



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT REPORT ON THE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

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ACRONYMS

ADAPTIT	Provider of specialised software and digitally-led business solutions
APP	Annual Performance Plan
APU	Academic Planning Unit
BAAP	Black Academics Advancement Programme
BUSSE	Beginning University Survey of Student Engagement
CAPEX	Capital Expenditure
CE	Community Engagement
CEU	Community Engagement Unit
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CIECT	Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DLTSS	Directorate of Learning, Teaching and Student Success
DRS	Developing the Research Scholar
DVC: Academic	Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic Affairs
DVC: RI	Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research & Innovation
EE	Employment Equity
ERTL	Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning
FAPC	Faculty Academic Planning Committee
FLTP	Flexible Learning and Teaching Provision
FYE	First Year Experience
HDI	Historically Disadvantaged Institution
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HoDs	Heads of Departments
HR	Human Resources
ICS	Information and Communication Services
IF	Institutional Forum
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
IT	Information Technology
IOP	Integrated Operating Plan
LMS	Learning Management System
MAS	Marks Administration System

MIS	Management Information System
NDP	National Development Plan
NESP	Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme
nGAP	New Generation of Academics Programme
NRF	National Research Foundation
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NSS	National Student Survey
OSD	Office for Student Development
OPEX	Operational Expenditure
PDS	Performance Development System
PMS	Performance Management System
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
PowerHEDA	Power Higher Education Data Architecture
PQM	Programme/Qualification Mix
QA	Quality Assurance
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
QA&E	Quality Assurance and Enhancement
QA-MIS	Quality Assurance Management Information System
QIP	Quality Improvement Plans
QMS	Quality Management System
RI	Research and Innovation
RMS	Residence Management Systems
SAP	Senate Academic Planning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASI	Student Administration System
SASSE	South African Survey of Student Engagement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEC	Senate Executive Committee
SEMS	Student Enrolment Management System
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SoTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
SRC	Student Representative Council
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
T&L	Teaching and Learning

UCDG	University Capacity Development Grant
UCDP	University Capacity Development Project
USDP	University Staff Doctoral Programme
UWC	University of the Western Cape
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)*¹ and its attendant *Manual for Institutional Audits (2021)*² are key instruments to regulate the implementation of institutional audits. These documents are also aligned in important aspects to the new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)³ that was approved by the HEQC and Council in September 2020 and which will be implemented in the medium term by the CHE. Institutional audits are strongly influenced by both the specific context within which each higher education institution (HEI) works and by the national transformational agenda within which higher education functions. The HEQC identified a need to undertake full audits of all HEIs in South Africa. A full audit of an institution determines whether and to what extent an institution's internal 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.

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>

The following principles guided the institutional audit of the University of the Western Cape (UWC):

1. The primary responsibility for internal quality assurance rests with the individual HEI. Each institution is responsible for the establishment, implementation, maintenance, improvement and enhancement of its own quality management and assurance systems.
2. The uniqueness of each institution's size, shape, location, context, and mission is recognised.
3. The value of institutional audits rests on the compilation of credible, contextually relevant, and reliable information that is required for internal quality-related planning and self-evaluation, peer review and public reporting (for example, by publishing executive summaries).
4. Student experience, student engagement and participation and the student voice are central to an evaluation of an institution's quality management system.
5. The institutional audit is a peer-driven and evidence-based process to ensure that the HEQC and its audit Panel reports are transparent, informed, and consistent.
6. Institutional audits are developmental and intent on supporting continuous quality improvement and enhancement.
7. Institutional audits are required to balance their developmental character with the regulatory requirement that the CHE and the HEQC act on poor provisioning where institutions have no clear commitments, processes, practices or plans to improve.
8. Institutional audits are key to 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 (POE), 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 UWC.

Brief Overview of the University of the Western Cape

UWC is a medium-sized institution with seven faculties: Economic and Management Sciences; Arts and Humanities; Natural Sciences; Community and Health Sciences; Education; Law; and Dentistry. It is apparent in the University's approved Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) that it has established and developed more than 460 accredited undergraduate and

postgraduate programmes through which its mission is realised. Between 2019 and 2020, UWC conferred an average of 5 500 undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in several fields, including master's and doctorates.

The Panel, using the differentiated approach promoted by the *Framework*, approached UWC as a historically disadvantaged institution (HDI), observant of the impact thereof on its current functioning. The influence of the historical context (pg.4-5, SER) is seen in the institution's vision, mission, and goals (pg. 5-6, SER). The institutional vision (and its contemporary translation through its Integrated Operational Plan (IOP)) is aspirational and displays a definite upward trajectory, buoyed by various state-funded grants and private capital investment in the institution. The Panel observed that the institution deliberately attempts to keep the cost to students low through cross-subsidization.

The Panel further observed (confirmed by documentary and oral evidence) that the UWC is increasingly becoming a multi-site university.

The total student headcount enrolment in 2020 was 23 730, representing an overall growth of 6.3% since 2017. Of the total headcount enrolment in 2020, 21% of students were enrolled for postgraduate studies – a figure that has remained constant since 2017. Masters and doctoral students represented 9.65% and 5%, of the overall student body in 2020. Under-enrolment in the category of 'postgraduate level,' typically covering honours and postgraduate diploma level students, is an area of concern. Under-enrolment in this category has been exacerbated by the reclassification of specific qualifications (such as the PGCE) as undergraduate qualifications.

The proportion of students distributed across the seven faculties has remained constant. In 2020, the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences had a headcount of 23.6% or 5 608 students, followed respectively by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities with a headcount of 4 542 (19.1%); Faculty of Natural Sciences with a headcount of 3 975 (16.7%); Faculty of Community and Health Sciences with a headcount of 3 627 (15.3%); Faculty of Education with 2 826 (11.9%); Faculty of Law with a headcount of 2 385 (or 10%); and Faculty of Dentistry with 767 students (3.2%).

On aggregate, Black African, Coloured, and Indian students jointly made up 95% of the 2020 student body. Over the reporting period, the number of Black African students consistently

represented the most sizeable proportion of the student body, followed by a declining order of Coloured, White, and Indian students.

The 2020 headcount of 14 526 female students formed 61% of the total enrolment compared to 9 204 (or 39%) male students. When the gender distribution is disaggregated by level of study, the percentage of female students enrolled for postgraduate studies in 2020 dropped by three percentage points to 58%.

