



COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT REPORT

ON

RHODES UNIVERSITY

(8 February 2024)

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ACRONYM	DEFINITION
ALF	Academic Leadership Forum
APP	Annual Performance Plan
APCQC	Academic Programmes & Curriculum Quality Committee
AU	African Union
CATALyst	Conversations About Assessment, Teaching and Learning
CE	Community Engagement
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHERTL	Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning
CoD	Chairs of Departments
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DSA	Division of Student Affairs
ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
EdTech	Educational Technology
E&IC	Equity and Institutional Culture
EMP	Emergency Management Plan
ERT	Emergency Remote Teaching
FB	Faculty Board
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
HE	Higher Education
HEDA	Higher Education Data Analyser
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HoD	Head of Department

HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDP	Institutional Development Plan
IF	Institutional Forum
IPC	Institutional Planning Committee
I&R	Instruction and Research
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
IQMS	Internal Quality Management Systems
IRPQP	Institutional Research, Planning and Quality Promotion
IT	Information Technology
ITP	Institutional Transformation Plan
I&TS	Information and Technology Services
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LMS	Learning Management System
MRTEQ	Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications
NDP	National Development Plan
nGAP	New Generation of Academics Programme
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
PG	Postgraduate
PGDip (HE)	Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
POPI	Protection of Personal Information

PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
QA	Quality Assurance
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
QM	Quality Management
QMS	Quality Management System
QPF	Quality Promotion Framework
RC	Research Committee
RU	Rhodes University
SABPP	South African Board for People's Practice
SADC	South African Development Community
SAM	Senior Administrative Management
SAICA	South African Institute of Chartered Accountants
SAPC	South African Pharmacy Council
SARChI	South African Research Chair Initiatives
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SETA	Sector Education Training Authority
SLP	Service-Learning Programme
STLC	Senate Teaching and Learning Committee
T&L	Teaching and Learning
UCDP	University Capacity Development Programme
UG	Undergraduate
UN	United Nations
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 ensure quality in the South African (SA) higher education (HE) 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 (QA) responsibilities through its permanent committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The CHE, through the HEQC, exercises its QA 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 with 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 higher education institution (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, and to what extent, the internal quality assurance (IQA) systems, policies and procedures of an institution ensure the effective provisioning of good quality higher education that enhances the likelihood of student success through quality teaching and learning, 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 Rhodes University (RU):

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 (QM) and assurance (QA) systems.
2. The uniqueness of each institution in terms of 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 reviewing, 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 the quality management system (QMS) at an institution.
5. The institutional audit is a peer-driven and evidence-based process to ensure that the HEQC and its audit reports are transparent, informed, and consistent.
6. Institutional audit panels 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 broad-based QA mandate of the HEQC.

Aligned with 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 self-evaluation by the institution. The external peer review consists of a document analysis of the SER and the institutional portfolio of evidence (PoE), as well as a site visit during which interviews are conducted with constituencies and physical infrastructure is visited. This audit report forms the outcome of the institutional audit of RU.

A brief overview of the institution

Rhodes University was established in 1904, in Makhanda, in the Eastern Cape. Several measures have been taken in recent years to acknowledge the colonial history of the institution and to ensure that it reflects critically on its responsibility to do public good and to remedy the injustices of the segregated and apartheid past.

Rhodes University is a residential research-intensive institution in existence for the past 118 years. Over the past two decades, the student and staff composition profiles changed by faculty, race, gender, home language, citizenship, school quintile, residence: oppidan split, student: staff ratio, permanent academic staff, and research outputs.

Rhodes University is a single-facility, traditional, residential HEI. With just over 8,500 registered students, RU is recognised as amongst the smallest universities in South Africa. The institution has shown an upward trajectory in female student enrolments, with 67% of females registered in 2021 compared to 62% in 2020. The safety and security of students and staff, particularly in terms of sexual and gender-based violence are matters that are taken seriously at RU. Rhodes University draws

students from all quintile schools. In 2021, 21.8% of all registered students were from quintile 5 schools. In 2000, 49% of registered students were black compared to 86% in 2020. The increasing number of registered students from poor and working-class backgrounds and groups described as from the 'missing middle', draws attention to financial sustainability in relation to rising fees and affordability of university education, especially in the context of insufficient National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funding. Approximately 55% of the student population speaks a home language other than English or Afrikaans, with 39.8% speaking isiXhosa at home. This equates to 30.4% of the student body, which points to the need for English language support for a substantial number of students, which requires the acceleration of an enabling multilingual environment.

