate with subject and discipline norms.
- 32) Following approval and adoption of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, the University of Venda should re-align all strategies, policies, plans, and standard operating procedures at all levels, including all the policies which regulate the academic project.

**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.*

In the SER, a system for programme design, approval, delivery, management, and review is described which derives from strategic objective 3 of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025. The system aims to enhance the curriculum, by stipulating the extent of curriculum review over this period, and by providing the policy and procedures for programme development and review, which provides a context for curriculum development and renewal and a basis for curriculum decisions, including the development of programme procedures and processes. The system consists of internal and external components. School and Faculty boards and the Senate are for internal approval, and the DHET, CHE, SAQA, and designated statutory bodies are external structures for funding, accreditation, and registration respectively. The SER stipulates that the IPQA, CHETL, and the Academic Departments are the internal organizational structures that are key participants in programme design, delivery, management, and review. The instructional products emanating from the system include the curriculum and course documents. The system also describes programme and delivery unit reviews as means for monitoring the capacity of UniVen for programme and curriculum development and management. An elaborate system is therefore in place for programme design, approval, delivery, management, and review. The effectiveness of the system is, however, challenged in several areas. These include review, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. The impact assessment of the system in terms of outcomes does seem to show that it is effective. The module and lecturer evaluation system provides some basic delivery level monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, like other universities, UniVen responded to the hard lockdown of 2020 and 2021 by migrating to emergency remote teaching and learning in which online modes dominated the learning and teaching landscape even though an institutional system approach for the development of an emergency remote teaching plan was not explicitly referred to in the SER, neither was the existence of an emergency remote teaching and learning plan confirmed. It is therefore concluded that the system is in place, but that improvements are required by resuming unit and programme reviews and designing and implementing strategies for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of the system, as well as for emergency remote teaching and learning.

**Recommendations:**

- 33) The University of Venda should review the Policy and Procedures for Programme Development so that it provides clear step-by-step activities for all the processes involved in the procedures, and to ensure that there is alignment with teaching and learning policies.
- 34) The University of Venda should reflect on which of the various components of the 360-degree evaluation system (self-evaluation, evaluation by students, peers, and line managers) to

include in its peer evaluation system and then revise its policies accordingly.

- 35) The University of Venda should describe fully its IQMS and evaluate the extent of coherence between programme intentions and implementation. Furthermore, the quality assurance policy will have to be reviewed to align with the IQMS, to regularize the lecturer and module evaluation practices at programme delivery level, and provide clear monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of classroom-level teaching and learning practices. The capacity within the IPQA directorate needs to be enhanced to enable reviews and planned quality assurance procedures and processes to take place within the policy-prescribed time periods to ensure that the quality of the academic project is continuously upheld.
- 36) The University of Venda should develop a Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan which can be implemented with agility in case of disruption and also to deal with the leadership and staff movement, with clear guidelines for agility in responding to such disruptions for business continuity and the assurance of the quality of the academic processes and graduate attributes.
- 37) The University of Venda should urgently address the lack of programme reviews within its quality assurance system by attending to the human capital weaknesses that have been identified in IPQA and the required funding thereof, which will enable the directorate to resume the cyclic reviews of 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 evidence supports the conclusion of the Panel that different levels and platforms are used at UniVen for evidence-based engagement in curriculum reform. Curriculum reform is informed at the highest level by strategic objective 3 of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, which directs that UniVen will review the programme and qualification mix (PQM) and introduce comprehensive university-type programmes, technology-enhanced learning and teaching, and a great deal of online content delivery. The purpose of the curriculum review agenda which is directed by the Strategic Plan is to maintain periodic review for a curriculum that is responsive and relevant to societal needs. The functional and expert debates on the reform of the curriculum, however, take place at Departmental meetings, curriculum-related committees, and other external stakeholders, such as professional bodies. Examples of professional bodies where such discussions take place include the Health Professions Council of South Africa and the South African Nursing Council. Therefore, as UniVen

advances towards a comprehensive university through curriculum reform, the role of advisory boards to bring the contribution of industry to curriculum reform is being considered. Language transformation at UniVen needs further consideration so as to ensure that as students are empowered for learning in English, the dominant indigenous languages are also afforded advancement in line with the national language policy. UniVen is using its community engagement and community-based research to optimize research-led curriculum reform. In this process, the research findings are used to elucidate the community needs that will be addressed by curriculum reform. A shining example in this regard is the Vuwani Science Center, which is used as a community engagement hub as well as a platform for numerous research projects. Importantly the Vuwani Science Center has been used for many years for the technology transformation of members of the surrounding communities and schools. The introduction of IT and the use of technology and devices is intended to prepare students for the world of work and service. The Panel therefore concluded that the engagement at various institutional levels, on curriculum transformation, reform, and renewal, learning and teaching innovation, technology in the curriculum, in the world of work, and in society in general is functional.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 38) The University of Venda should consider innovative teaching methodologies that will improve students' epistemological access and success and provide sufficiently scaffolded support for students for whom the English language acts as a barrier to learning and success.
- 39) As part of the quality enhancement and transformation, the University of Venda should appropriately respond to epistemological diversity in the classroom, for example by developing strategies for the use of indigenous languages.
- 40) The University of Venda should strengthen the relationship between CHETL and academics, focusing on how CHETL interacts with academics. For example, CHETL could consider creating platforms for debates on curriculum transformation, innovative learning and teaching through technology, and other teaching and learning discourses.
- 41) The University of Venda should mandate the IPQA office to have total oversight on all internal curriculum changes, regardless of whether they involve minor (< 50%) or major (>50%) changes.