Students are accommodated in residences, both on- and off-campus. On-campus residences have a capacity of 3 322 beds. UWC also has eight off-campus residences, some owned and operated by UWC and others leased and privately operated. In addition, at the time of the site visit, a significant new student accommodation development, Unibell, was underway in Belhar, adjoining the main campus, which, when complete, will provide an additional 2 700 beds.

Between 2015 and 2020, UWC's permanent staff headcount grew marginally to 1 681, of which 692 (or 41.1%) were instruction and research professionals and a further ninety staff members (or 5.3%) specialized support professionals. Professionals in executive and management positions decreased by 41 to 101, representing 6% of the overall headcount.

Overview of the audit process

This report emanates from the peer review process by the Audit Panel appointed by the CHE to review the UWC as part of the national institutional audit, as outlined in the CHE *Framework and Manual* (2021) for the Institutional Audit Process.

The audit consisted of a desktop review phase and institutional site visits. The Panel thus received documentary evidence, including the UWC's SER, and oral evidence as part of its peer review mandate. The work of the Audit Panel focused on the efficacy and efficiency of the quality management systems (QMS), which the UWC has in place to ensure the quality of their core functions as an institution of higher learning, to wit, teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.

Using the methodology prescribed within the Framework and Manual for the institutional audit process, the Panel received an SER and POE submitted to the CHE by the UWC. The Panel then immersed itself in reading and reviewing the SER and POE while establishing an interview

schedule based on its initial observations and identifying areas for further exploration from the in-depth reading. The Panel met weekly to discuss findings and to supplement its interview schedule. The Panel then conducted an on-site visit to the UWC from the 29th of June to the 5th of July 2022 (using a hybrid approach). During this time, various staff members were interviewed (see the schedule attached in Annexure A. It is essential to mention that none of the interview sessions during the audit were recorded nor was a designated scribe included in the interviews. In compiling this report, the Audit Panel relied on their internal discussions and notes taken during the interviews.

In all meetings with staff, students, and external partners at UWC, the Panel appreciated the active engagement during discussions and the frank and open way matters were raised. The organisation and administrative arrangements for the visits were well-managed, and members of the Audit Panel are thankful for the time, dedication and professionalism demonstrated by the UWC team in charge of the process.

The site visit served the purpose of data triangulation but also supplied a platform to probe further into specific aspects and allow the institution to explain certain elements that may not have been clear in the SER. The site visit included physical tours of the UWC campus and delivery sites, allowing the Panel to observe the infrastructure available to the students and interact with the staff within their working environments. It is important to mention that all staff seemed knowledgeable about the audit process and its context. The Panel was professionally received in all UWC settings, whether specifically scheduled or ad hoc. The Panel is appreciative of the UWC approach in this regard.

The reflections and recommendations in this report are intended to point to areas of enhancement and development as UWC strengthens the quality of its practices. The reader will find a wide range of Panel reflections and suggestions for improvement for various UWC quality-related practices. Where the Audit Panel considered a matter to be of sufficient importance, or the impact to be of sufficient gravity, the suggestion has been elevated to the status of a recommendation that requires a more active and directed response from the institution. The recommendations are clustered around each of the 16 CHE Standards.

The SER and POE formed an important part of the assessments and findings presented in this report. The SER was also the main basis of preparation for the Panel's site visit to UWC and for the questions and issues that were a focus of discussions during the site visit. The Panel noted

that the SER and POE were well-constructed, contextually relevant, and reflective of the instructions provided by the CHE. The SER provided a well-thought-out and reflective internal evaluation by UWC, and for this the Panel was grateful.

The Audit Panel also noted evidence of preparatory consultations within the institution, and the range and depth of consultation for input during the preparation of the SER. During the interviews, it was evident that a wide range of internal and external stakeholders contributed to developing or reviewing the SER and received the final copy. This is important since the Council is expected to critically engage the SER and give final approval for its submission to the CHE after it has been widely consulted and discussed by the UWC community.

The report commends UWC for good practice and contains recommendations that will, the Panel believes, assist in consolidating and strengthening this historically important institution's core business and mission.

Based on the SER, POE and data triangulation from the site visit, the Panel drafted an audit report against the Standards, considering all the evidence presented by UWC. The Report includes commendations and recommendations based on the evidence presented by the institution (both written and from interviews and site-visit observations), which are offered in the spirit of continual improvement.

Audit Findings

The Audit Panel's commendations and recommendations for the UWC are summarized below. A more contextualized explanation is provided in the main report.

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 and mission, and strategic goals which have been approved by appropriate governance structures, subject to comprehensive stakeholder engagement.*

The Panel formed a view that the vision, mission, and strategic goals of the UWC are clearly stated and approved by the appropriate governance structures and finally by the Council on 15 June 2021 (H1-Senate and Council News, 21 July 2021). Its Vision 2035 document describes the University's long-term aspiration to:

"...be widely recognized as a leading research-led university, most notably for the nexus between its undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes and its research endeavour, its substantial place in critical areas in the knowledge ecosystem, its keen focus on the public good and transforming lives, and its productive relationships and effective partnerships with universities and key agencies in Africa and beyond". (UWC SER, p. 5)

The vision, mission and strategic goals are clear and have been translated into a viable business model through the Integrated Operational Plan 2021-2025 document (IOP), which is a five-year plan aligned to specific goals, actions and objectives linked to the long-term vision 2035 (A5-Institutional Operational Plan 2021-2025).

It seems that the institution has made strategic choices to differentiate itself as a university focused on public good and as an engaged university: an example of this is the institution's choice to launch a school of public health instead of a medical school because the Western Cape already has two medical schools. The province requires a strong school of public health instead.

The translation of the vision in the IOP 2021-2025 was found to be a work in progress at the initial stages, based on the interviews with staff and students and has been cascaded down since its approval in June 2021, during the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Commendation

- a. The UWC leadership is commended for instilling a people-centred culture (in line with the IOP 2021-2025, goal 4), as expressed by most stakeholders during the site visit, especially students and staff.

Recommendation

1. It is recommended that UWC completes the cascading of the IOP to faculties and communicates it accordingly to the University community.

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

The UWC's stated vision of becoming a research-led institution is commendable (IOP, p. 6) and has been translated into the Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) as Goal Area 3: Research and Innovation (IOP, pp. 14-15). The University is making positive progress toward that vision, especially considering the institution's history as an HDI.