In the period 2020–2021, the postgraduate (PG) student composition ranged between 29% and 30% and varied across faculties with Pharmacy registering 8%; Science, 43%; Education, 48%; Humanities, 21%; Law, 6%; and Commerce, 33%. Rhodes University has historically had 20% or more international students, mostly from the South African Development Community (SADC) region. In 2017, the number of international students however dropped to 17%, and in 2021, it was as low as 11%, probably due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The University expressed its concern about the effects of national xenophobia and the ongoing issues regarding student visas affecting RU recruitment of international students.

Almost 50% of Rhodes students and most undergraduates live in university residences, while there are also special residences catering for PG students. Through a well-established structure of wardens, sub-wardens, and residence committees, the residences play a significant role in overall student development, including developing leadership skills.

Rhodes University produces 3% of research outputs nationally, providing a per capita research output of 2.12 unweighted units per permanent academic staff member. It has an international footprint and an ability to draw international students from the rest of the African continent and beyond. Student success rates have remained high and above 80% in the last five years compared to a sector average of 78%, despite serious challenges, such as students and staff experiencing difficulties with distance and remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021. Although student success rates are high, graduation rates are distorted by the number of students not generating a sufficient full-time equivalent (FTE). The graduation rates at RU dipped from 30% historically to 20% in 2021. Rhodes University also has the highest concentration, per capita, of South African Research Chair Initiative (SARChI) Chairs in the SA HE sector. It has a high proportion of students in on-campus residence housing with one-third being first-year students in residences. These residences provide living and educational spaces conducive to learning. The rural setting in Makhanda (Grahamstown) in the poverty-stricken Eastern Cape, which is 130 km from the nearest airport Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), is a constraint on attracting and retaining highly qualified staff.

Rhodes University has six faculties (Humanities, Commerce, Education, Law, Science and Pharmacy), with traditional undergraduate (UG) qualifications (general formative degrees with dual majors) being offered in Humanities, Commerce and Science. Pharmacy offers a single four-year professional UG qualification, as does the Law Faculty. The Education Faculty offers top-up UG qualifications, one-year PG certificates and diplomas, and one full-time Bachelor of Education degree in Foundation Phase Teaching. Curriculum flexibility is encouraged, and students are provided with options to take courses across faculties.

Faculty size differs, ranging from Humanities, which in 2021 registered 42% students, followed by Science (18%), Commerce (15%), Education (13%), Pharmacy (9%) and Law (3%).

In 2021, RU had a permanent academic staff complement of 356, while the audited FTE (permanent and temporary staff) for the academic programme stood at 461.99 FTE, with an additional 104 FTE staff contributing to the academic endeavour. The proportion of RU academic staff with a doctoral degree (60%) is higher than the norm (48%) for the sector nationally.

The ratio of academic staff to students is favourable for ensuring students have close contact with academic staff, but it is unfavourable in terms of financial sustainability. The University has good student success rates, which are consistently above 80%, which was above the sector average of 78% over the past five years.

Rhodes University contributes approximately 3% to sectoral research outputs. The ratio of permanent academic staff to research outputs is 2.12 unweighted units per permanent academic member, which ranks among the highest in South Africa. These ratios mask a small number of “extremely productive” researchers and an “ageing productive” cohort of academics and attests to the capability of the institution to train, recruit, and retain a younger cohort of researchers who could replace this group.