***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.***

Several methods used for the assessment of the experience of students as a result of their exposure to undergraduate learning and teaching at UniVen, to determine whether it is positive or negative,



are described in the SER. However, the SER does not say how the students experienced their exposure to learning and teaching at UniVen, whether it was negative and disabled their success, or positive and enabled their success. However, this was established through the Panel interviews during the site visit. UniVen also plans to use this methodology at postgraduate level in the future. Past undergraduates and some of the current postgraduate students were thankful for their experience and successes gained from their time at UniVen. Being aggregated over the entire tenure of these students at UniVen, these were highly valued as valid responses. The SER states that CHETL analyses module and lecturer evaluation questionnaires and makes the reports available to the lecturers concerned, and also states that sometimes discussions are conducted. It would have assisted a great deal to have snapshot responses to short-term experiences of modules or courses from the results of the student feedback analysis conducted by CHETL. Current students in the main were quite despondent. The main criticism emanated from the lack of or poor responsiveness of UniVen to the concerns and complaints of students. Examples include the closure of the library for nearly 3 years, poor WiFi and connectivity on campus, and slow response to the lack of uninterrupted power supply to curb the effects of load-shedding on campus and at some of the residences. Although students receive additional support to improve their experience, such as Student Counselling and Career Development, a variety of sporting codes, arts, and cultural activities, appeals against academic exclusion, requests to complete qualifications at other institutions of higher learning, applications for late registration, applications for status recognition and credit recognition, and deferment of studies, the impact of these on the experience of students was hardly acknowledged in the SER and hardly mentioned by students. Careful integration of robust methodologies accessible through collaborative initiatives and reporting of the responses to enable improvement of the methods will contribute to functionality.

### **Recommendations:**

- 42) The University of Venda should develop the key outcome indicators of student success and ensure that the set of student graduate attributes in its mission, vision, and goals are speedily developed.
- 43) The University of Venda should prioritize the resuscitation of its partnership with the University of the Free State to conduct The Beginning University Survey of Student Engagement (BUSSE) and South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) surveys.
- 44) The University of Venda should review how it handles student complaints and other student experience-related issues so that they can be dealt with quickly without escalating into strikes and without students being sent from one point to another, thus gathering frustration. In this regard, given the single campus configuration of the University of Venda, a single point of care is highly recommended.

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

The tracking of the workplace destinations of university graduates has been an important factor in the review of curricula, the design and assessment of the student experience, and graduate attributes. It is meant to influence and improve the learning and campus life experiences of current students by understanding the employment future of past students as well as what influences workplace performance. Despite the SER and site visit outcomes which indicated that UniVen does not currently conduct any graduate tracking activities in this regard, residual activity was established which does collect and present data on the destinations of graduates to the University. For example, the number of graduates that are, have been, or are self-employed, was available from the UniVen Devman IT System in 2021, which showed 2 022 graduates who have indicated their employers and employment positions. In addition, in programmes such as Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase, Bachelor of Education in Further Training, and Bachelor of Nursing, the SER states that most of the graduates get employed soon after graduation and that in programmes such as Accounting, it can take graduates less than two years to get employment. In the Bachelor of Arts in Development Studies, and Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, and Media Studies, it takes more than two years for graduates to get employment. This is valuable information on the tracking of graduates to determine their employment status. Therefore, there is some activity in the area of tracking of the workplace destinations of some of the UniVen graduates, and this presents reasonable grounds to consider that graduate tracking exists, albeit not fully developed. It therefore needs substantial improvement.

**Recommendations:**

- 45) The University of Venda should regularly conduct graduate employability and destination surveys to provide data on the nature and expected duration of their graduates' employment or self-employment and whether their employment or self-employment is directly related to their programme of study. These surveys can be used to probe for further information that can assist the University in transforming the curriculum and improving the student experience.
- 46) The University of Venda should recall unemployed graduates for micro-credentialing in line with soft skills that are currently highly valued in the workplace, and in this way improve the employability of its unemployed graduates.
- 47) The University of Venda should develop a community engagement strategy that would enable it to successfully influence transformation imperatives in associated industries.