The UWC hosts 18 Research Chairs in areas strategic for the country and the continent, and for the Sustainable Development Goals (the priority areas are detailed on the UWC website; the UWC Annual Research Report, pp. 44-59). The University has 7 NRF A-rated researchers and 35 B-rated researchers (UWC Annual Report 2020, p. 36), a significant increase from previous years. The UWC has steadily increased its research outputs and postgraduate student enrolments, although throughput in record time remains challenging.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is primarily undertaken in applied programmes but is less institutionalised in other programmes and not always part of the formal curriculum. This was an area that the Student Representative Council (SRC) and Class Representatives foregrounded as a significant concern.

The PQM lists 460 programmes offered but needs a review to remove obsolete programmes and to align the PQM with the IOP and the strategic priority areas identified by the institution.

The UWC has a language policy that aims to promote multilingualism, specifically in English, IsiXhosa and Afrikaans. It was approved as far back as 2003 (pp. 1-2) and has not been updated. It is, however, noted that the institution is engaging language as a discourse in decoloniality and

has explored the use of IsiXhosa and Afrikaans during tutorial sessions (although all qualifications are offered only in English).

The growth in instructional/research professional staff from 612 in 2014 to 692 in 2020 is commendable. Still, the growth in the specialised/support professional component may need to be monitored since it has grown from 29 to 90 within the same period (E1- Staff Data, p.6).

The UWC staff complement tables (May 2020) reveal an under-representation of African male and female staff, both from the Western Cape's Economically Active Population (EAP) and the country at large. The under-representation of African female staff in senior management is significant. The under-representation of people with disabilities is also evident, while the over-representation of foreign nationals is also apparent. The Employment Equity Plan (EEP) has clear targets requiring close monitoring to ensure implementation and accountability.

Academics from historically disadvantaged groups who have obtained postgraduate qualifications, especially doctoral degrees, have increased but remain significantly under-represented in higher academic ranks. Furthermore, previously marginalised groups such as Africans and females remain underrepresented in Research Professor and Research Chair positions.

While the student profile broadly aligns with the country's population demographics, diversity and inclusivity should also be encouraged. Throughput remains an issue at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and the measures in place for facilitating throughput should be constantly strengthened and monitored for effectiveness. The throughput data demonstrates that students from previously disadvantaged communities are afforded access, but success remains challenging. The Siyaphumelela Project, the first-year experience, tutor enhancement, Student Retention and Success Framework, and other initiatives to address student success are noted and should be monitored closely for success (SER, p.37).

UWC has established a Community Engagement Unit (CEU), which focuses on community engagement, and its work in integrating the University into its local community is commendable.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Language Policy be reviewed since it was approved in 2003, and its implementation, achievements and impact should be evaluated to inform furtherance of the objectives.
3. It is recommended that the institution review and align its 460 programmes in the PQM to establish their relevance to the University's current- and intended size and shape and their alignment to the IOP 2021-2025 and the UWC's vision 2035.

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.*

According to the SER (p. 27), the IOP is being cascaded into the plans of the executive lines and those of faculties and the various support units. It is being aligned with the UWC's QMS and encapsulated in the policies, frameworks, and guidelines governing quality. From discussions with various stakeholders, it emerged that some sections of the university community, although knowledgeable about the institution's IOP and goals, could not identify how it was being cascaded to their levels and included in day-to-day operations. The executive plans were provided as evidence of cascading the strategic plans, and the executive is accountable quarterly to Council, based on the plans provided by executive management.

Several policies were outdated at the time of the visit, and some have not been reviewed in almost ten years. These policies are detailed further in the report.

The collaboration between the Quality Assurance Office, located within Institutional Planning, and the Teaching and Learning Office is a matter of concern. There may be a need to review the processes to provide the oversight required from the DVC: Academic for the quality assurance office.

The institution's systems and processes are described as multi-dimensional and multi-layered and involve academic and administrative staff as well as leadership at faculty-, senior- and executive levels, along with students, within and across departments, faculties, and the broader university (SER, p. 28). In such a complex system, possibilities for duplication and bureaucracy

abound. Therefore, clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and guidelines may be needed.

The faculty processes around quality management systems require bolstering so that quality assurance permeates the planning and work undertaken by the academic and administrative staff, including initiating programme reviews by faculties while working together with the office of academic planning. The professional programmes have benefited from external reviews by professional bodies. However, the extent of Senate's engagement as custodian of academic integrity with the reports and recommendations of the professional bodies and proposed improvement plans remained unclear to staff interviewed.

There is generally a good understanding of quality assurance and management across the institution, but the QMS policy must be reviewed and updated. All interviewees mentioned quality as integrated into all core academic functions, but this understanding may be negatively affected by outdated policies and procedures relating to quality assurance, enhancement, and management.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that the Quality Management Policy should be reviewed as it has not been reviewed since 2007, and this is cause for concern.
5. It is recommended that the following policies also should be reviewed:
 - The Admission Policy (2009) which provides the criteria for admission and re-admission to the University.
 - The Co-curricular Record Policy (2013) provides a guide on the application of the co-curricular record, including outlining applicable essential student learning outcomes and development indicators.
 - The Examination Rules and Regulations Policy (2009).
 - Management of Continuing Education Courses Policy (2013).
 - The Plagiarism Policy (2011).
 - Research Policy: Introduction and Defining Framework (2009).
6. Since most interviewees mentioned duplication and bureaucracy in quality management systems, it is recommended that structures have clear SOPs and service level agreements to avoid such duplication and bureaucracy, and to ensure that some flexibility is built into the system, e.g., delegation of authority where applicable.

7. It is recommended that the institution develops a single dashboard for all its policies with their review dates (if not already in place) so that no policy falls through the cracks in terms of timeous review. It would assist if this dashboard were managed by one office, e.g. The Office of the Registrar.
8. It is recommended that Faculty Councils be established consistently across all faculties to increase the voice of students around curricular issues, since there is a belief that the SRC focus is mainly on significant matters such as finances and accommodation, and that it sometimes pursues a political agenda. The Faculty Councils should be linked to the Central SRC to unify the locus of students' voices.

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.*

A UWC organogram describes the different governance structures, management and academic leadership and their roles. The Council executes its responsibilities through its committees and the joint committees of the Council and Senate, which all appear functional. The Senate Committees must oversee academic integrity, including quality assurance (QA) and ensure it is replicated at the faculty level. The institution also has an approved risk register, which is monitored.

The relationship appears to be one of trust between the Council and Executive Management, who report to Council through annual plans and quarterly reports, with Council holding management accountable without becoming operational. The Council membership consists of representatives from government, industry, staff, executives, organised labour, the Senate, students, the City of Cape Town, and Western Cape province. The skill set is acceptable, based on the self-evaluation of Council members.