The total headcount of all Council-funded staff dropped from 1 381 in 2020 to 1 325 in 2021. The employment equity breakdown in terms of all Council-funded staff in 2021 was as follows: African, at 779 (58.8%); coloured, at 168 (12.7%); Indian, at 26 (2%); and white, at 352 (26.5%). The proportion of black staff to white staff is 73.5% to 26.5%. The proportion of support staff to academic staff is 74% to 26%. Notably, RU does not outsource cleaning, residential operations or facilities, or a component of the campus security services. This provides an avenue for employment in the Makhanda community, which needs to be monitored in terms of financial sustainability.

The total headcount of Council-funded academic staff (the instructional and research category of staff) dropped from 358 in 2020 to 356 in 2021. In 2020, of the academic staff, 60% had doctoral degrees, which was higher than the national average of 46%. The racialised employment equity breakdown in terms of all Council-funded academic staff in 2021 was: African (31.5%), coloured (8.7%), Indian (3.7%) and white (56.1%). The proportion of black staff to white staff was 43.9% to 56.1%.

Of the permanent academic staff, 14% hold the rank of professor; 23%, the rank of associate professor; 26%, the rank of senior lecturer; and 35% are at lecturer level. Within the category instructional and research staff, there is an ageing professorship (i.e. over the age of 55) with 63% being professors, and 37%, associate professors.

The small size of RU together with a high staff to student ratio is regarded as a strength, with the students having a good chance of success through close contact with their lecturers. The changes in the demographic profile of the students are not commensurate with the slow changes in the staff profile. The measures in place, such as mentoring and relying considerably on the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP), although necessary, are not sufficient to bridge this gap.

A brief overview of the audit process

Rhodes University commenced its internal audit review as part of the CHE review process towards the end of 2021 under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notwithstanding this, the University submitted its Institutional SER, which was conducted according to the *CHE Framework for Institutional Audits* (CHE 2021).

The SER outlines the context of RU, located in the Eastern Cape, one of the poorest provinces, and within the poverty-stricken town of Makhanda characterised by service delivery problems including problems with the provision of water, inadequate wastewater treatment capacity, intermittent electricity supply, inadequate quality of public roads and dilapidated physical infrastructure. In recent years, these challenges have put much pressure on the University and its community affecting, among other things, the achievement of enrolment targets and attracting and retaining staff. Notwithstanding the endeavours by the University to mitigate the service delivery challenges of Makhanda, the Panel had first-hand experience of the inadequate supply of water and intermittent electricity supply whilst conducting the site visits and recognises these as having significant effects on the operations and the finances of the institution.

The self-evaluation process has allowed faculties, departments, centres, the governance structure and all related stakeholders to reflect on the institutional context and on the collective contribution towards quality across the academic project and interdependent domains. The intensive reflective process culminated in the institution attributing a rating for each standard (as shown in Appendix C) according to the prescribed CHE scale of Mature (M), Functional (F), Needing Substantial Improvement (NSI), or Non-functional (NF).

The final version of the SER was submitted to the CHE for external peer review by the CHE-appointed Panel comprising the names as shown in Appendix A. The review Panel convened on 11 August 2022, and underwent a reviewer induction programme presented by the CHE. This was followed by a series of weekly meetings interspersed with extensive reading and analyses of the SER and the

PoE. The Panel was guided by the four CHE Focus Areas and associated Standards. Panel members reviewed and deliberated the evidence pertaining to the Standards and developed lines of enquiry to be used as the basis for the site visit interviews with a view to obtaining further information and clarity on the SER.

The site visit took place at the RU campus from 18 to 22 September 2022. The site visit entailed 40 scheduled interview sessions with key individuals or stratifications of university personnel (see Appendix B) and visits to various campus facilities including the Registrar's Division, residences, laboratories, and library services.

The principal benefits of the SER preparation were expressed by the interviewees who indicated that it provided the institution with the opportunity to interrogate and reflect on its own practices and to triangulate views and opinions of their effectiveness with peers. The SER also allowed the working groups to focus on institutional strengths and weaknesses, verifying policies and practises, and exploring cross-institutional differences.

Across the range of interviews conducted by the Panel in the course of the site visit, interviewees (apart from a few) concurred on the positive effect of the SER process as being important for analysing what they had reported relative to the other and associated viewpoints contained in the various iterations of the report indicating, "it was like looking in the mirror" and "working together for progress".