The Institutional Forum (IF) believes it understands its mandate as an advisory structure to the Council, and the working relationship is mature and moves the institution forward. However, considering the issues of transformation articulated in Standard 2 of this report, the Forum could do more to advise the Council on such matters.

The Student Representative Council (SRC) is also represented in Council and management. At the time of the visit, the SRC was new to their portfolios, but it believes there is apathy from

management about engaging them, especially at the faculty level. Although it is often understood that the SRC raises issues of funding and accommodation, the issue of sports funding needs further interrogation by the management since it was emphasised in discussion.

UWC reportedly uses the integrated performance development system (PDS) instead of a performance management system (PMS). Still, staff and students expressed concern that it may not always be an adequate instrument of accountability at senior management levels. The PDS could be retained, but accountability could be strengthened at the senior level by having clear KPIs and targets linked to the IOP. The example of the faculty plan given in the POE to illustrate the functionality of the UWC's performance development system was the Faculty of Health Sciences Plan. The plan presented does not, however, seem to have clear targets, although the measures are in place. The senior management KPIs and targets were unavailable to the Panel, and it was difficult to establish their suitability to the goals and the IOP. As a result, the Panel relied on information obtained during the site visits where staff believed there could be improvements and transparency in accountability towards the IOP by senior management.

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that the Executive Management establish an onboarding programme for the new SRC.
10. It is recommended that the institution strengthen accountability and transparency among all staff about the cascading of the IOP.

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.

In terms of governance, the university's structure around quality matters is professionally managed. The approved policies of the university (albeit requiring updates as articulated above) and their translation into plans and processes are aligned and executed per the goals reflected in the IOP.

The various forms of support provided by the Directorate of Learning Teaching and Student Success (DLTSS), the Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies (CIECT), the Academic Planning Unit (APU), and the Community Engagement Unit (CEU) are commendable. However, the APU operations appear to overlap with traditional QA oversight, which may be related to the reporting-line differences between the APU and the Quality Assurance Office.

Discussions with the DVC: Academic and the Deans and Deputy Deans made it clear that there is good accountability and support for the QMS. Assessment of the 2020 reflective report highlighted critical interventions for teaching, learning, and assessment practices. Interviews with Deputy Deans and other key support and faculty personnel and students across university sectors confirmed this excellent practice. Policies related to teaching and learning are part of the academic project in practice.

The University's participation in the Siyaphumelela Project aims to improve student success through data management and utilisation. The first-year experience (FYE) and transition programmes include the Academic Induction Programme, a course called Towards Professionalism of Teaching & Learning, and the Tutor Enhancement Programme, which provides excellent support mechanisms for teaching and learning. In the discussion with the Deans, staff, and tutors, we found that these instructional products significantly impacted student success.

This student success drive is further bolstered by the appointment of a Teaching & Learning Specialist in each Faculty to create a strategic shift in the quality of teaching and learning. However, based on the interviews, it remains unclear how faculty strategies – driven by the IOP – are executed and how the targets are interrogated. From the interviews conducted, it was noted that cascading of the IOP is not yet complete, hence the lack clarity in how the IOP strategies are executed and monitored at Faculty levels.

Goal area 3 of the IOP (pp. 34-43) and the Research Policy 2009 (amended 2020) are explicit in intent and cemented in strategy. The strides made by the institution over the past five to eight years and the related outputs are outstanding. The University's 2030 vision of being a research-intensive public institution focused on creating a “*vibrant intellectual space where people engage with matters of real significance at the highest level of competence*” is being attained rapidly. However, the Panel interviews with staff revealed that research support was not standardised across faculties. The Panel suggests that there should be an identified path for support and integration of emerging researchers into established research areas in all faculties or as part of an overall institutional approach.

Community Engagement is well embedded in the university's teaching, learning, and research and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Respectable community engagement practice was evident within the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences, based on their impact on several projects linked to research and teaching and learning practice. However, the impact and currency of the CE projects managed by the CEU require evaluation. The provided CE report is a 2017 database and should have been updated to at least 2020.

In the discussion with the DVC: Academic, she indicated that an electronic tool would be implemented and piloted in three faculties to assess the impact of their projects, especially from a societal perspective and to ensure more structure and impact. The DVC: Academic also recommended a decentralised approach of the CEU for Faculties. Further discussion with the DVC: R&I confirmed the connection between research, teaching, learning and community engagement and the strong influence that this integrated approach has, viz., “*research should inform your engagement in communities and how we talk to that.*”

Recommendations

11. It is recommended that the support units feeding into faculties may require a more strategic footprint in operations. While these units serve faculties, their direct reporting

lines should be through the relevant DVCs. In particular, the role of the QA unit needs to be refined or realigned to ensure a more significant role.

12. It is recommended that outdated policies are reviewed/revised in keeping with changes in higher education policies. Policy-custodianship should be under the Registrar's portfolio to ensure currency and timely revision. The outdated policies are also reflected in recommendations 4 & 5 above.
13. It is recommended that a new approach to data should be considered as it is not clear to the Panel from interviews how data is managed and used to hold Faculties accountable. This approach should also be reflected in the annual report emphasising trends regarding success indicators. The University's new role in the Siyaphumelela Project is key as target indicators for student success are essential for managing and delivering on this project's outcomes.
14. It is recommended that the university structures related to quality monitoring at the deanery level be revisited as accountability and ownership remain unclear from the SER and site visit interviews. It is further recommended that the Deans of Faculties play a more significant role in managing quality within their faculties.
15. It is recommended that there should be transparent reporting mechanisms with target-driven approaches to quality management.
16. It is recommended that there be a policy related to Community Engagement to ensure targets are met with impact for each of the faculties.

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

The UWC People Plan is clear, and the HR plan, directed toward meeting its IOP targets, is deeply expressed by its People Plan, the Skills Plan, talent pool, reward and recognition and work-life relations.

Staff equity at the top management level is well-balanced, with a strong emphasis on female staff. The deanery also displays a good equity profile. The Council approved a well-designed employment equity plan in November 2020, but the actual implementation of EE targets within faculties is not sufficiently evident. Although the University expresses concern that its

employment equity targets remain challenging, it has made great strides with several transformation initiatives.

The investment of funds from UCDG, DRS, USDP, ADAPTIT, BAAP and NESP, together with the university's long-term aspiration to be '*widely recognised as a leading research-led university*,' is commendable concerning several key indicators. These include a professoriate, which comprises 34% of staff in 2020, and the overall staff doctorates at almost 60% institution-wide, with some faculties at over 70%. Staff interviews showed that PhD support is well-driven and effective in its planned rollout. Also, interviews with newly graduated staff and current students in the system confirm sufficient resources (NRF and internal) and support.

The university's response to the Covid-19 pandemic was highly strategic: supplying laptops to 28% of students, data to 58% of students, expanding the tutoring programme, appointing teaching assistants, improving the virtual space for teaching and learning, and enhancing engagements amongst tutors, mentors and undergraduate students. R22 million was invested in these activities, which is acknowledged. In discussions with both management and senior staff as well as students, it was evident that blended learning activities and the strategic creation of virtual teaching spaces with online availability of pre-recorded lectures were fully operational, together with several methods to extemporise assessments, viz., group work activities, problem-based questions, the complexity of evaluations, with attendance above 90%, and measures to overcome copying/plagiarism. Meaningful engagement with students was through emails, cell phones, WhatsApp, and Twitter to assist with all queries related to their learning experience.

Teaching and learning infrastructure is critical for quality, especially in the health and applied sciences. However, a reported CAPEX allocation of R2.5 million for the academic sector and the research CAPEX of R5 million were described as inadequate to sustain superior quality teaching and learning. The IOP Academic Project should be aligned to a budget. In addition, the OPEX allocation could be based on a 3- to 5-year spending pattern across divisions. In interviews with the DVCs, Deans, relevant heads, and lecturing staff, there was a significant concern about trying to run laboratory practice within the constraints of a limited budget.

Commendations

- b. The UWC has made significant strides in ensuring a trajectory in its professoriate and staff doctorate profiles.

- c. The UWC is commended for its response to maintaining a stable academic environment during the Covid-19 pandemic and the use of associated funding of multiple academic initiatives.

Recommendations

17. It is recommended that the retention policy should be incorporated as part of the People's Plan and be made more explicit in the IOP. The interviews revealed that while staff were involved with the People's Plan, they had limited engagement with the retention plan, highlighting the necessity for integration.
18. It is recommended that the UWC develops a resource allocation model for departments and units to ensure equitable allocation of funds. The enrolment plan could play a critical role in determining faculty projected income.

Standard 7: *Credible and reliable data (for example, on throughput and completion rates) are systematically captured, employed and analysed as an integral part of the institutional quality management system so as to inform consistent and sustainable decision-making.*

The University uses multiple systems to ensure an accurate, appropriate, and real-time data supply: The MAS, SASI is a database for admission, programme information, fee information and graduation eligibility, and SEMS provides data around examinations, the academic calendar, graduation, a help desk, registration, and results.

Stringent quality control measures exist around the operation of these systems (SASI, SEMS and MAS). Graduation data is professionally managed to prevent malpractice or corruption. All seven faculties work closely together, and whilst operations are decentralised, systems are well mirrored with the Registrar's Office to ensure solid governance. A student finance system is integrated with SASI and a Residence Management System (RMS) was launched in 2021.

The University uses PowerHEDA and Power Business Intelligence to cross-reference data. Despite its efforts to integrate data from both systems, the interviews revealed a lack of clear, compelling evidence demonstrating their effective use in long term planning, such as in the use of success rates, increased pass rates, enhanced throughput rates, student wellness, social cohesion and decreased dropout rates.

Planning and reporting meetings between the DVCs and the Deans rely on a set of indicators, including DHET and institutional targets and those from faculty and departments from previous years, influencing annual plans for the upcoming year. These should serve as guidelines for directing and executing academic planning, evaluating the requirement for additional academic staff, academic support measures, and guaranteeing appropriate allocation of resources (opex and capex). However, the interviews with staff indicated that this was not clearly evident.

The reflective reports by the DVC: Academic and the Deans do not demonstrate sufficient interrogation of success data to ensure suitable interventions based on results. Whilst the Institutional Planning Committee interprets data from various sources, a closer link with faculties and departments would provide a meaningful data-led approach for student success. The Academic Planning Unit (APU) also monitors several student and departmental success activities.

The Panel believes that the combined expertise of the APU and the Data Analytics Working Group may impact significantly on student success and prevent the existence of data in silos. It will also allow for closer engagement with data. The Siyaphumelela 2.0 Project focuses on several data-led approaches and should focus on indicators related to student success.

Recommendations

19. It is recommended that a strategy be developed to ensure that data, especially the impact of student success data, is centrally managed with close interaction among faculties and departments. This strategy should outline how data will be used to facilitate academic planning, interventions, and resource management implementation.

20. It is recommended that target indicators (DHET and institutional targets at various levels) should permeate across all levels of the university. This should be a strategy to ensure accountability, especially regarding divisional strategic planning.

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

Security is central, viz., in tracking user access, the logging of activity and training to prevent user malpractice. Security measures thus restrict and monitor access and allow for the internal

and external verification of data. The Registrar's Office audits specific processes and ensures compliance by having well-established processes linked to faculty operations which are policy-driven and frequently reviewed.

Training ensures that users can manage specific processes and actions relevant to the Registrar's Office. A dedicated training and development unit within the Office focuses on staff training and assistance, coupled with developing E-Systems in practice. Enhancements are introduced as the environment changes, ensuring functionality related to quality. Aligned to best practices, processes are benchmarked with various institutions and external bodies. Quality management occurs in terms of multiple policies, reports, and frameworks.

Three areas needing attention are departmental reviews, programme reviews and student evaluations. It is nonetheless evident that satisfactory quality management permeates all teaching and learning levels.

In 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the university moved all its operations to an online platform. Providing devices and data under the banner #NoStudentWillBeLeftBehind was also successful, based on interviews with critical academic personnel. The Registrar's office was key in ensuring calendar- and timetable rollouts to map catch-up periods and ensure student support during this challenging time. The University established continuous assessment practices and additional support interventions for teaching and learning. Feedback in this regard was highly positive.

Recommendations

21. It is critical that departmental reviews and programme reviews are conducted as they are vital for assessing and maintaining academic programme quality, ensuring rigorous standards, fostering continuous improvement, allocating resources effectively, and meeting accreditation requirements. They also support faculty development, align programs with institutional goals, enhance student success, promote transparency and accountability, and contribute to a culture of academic excellence.
22. It is recommended that student evaluations must be instituted across faculties as they provide essential feedback for lecturers to improve teaching methods, engage students, ensure accountability, and assess programme effectiveness. They also fulfil accreditation requirements, support faculty development, and promote transparency, fostering a culture of continuous improvement in education.