Participants emphasised that the process afforded them time to "jointly reflect and to gain a full appreciation of how our work impacted on students" and "how we individually and jointly meet the standards".

The weeklong campus-based site visit added another dimension to the reflective process, as the Panel engaged in further conversations with those who had participated directly or indirectly in the SER report.

During interviews, the Panel however learnt that there were participants who reported that they did not see their views represented in the SER; yet, they had made contributions that they had imagined would be reflected upon in the SER. When this was deliberated upon, it became clear that some information was lost during the editing process, as the SER was becoming too bulky, and some voices were lost as a result.

The site visit enabled the Panel to meet the various participants to be interviewed. While almost all meetings were face-to-face, it was necessary that the meetings were also conducted using an online hybrid modality since one of the Panel members was in the United Kingdom and needed to participate online. The hybrid modality also made it possible for RU staff who were unable to be present to attend the interview virtually.

In line with the CHE requirements, none of the interview sessions was recorded nor was a designated scribe appointed. Each member compiled his or her own notes and, in the writing of this report, the Panel members relied on the internal discussions and the notes, which each Panel member made during the interviews.

The following is a summary of the audit Panel's commendations and recommendations for RU.

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 played by the *governance, strategic planning* (as contained in its *vision, mission, and strategic goals*), *management* and *academic leadership* at the Institution in its quality management. The intention is to enhance the likelihood of student success; to improve the quality of teaching, learning, and research engagement; and to accommodate the results of constructive integrated community engagement.

The standards are:

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

As stated in the SER and validated by the Panel through interactions with stakeholders during the site visit, the University has a clearly stated vision, mission and strategic goals as recorded in the 2018–2022 RU Institutional Development Plan (IDP) and University Calendar 2022. These were developed in consultation with key stakeholders, approved by the Council, and regularly reviewed and aligned with the business model of the institution. The term of the current strategic plan expired at the end of 2022. The vision and mission are already under review, and goals are being revisited to ensure responsiveness to unresolved issues, new complex challenges and the changing context in which higher education operates. The review will need to reflect on the last twenty years, inclusive of the major events, namely #FeesMustFall and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have influenced the various facets of the academic project. As part of the review, the University is also looking at its Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) with a view to ensure that, as a research-intensive University, appropriate programmes and qualifications are introduced, which are meant to propel a further increase of enrolment of students at PG level.

Recommendation 1

The Panel recommends that, as part of the review of IDP on strategic goals, the University reflects on Goal 1 in particular around the maintenance and strengthening of general formative degree offerings as opposed to a balance with professional degree offerings. This will enable the University to be responsive and relevant to the needs of its geographical area, which is poverty-stricken with a high rate of unemployment. This will also address the plight of some of the students from such geographical areas who are first-generation graduates in their families and whose main concern is to look for employment opportunities in the Makana municipal area, upon completion of their first degrees.

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

The Panel was of the view that the vision and goal statements, core values and principles, even though these had been adopted before the national priorities were formulated, are aligned with national priorities and respond to the NDP, Africa Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. The vision and mission statements of RU and the core values and principles of the University were developed and adopted before the adoption of the NDP by the government in 2011, the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 (adopted in 2013), and the United Nations (UN) SDGs (adopted in 2015). The University has nevertheless evaluated its vision and mission statements and core values to bring them in alignment with these subsequent developments while acknowledging much still has to be done as part of the 2018–2022 IDP review. There is a demonstrable alignment of the strategic goals and objectives of the University with the NDP, Africa Agenda 2063 and the SDGs and practical realisation of the support that the University provides for these initiatives as evidenced in Table 5 of the SER and corroborated during the site visit.

Standard 3: *There is demonstrable strategic alignment between the institutional 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 roles and responsibilities of Executive Management are clearly expressed and delineated in terms of responsibility and accountability. In addition to this, there is demonstrable evidence of a clear

understanding and appreciation of line management within the context of collegiality. The individual management portfolios are comprehensive and involve a wide range of responsibilities given the small size of the University. The University responds appropriately to matters of governance, management, ethical leadership, and resource allocation while operating under a limited but well-managed budget.