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 per 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 UWC's practice for Standard 9 is framed in terms of the university's IOP, the Quality Management Policy; the Council and Senate committee system and respective committees; the General Calendar; and the rules and regulations guiding the academic practice in faculty yearbooks. The IOP and the Quality Management Policy (2007) guide the coherence of the QMS, while the Council and Senate committee system coordinates the QA processes at the department/school/centre level, through faculty and up to Senate and Council levels.

The Senate Academic Planning (SAP) Committee and its sub-committees oversee all programmes and quality matters before submitting its reports to the SEC, Senate and Council. The SAP Curriculum Sub-Committee reviews proposals for new programmes and programme amendments before they serve at SAP. At the same time, the Accreditation and Quality Management Committee ensures that delivery aligns with the approved plans. The Faculty and Senate Assessment committees oversee undergraduate assessment processes; the Faculty Higher Degrees committees manage the quality of research and postgraduate degrees, while the Senate Research and Higher Degrees committees do so at the institutional level.

The Panel examined the UWC's Community Engagement (CE) quality provisions as part of the coherent, structured QMS. The CE quality management mechanisms function primarily by assessing students' learning. Staff need to apply for ethical clearance for CE projects, but no systems of follow-up or monitoring exist to check adherence. The relationship between the CEU,

the Quality Assurance Office and other institutional quality management structures is not clearly defined, and the Panel proposes that the relationships must be clarified to improve coherence within the QMS.

The functionality of the relationship between the components of the QMS is to be maintained through ongoing monitoring, regular review systems and reflective reporting. The Panel was able to follow the institutional QMS processes described.

How the staff performance management-related provisions are integrated with other QMS components was discussed. Committee structures and documented core academic functional areas are some of the strategies used by UWC to integrate staff performance management-related provisions with other QMS components. For the academic staff, the documented core academic functional areas are instrumental in facilitating the performance management-related processes. The committee structures, specifically the Faculty Appointments Committees, Senate and the Senior Appointments Committees of the Senate, as well as the Joint Appointments and Promotions Committee of the Council, have a monitoring role over the QA associated with staff performance development processes. For support staff, performance development is the responsibility of the relevant departmental chairs. Unlike the academic staff, it remained unclear what functional areas, key performance indicators and evidence of performance are used to facilitate performance management-related processes and hold support staff accountable.

Faculties have dedicated Learning and Teaching Specialists, while the Director of Learning and Teaching and Student Support (DLTSS) provides institutional-level guidance. The Quality Assurance Office has overall responsibility for the coordination of quality-related activities as well as the promotion of a culture of quality at the institution.

The Panel recognises the fragmented nature of the internal QA system, consisting of the Quality Assurance Office, the APU and the QA-MIS. The disjointedness of the QMS components results in faculties being unable to access real-time QA management information (p. 58). This fragmentation can be addressed *“by revamping and consolidating the internal QA structures”*, specifically the Quality Assurance Office, QA-MIS and APU, for greater coherence and functionality.

The Senate Academic Planning (SAP) Committee provides oversight on all programmes and quality matters. The SAP has two sub-committees, namely, the SAP Curriculum Sub-Committee

and the Accreditation and Quality Management Committee. The two sub-committees ensure appropriate quality governance by SAP over proposals for new programmes and programme amendments, as well as the delivery of programmes aligned to the approved plans. SAP provisions are intact, and its two sub-committees strengthen the coherence and reasonable relationship between the QMS components.

The University has quality monitoring provisions for academic divisions and functions in the form of periodic/cyclic academic quality reviews and programme reviews. APU is said to conduct regular reviews of programmes, but the University is nonetheless struggling to keep up with programme reviews. The lack of QA human resource capacity and support in faculties was referred to as the suggestion that “*employment of QA officers for faculties would assist a great deal*” (SER, Pg. 58).

The UWC QMS needs improvement in a few areas. Academics are expected to conduct student surveys to obtain feedback to enhance learning and teaching. The standardisation of the student evaluations is identified as needing improvement. The need for transparent QA processes and guidelines for departments and effective monitoring of the implementation of learning, teaching, and assessment policies have been proposed. The evaluation of the impact of the student support strategies and interventions on student success needs improvement. UWC itself considers that the effectiveness of the processes for recruitment and induction of new students should be monitored through periodic evaluation, in line with the suggestion in the SER (p. 58). The Panel advises that the UWC implements relevant quality management mechanisms in this regard.

The institutional stakeholders could generally identify components of the quality management system of UWC based on their exposure but could not agree on whether the provisions at the departmental level were mandatory or optional. The Panel confirms the need for documented quality management guidelines and frameworks as recommended below.

Recommendations

23. It is recommended that the UWC develop and implement quality management guidelines for departments as well as the professional and administrative support units, including guidelines for teaching evaluations (for academics) and ensure consistency in implementation across the departments and faculties.

24. It is recommended that the UWC establish transparent processes to address the fragmentation of the internal QA system to achieve a more coherent and meaningfully structured relationship between the Quality Assurance Office, APU and QA-MIS as the constituents of the QMS.
25. It is recommended that the UWC establish a clearly defined relationship between the CEU and the Quality Assurance Office and other relevant quality management structures to improve the coherence between all the various components of the QMS.
26. It is recommended that the UWC develop and implement mechanisms to periodically evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the recruitment and induction processes of new students as suggested in the SER (p. 58).

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

The executive management is responsible for overseeing the QA system, and senior management is responsible for QA, according to institutional protocols, with the quality manager being part of the Senate committees.

QA oversight is planned by aligning all departmental/unit and individual staff plans with the IOP. All management and staff are intended to take responsibility for implementing departmental/unit plans: individual staff members have QA responsibilities aligned to their job descriptions. Line managers use these to manage staff performance. However, a view was expressed that various aspects of QA are delegated without adequate expertise and resource support, thus hindering the achievement of the QM goals. It is acknowledged that an improved quality management strategy and adequate resourcing are required across all levels and functions, particularly at the module- and programme level.

Governance and management oversight of the QA system is to be facilitated through regular reporting at all levels and through institutional committee structures and associated meetings. The management-related reports reviewed and the site discussion revealed that the meetings and reports focus mainly on the academic project and business operations rather than on quality management-related matters.

The University's Performance Development System (PDS) is presented as instrumental in managing staff accountability, but the practical implementation of the PDS as a component of

the QMS became difficult to clarify, even more so among support staff: the PDS is intended to facilitate discussions between individual employees and their line managers. Except for the HR representative who could describe the process, most interviewees were unable to describe the practical implementation and performance assessment criteria applicable to them as support staff. The staff explained that the implementation and performance assessment would be almost impractical given the PDS lacks incentives. How the PDS facilitates and monitors quality management and the implementation of the IOP at the staff/implementation level seemed unclear to the staff and, thus to the Panel. The Panel concluded that the PDS seems to be mostly on paper currently. The Panel recommends that the PDS be reviewed, better implemented, and/or monitored to ensure effectiveness of UWC's QMS system.

Recommendations

27. It is recommended that the UWC improves the implementation of the PDS by stipulating the key performance expectations (indicators, tasks, outputs/targets and evidence) for both academic and support staff for them to be able to demonstrate accountability for the relevant quality management aspects, and to ensure the effective review and monitoring thereof.
28. It is recommended that the UWC explicitly includes in the official agendas/formats of meetings and reports a section on quality management to facilitate effective ongoing governance and management oversight over the QA system.
29. It is recommended that the UWC develops and implements strategies to address the lack of QA human resource capacity and support in departments and faculties.

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

A detailed account of the institution's budget allocation to QM processes for ensuring the conduciveness of the learning and teaching environment was provided and the processes were reiterated during interviews, explaining how the university allocates its limited resources to aspects of the various academic projects.

While the UWC claims to budget intentionally for quality enhancement, it considers its budgeting for quality assurance (QA) measures as not sufficiently intentional and visible: no separate budget covers internal QA interventions, professional body accreditation costs and support to

faculties by QA professional staff. Faculties only receive the APU's support during the programme design and approval process.

“An increased staffing budget would go a long way to enhance academic quality” (SER, Pg 62) was suggested to support the work of the QA office, the Academic Planning Unit (APU) and faculty QA capacity. The SER states that the University will consider people-development initiatives that may improve QA capacity within faculties to address the quality shortcomings. The Panel thus proposes that the institution budget more intentionally and visibly for its quality management structures and processes/initiatives.

Significant divergent views emerged when it comes to explicit budget allocation for quality management processes. One view associated QA resource provisioning with the specific provisions of the QMS, with quality coordination as the role of the Quality Assurance Office. It argued that resource allocation to quality management should address the institution's lack of QA capacity and enable the conduct of regular, cyclic academic and programme reviews.

The alternative view emphasised that *“quality is everyone's business”* and *“quality is embedded in institutional culture”*. The critical consideration was that the institution's HR costs were already regarded as *“very heavy”* on the support personnel side. The institution also wished to prioritise financial allocation to align and strengthen academic capacity with the university's research-intensive aspiration.

The University uses approved *Guidelines for the Workload of Academic Staff* to allocate the workload concerning teaching and learning, community engagement, research, postgraduate supervision, staff development and administrative tasks to academic staff. Workload calculations, however, tend to ignore the differences between disciplines: certain disciplines have significantly more students than others, resulting in imbalances in staff/student ratios and workloads across faculties and departments. Affected academics consequently raise issues such as increasing administrative responsibilities without sufficient support, skewed workload towards teaching, burnout, and fatigue.

Such imbalances affect the amount of time that could be allocated to WIL and research, resulting in frustration and low morale. Staff workloads should consider the capacity of individual staff taking into consideration the staff development initiatives needed by newer/young academics. Workload allocation needs to factor in time for the more experienced staff to supervise, nurture,

and mentor new and younger staff members. Workload imbalances should consequently consider the core academic functions, namely, teaching and learning, supervision and research, administration, committee work and community engagement, the academic career stage, and other collective/personal factors such as career orientation and promotion aspirations.

Furthermore, the workload model is predominantly discretionary, differing from one line manager to another. The Panel accordingly advises that the workload guidelines be improved to address workload imbalances across disciplines and that mechanisms be introduced to monitor implementation across the institution.

Recommendations

30. It is recommended that the UWC budget deliberately and visibly for quality management structures and processes that ensure effective support and coordination for integrated quality assurance, as well as for the review, monitoring, and improvement or enhancement of quality management across the university.
31. It is recommended that the UWC review the workload guidelines to address the imbalances across disciplines and put in place relevant monitoring mechanisms to ensure consistency in its implementation across the institution.

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

The UWC aims to ensure that the QMS achieves its purpose by basing its QMS budget allocations to student success-related initiatives on the *Student Retention and Success Framework*. Financial management provisions for UCDG (for the promotion of student success), the clinical and the foundation grants, and other funded programmes include the management of grants according to dedicated, restricted cost centres; steering committees, chaired by the DVC: Academic, that monitor the grants; and meet financial auditing and reporting expectations. The financial management processes could however not necessarily be associated with QMS-specific provisions such as quality review and monitoring and improvement processes.

Detailed discussions between the Panel and the relevant institutional stakeholders deliberated on the budget allocation and use, specifically about ensuring that the QMS achieves its purpose efficiently and effectively. UWC considers the performance development system (PDS) as instrumental in ensuring that the QMS achieves its purpose efficiently and effectively. The Panel

explored how the implementation of the PDS is to guarantee that the QMS achieves its purpose. The discussions illustrated that the PDS does not currently effectively serve this intended purpose since the stakeholders could not explain *how* it ensures that QM budget allocations are used to guarantee that they achieve their purpose as a benefit to the university.

The academic quality reviews of departments, schools, and research entities with associated SAP oversight and reporting through the Senate to Council are also seen as measures for ensuring the effectiveness of the QMS. Eighteen academic reviews of departments, schools and research entities were conducted between 2016 and 2020. While the budget for quality management purposes is associated with quality reviews, the Panel found that implementing the quality improvement plans related to review recommendations was not adequately monitored.

Reflective reporting on strategic plans and stakeholder engagement on QMS-related reports are suggested as additional strategies through which the QMS achieves its institutional purpose. Students are represented as stakeholders in institutional structures such as faculty boards and Student Faculty Councils, the Student Success Committee, Senate committees and the Finance Committee of the Council.

Recommendations

32. It is recommended that the UWC design a quality improvement plan and monitoring template with clear guidelines for implementing the recommendations of the academic quality reviews. Such a template should ensure adequate monitoring and reporting to relevant institutional structures until the end of implementation.
33. It is recommended that the UWC develop and implement clear budget allocation-, utilization- and monitoring processes to ensure that the QMS is effectively implemented, and that it achieves its purpose efficiently to the benefit of the university.