Although the University has introduced a review system of academic departments, support services and research on a cyclical basis of three to six years, upon engagement with relevant stakeholders during the site visit, it became apparent that the review system has not been extended formally to the academic programmes other than professional ones by external statutory and professional bodies. Evidence provided showed that only professional programmes are subjected to such reviews and re-accreditation by professional bodies such as the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) and the South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC). This creates a risk to other programmes of the University to ensure that they remain responsive and relevant. Notwithstanding these, the University has successfully managed to conceptualise and establish the Institutional Planning and Review Framework, the Institutional Planning Committee (IPC), the Directorate: Institutional Research, Planning and Quality Promotion (IRPQP), and the institutional budgeting processes as cohesive and complementary units and activities.

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 governance structure at RU is aligned with the Higher Education Act, 1997, as amended, and the RU Institutional Statute. It comprises key governance bodies including the Council, as the highest governing body for institutional governance and the Senate, which is responsible for academic governance. An Institutional Forum (IF) and a Student Representative Council (SRC) are also in place. Interviews with the representatives from these bodies pointed to a sense of collegiality and solidarity with no divergent and opposing views expressed or noticed during the site visit.

The institutional reporting lines between the governance structures and associated roles appear to be well understood, observed, and adhered to by all role players in the University. The Council representatives interviewed indicated satisfaction with the level of accountability, including the flow of information between Management and the Council, and the overall functioning of the structures that report to Council.

The University organogram is lean but reflects the size of the institution, which is small, as stated in the SER and reiterated by the stakeholders during interactions with the Panel. The organisational structure relates to the size and shape of the Institution, that is, with limited senior executives, each with a finite set of directorates and faculties reporting under the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC):

Academic and Student Affairs (A&SA). The RU organogram mirrors the size of the University in terms of its PQM and enrolment planning. A formal induction for all new DVCs, Deans, Directors and heads of departments (HoDs), taking into account that the University, to promote intellectual diversity, will always strive to recruit, not only internally but externally as well, should be considered.

Recommendation 2

The Panel recommends that the University review the existing induction system and initiatives with a view to introducing a formal inclusive induction system for all different categories of staff upon appointment, to accommodate externally appointed staff members meant to promote intellectual diversity at the Institution. The system should be varied in accordance with the roles and responsibilities of staff.

Focus Area 2: The design and implementation of the institutional quality management system support the core academic functions

The four standards in Focus Area 2 concentrate on how the *design and implementation of an integrated QMS* at the Institution enhance the likelihood of student success; improve the quality of teaching, learning, and research engagement; and accommodate the results of constructive, integrated community engagement within the context of the mission of the Institution. These standards are:

Standard 5: *A QA system is in place comprising, at a minimum, giving effect to the delivery of the core functions of the HEI:*

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

The Panel considered many different facets regarding whether a QA system is in place according to this standard. The University has developed governance arrangements, structures, processes, and sound policies, which support the core academic functions that have evolved and are embedded in the institutional QMS. These are regularly reviewed through the statutory committees and ensure that the QA system supports core academic functions. However, there are clear areas for improvement under the areas covered by this standard, as reflected in the recommendations, which seek to enhance the level of coherence and alignment between policy and practice.

Recommendation 3

The Panel recommends that RU review its Quality Promotion Framework (QPF) for Teaching and Learning (T&L) to strengthen the coherence and alignment across individual policies and the overarching principles for teaching and learning. More specifically, this review should include:

- Consideration of whether the current Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Course Design includes a common or standardised evaluation instrument for assessing the quality of course materials and the student learning experience.
- Greater attention needs to be placed on sharing evaluation results with students as partners in their own learning.
- Consideration of a stronger emphasis in the Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning on the benefits of new digital forms of assessment and student feedback as part of the RU commitment to a blended learning experience. This policy should also ensure alignment between new initiatives in the area of academic integrity.
- Revision of the current Policy on Plagiarism to reflect contemporary developments in academic integrity better. Renaming this policy accordingly is recommended. There is an opportunity to support the policy in an educative manner by adapting some of the online resources developed by leading agencies and organisations working in this area.

Recommendation 4

The Panel recommends strengthening the level of training and professional development available to departmental leadership in terms of staff appraisal to enhance the support on how to assess, monitor, and enable quality teaching and learning.

Recommendation 5

The Panel recommends reviewing the dual role of the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL) to determine whether the current structure or arrangements serve the academic development and technology-enhanced learning needs of those who teach and support teaching at RU best.

Recommendation 6

The Panel recommends strengthening existing QA processes, support, and resources for course design to harness the transformative potential of blended learning better and to give priority to implementing common design templates and targeted professional development of programme teams to help enhance the student learning experience on a programme-wide basis.

Recommendation 7

The Panel recommends continuing to pilot and explore the potential of fit-for-purpose Information Technology (IT) systems to provide more integrated, enterprise-wide, and strategic use of learning analytics to support targeted interventions that would enhance student success and the quality of the student learning experience.

Standard 6: *Human, infrastructure, knowledge management, and financial resources support the delivery of the core academic functions of the institution across all sites of provision, in alignment with the concomitant QMS, in accordance with the mission of the institution.*

The Executive Management as well as senior members of management and leadership across academic, administrative and support divisions reflect extensive HE experience, knowledge, competencies and ability to oversee the execution of the QMS at RU. The University strives within its means to provide quality infrastructure and services in support of the academic endeavour. The Institution would however benefit from increased capital investment in physical classrooms and learning spaces – as budget constraints permit – to match the investment in digital infrastructure in order to enhance core academic functions.

Commendation A

The Panel commends the significant investment over recent years in IT infrastructure in a challenging resourcing environment to provide staff and students with digital tools and to develop a digital campus that supports teaching, research, and other core academic functions.

Commendation B

The Panel commends the commitment to employing people in the Makhanda community to deliver services and maintain core operations.

Recommendation 8

The Panel recommends that RU give priority to investing in the modernisation of classrooms and physical learning spaces to support active learning and the integration of digital technologies in the T&L experience. Stronger emphasis should also be placed on course teams developing a coherent blended learning experience rather than leaving teaching innovation to individual lecturers.

Recommendation 9

The Panel recommends that RU pay increased attention to the threat of cybersecurity in the move to

cloud-based IT infrastructure, including related protocols, awareness raising, and adequate training of staff.

Recommendation 10

The Panel recommends that particular attention be given to staff well-being issues, as staff and students at RU adjust to work-life balance in the new normal following the COVID-19 crisis.

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 QMS so as to inform consistent and sustainable decision-making.*

Rhodes University has an electronic data management and retrieval system, which is protected and legally compliant. The system is of an integrated nature across various areas of data management (bespoke student management system, SAGE 300, ARCHIBUS, HEDA, and Oracle). Further capacity is however needed in predictive learner analytics to enhance institutional quality management, academic achievement, and student success.

The University commits to developing its Information and Communications Technology (ICT) capacity further to enhance data retention and management control. Several initiatives are underway to increase capacity in learner and learning analytics data to support institutional quality management, academic achievement, and student success. These initiatives need to be evaluated formally to ensure key lessons to inform future developments.

Recommendation 11

The Panel recommends that RU give priority to finalising and approving its data analytics policy to ensure stronger data retention and management control in the context of the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act of 2013.

Recommendation 12

The Panel recommends that RU formally evaluate the new capacity development initiatives in learner and learning analytics data to ensure key lessons inform relevant policies, professional development initiatives, and future investments in the area.

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

Rhodes University has up-to-date systems and processes to monitor and support the QM capacity of the Institution. All staff members responsible for decision-making on quality management in terms of

the core academic functions have electronic access to protected and reliable data. Aspects of the systems and processes could however be modernised. While there is scope for some modernisation of internal systems and processes, they served the Institution well during the COVID-19 crisis.

Commendation C

The Panel commends the development of a Risk Management Plan Framework, an Emergency Management Plan (EMP), and related systems and processes, which played a key role in helping to maintain business continuity and served the Institution well during the COVID-19 crisis.

Commendation D

The Panel commends the participatory process around budgeting processes that allowed the different entities at the Institution to engage in decision-making in terms of budget allocations.

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

The four standards in Focus Area 3 concentrate on the coherence and integration of the various components comprising the institutional QMS, and on how these work in concert to support the likelihood of student success; improve the quality of teaching, learning, and research engagement; and accommodate the results of constructive integrated community engagement in accordance with the mission of the Institution. These standards are discussed below

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

The Panel considered the various components of Standard 9 and concurred that the Institution has a system that monitors and evaluates the quality of the core functions of teaching, learning, research, and community engagement at the Institution and that these elements have the capacity to monitor new developments. The components of the QA system were found to be synergistic and in concert. The integration enables a structured relationship between them and contributes to the student success rates that have remained high (above 80%) in the last five years amidst several challenges facing the Institution. The Panel noted that the management of staff performance was informal. While these arrangements may work for a small community, the Institution may require more structuring of its systems for managing performance should its staff complement increase.

Recommendation 13

The Panel recommends that RU establish ways of assessing the performance of staff in a more

coherent, structured, and developmental way that could contribute further to staff development and institutional performance in more targeted and personalised ways. Once instituted, managers of performance and their staff should be inducted to use the system.

Standard 10: *Evidence-based regular and dedicated governance and management oversight of the QA system exists at all levels.*

The QPF directs all quality with the ultimate responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning located within faculties and academic departments. The HoDs are at the interface and are responsible for assuring quality and its promotion and for holding lecturers (and administrative staff) responsible for quality-related matters. These are dealt with on the spot or are escalated to the faculty level if necessary. All faculties and academic departments have structures for direct oversight and for the implementation of quality standards as stipulated in the RU Quality Framework, policies and guidelines, and each course coordinator provides quality control over the courses for which he or she is responsible. The Panel noted bottlenecks in finances and procurements, which affect efficiencies.

Recommendation 14

The Panel recommends that RU ensure that the implementation of quality assurance from the departmental level to the Senate is coordinated in a way that ensures integration and coherence institutionally to ensure compliance with the same standards as outlined in the Quality Management Framework.

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

The Institution has regulatory budgeting processes in place to support assurance measures and to ensure that these include optimal processes for allocating resources.

Recommendation 15

The Panel recommends that the formula for allocating staff cost units takes into account the changing demographics and the increasing numbers of students from low-quintile schools who need additional support. The formula for determining cost units should go beyond simple student headcounts and should consider the need for student support as well as the number of courses on offer in departments.

Recommendation 16

The Panel recommends that the bottlenecks in finances and procurements be evaluated in terms of their efficiencies. While the Oracle system is intended to overcome delays, training needs to be

provided for managers to use the system.

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

The QA system was found to be efficient and effective, and the resources (human, financial and infrastructure) allocated to the QMS were used for their intended purpose. There are a number of systems in place at institutional, faculty and department levels to ensure that allocated resources are used as budgeted to benefit the Institution for quality academic outcomes. The Institution has a good record of managing its finances with well-resourced facilities necessary for upholding quality. During the site visits, some interviewees however complained about the lack of maintenance of lecture rooms and other facilities.

With regard to stakeholder engagements, including engagements with students, it was found that the Institution communicated and worked collaboratively with students and external stakeholders (specifically through its community engagement [CE] outreach) to ensure the continuation of the core business.

Commendation E

The Panel commends RU for the quality and the rapidity of its response to the pandemic, enabling the University to complete the 2020 academic year in that year.

Recommendation 17

The Panel recommends that RU develop a policy or guidelines in terms of which courses or parts of courses should be presented online, and which should be presented face to face. Students need to be made aware of the delivery modalities.

Recommendation 18

The Panel recommends that the development of the newly initiated student analytics and case management system for tracking vulnerable students be accelerated.

Recommendation 19

The Panel recognised the range of academic support interventions in place but suggests that the recent drop in pass rates and the changing demographics may require additional targeted approaches to providing academic support.

Recommendation 20

The Panel recommends that RU consider increasing the number of counsellors and career guidance

advisors and/or complementary approaches and utilisation of appropriate resources to address the needs of staff and students.

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

The four standards in Focus Area 4 concentrate on how effectively the institutional QMS enhances the likelihood of student success; improves teaching and learning; and supports the scholarship of teaching and learning.

There are many structures and processes in place to ensure effective institutional systems for programme design, approval, delivery, management, and review. The institutional culture of reflexive practice is evident through many informal reviews of courses and programmes. This is commendable, and has, without a doubt, contributed to the quality of the programmes. The Institution nevertheless acknowledges that its processes need a system-wide approach, particularly in some areas of teaching and learning that need to be strengthened, such as maintaining a centralised record of curriculum reviews.

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

Commendation F

The Panel commends RU for the institutional culture of reflexive practice evident through many informal reviews of courses and programmes. This has, without a doubt, contributed to the quality of the programmes.

Commendation G

The Panel commends RU lecturers and those who support teaching along with the CHERTL for their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under challenging circumstances, the Panel found evidence that RU was able to continue to support teaching, learning and assessment through its rapid turn to online delivery. There is also evidence that this experience was the catalyst for an increased strategic emphasis on realising the potential of blended learning.

Recommendation 21

The Panel recommends that RU monitor the implementation of a new institution-wide evaluation of programme review processes and procedures.

- Regular planned and scheduled (not ad hoc) reviews should be instituted for all programmes

at RU, within 3-year review cycles, to include student and peer feedback.

- The Institution should gather and store evidence that would demonstrate the reviews of programmes.
- Tools and templates as mechanisms for monitoring should be developed and used across the Institution.

Recommendation 22

The Panel recommends that the existing workload models for teaching be updated for improved recognition of the time required to develop high-quality online and blended courses.

Standard 14: *There is evidence-based engagement at various institutional levels among staff and among staff and students in terms of:*

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

Overall, there is a strong culture of valuing evidence-based and innovative curricula, assessment and teaching methods at RU, which are aligned with the institutional mission, vision, and goals as well as T&L policies. The Institution however needs to continue keeping up with the fast pace of digital transformation. The Institution is contributing to students' epistemological access and is actively advancing the development of isiXhosa as a language of teaching and learning and as an academic language.

Commendation H

The Panel commends the work done at RU in relation to language as an enabler, rather than a barrier to learning.

Recommendation 23

The Panel recommends that regular institutional self-assessment and benchmarking be undertaken in the rapidly evolving area of online and blended learning.

Recommendation 24

The Panel recommends that RU place an increased focus on supporting the development of students' digital skills for effective learning and success through online and blended learning.

Standard 15: *The students' exposure to teaching and learning across all sites and modes of provision at the Institution is experienced as positive and enabling of their success.*

Most students experience teaching and learning in their departments and faculties as positive and enabling of their success. Due to the small size of the Institution, it appears that it is easy for academics, HoDs and deans to be aware of students who are struggling at RU and who may need either academic or psychosocial support. The University is working towards upscaling student-centred academic support. There is a culture of evaluation of teaching and courses to enable the student voices to be heard for re-curriculation and renewal. There is also a long-standing and well-established process for the evaluation of teaching and courses.

Commendation I

The Panel commends RU on a long-standing and well-established process for the evaluation of teaching and courses.

Recommendation 25

The Panel recommends that line managers be provided with improved training and professional development on how to conduct effective staff reviews and support individual development plans.

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

There are some formal and informal data on the successful employment of many RU graduates. Deans report that some departments are including preparation for the world of work as part of formative degree curricula. The Alumni Office has established a number of activities to connect with RU alumni all over the world. The lack of formal tracer studies institutionally and efforts to trace and understand the employability of all graduates in a changing world needs improvement.

Rhodes University has recognised that the elements of this standard (Standard 16) have not received sufficient, targeted attention in the past. Since 2020, RU has however collaborating with an external agency to do research on its behalf.

Recommendation 26

The Panel recommends that a deliberate strategy in terms of tracking of graduates be implemented.