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.

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

The UWC has procedures to design, develop and approve programmes that are summarised in the main report. Feedback from academic staff indicated that, while these processes can be lengthy and time-consuming, they are largely effective. Still, introducing curriculum or quality specialists at a faculty level could be helpful. The internal templates need alignment with what is now required for CHE accreditation. The Panel affirms that greater alignment between internal and external application forms is required and recommends that the APU and the Quality Assurance Office align university forms with the external HEQC application forms. Faculty staff need to know of these changes and be supported in completing the internal and external application forms.

The Panel is concerned about the expansion of the Programme/Qualification Mix (PQM) over time. Therefore, as noted previously, a PQM review is recommended to remove outdated and dormant programmes and to ensure the PQM alignment with the current and intended size and shape of the university.

The UWC, despite procedures on paper, is not up to date with the delivery, management, and review of programmes, which is a significant concern because such reviews are a key component in ensuring coherence between programme accreditation and delivery. While regular academic *departmental* reviews occur, the University recognises its lack of progress in dealing with *programme* reviews. External statutory- or professional bodies also review relevant programmes, which does lead to changes in curricula. The policy for programme reviews makes faculties responsible for initiating and conducting reviews. Only two programme reviews have been undertaken since 2016.

Departments are required to report annually on their progress in implementing the recommendations from academic reviews, but it is unclear if implementation is monitored.

The SAP Committee is currently drafting a new policy and approach for programme reviews. It is recommended that this new policy be internally approved as a matter of urgency and that a monitoring and evaluation system ensures its implementation so that programmes are reviewed regularly and consistently. Other procedures or policy documents may need updating to provide holistic curriculum development and revision guidelines.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to university procedures and the QMS. A Covid-19 Response Task Team was put in place, and academic and professional administrative staff feedback indicates that the university continued processes and operations online relatively seamlessly during the disruption. The Panel notes that several policy changes were consequently required, leading to the approval of several new policies in 2021, namely, the *Flexible Learning and Teaching Provisioning (FLTP) Policy*, the *Curriculum Transformation and Renewal Framework*, and the *Assessment Policy*. Surveys administered to staff and students in 2020 collected actionable data, first around resource readiness to move to Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) at the end of Semester 1, to inform Semester 2 decisions. External data via DHET briefings and surveys were also considered. In 2020, the university's assessment rules were waived and replaced with Guiding Principles for Assessment during Covid-19 to respond to the disruption. Lessons from 2020 were used to inform guidelines for blended learning and teaching in 2021.

The quality management system appears to have withstood and adapted to the disruption. The University is to be commended for its responsiveness, particularly regarding regular communication and engagement with its stakeholders. While some staff and students complained about the university's mandatory vaccination policy, most expressed satisfaction with how it dealt with the disruption. The Panel would like to commend the Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies (CIECT) for supporting staff and students in transitioning to a different mode of learning in 2020. It is also noted that the institutional Learning Management System (LMS), iKamva, supported the increased usage and demand.

The UWC applied what it had learned from previous disruptions (such as the #FeesMustFall protests) in dealing with the Covid-19 disruption, which is seen in its revising policies or formulating new ones. It is recommended that the University articulates the lessons learned from the disruption so that these can be used to ensure the continuity of quality learning and teaching during future upheavals. Furthermore, it is recommended that the DVC: Academic leads a process to identify and resolve possible achievement/learning gaps in programmes from the 2020-21 academic years to reduce them (where possible) in subsequent years of study. As the University LMS (iKamva) has been in place for several years, it is suggested that the CIECT undertake a benchmarking exercise of LMS usage in other institutions to ensure the long-term growth and sustainability of the university's LMS.

A great deal of effort clearly went into assessment diversification and the sharing of new assessment practices during the pandemic. However, some academics expressed concerns about student academic integrity during this period. It is recommended that the university further considers implementing appropriate and diverse assessment methods for different modes (that is, a longer-term shift in thinking around assessments) and raises the importance of academic integrity issues with staff and students.

Commendation

- d. While many staff went 'above and beyond' during the time of the pandemic and shared their learnings, the Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies (CIECT) is commended in particular for supporting staff and students to transition to a different mode of learning in 2020, through the provision of online training and support for staff and students, the identification of faculty champions and the creation of communities of practice.

Recommendations

34. It is recommended that the APU and QA update the internal application forms by aligning them more closely to the external application forms.
35. It is recommended that the new policy for programme reviews be internally approved and that a monitoring and evaluation system be put in place to ensure the implementation of this policy so that programmes are indeed reviewed regularly.
36. It is recommended that the UWC articulate the lessons learned from the Covid-19 disruption in a way that can be used to deal with future disruptions or disasters (in whatever form these may take), through, for example, compiling a quality learning and teaching continuity plan.
37. It is recommended that the DVC: Academic lead a process to identify and resolve possible achievement/learning gaps in different programmes from the 2020 and 2021 academic years so as to reduce these gaps (where possible) in subsequent years of study.
38. It is recommended that, in alignment with the implementation of the revised assessment policy, the UWC further consider the implementation of appropriate and diverse assessment methods (that is, a longer-term shift in thinking around assessments) in a way that facilitates/fosters assessment integrity and raises the importance of academic integrity issues with staff and students and how to deal with any issues appropriately.

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.*

A core institutional emphasis is engagement and responsiveness. The UWC's *Curriculum Transformation and Renewal Framework*, approved in 2021, arose from a process that included stakeholder engagement, conversations with various groups and faculty roadshows. Its implementation includes embedding its principles in the design and redesign of programmes going forward. Curriculum transformation is understood as a long-term process requiring individual and collective responsibility. Engagement with staff around curriculum transformation and renewal occurs during the annual Academic Week that dedicated a full day to the topic in 2021. The University also recognises the need to update existing curricula as academic and social conditions change.

While some work-integrated learning (WIL) programmes are offered, greater use of WIL programmes and internships can be made. While the SRC believes it is not consulted when new programmes are designed, the representatives do feel fully involved in the *Decolonisation Programme* and hope to see that becoming a trend. Student input into the curriculum could be improved by involving students in faculty advisory boards or having faculty-student representative committees that consist of class representatives, who could alternatively contribute to the Siyaphumulela Project.

The UWC is commended for the positive influence of its culture on engagements and discussion through its promotion of dynamic discourse, comprehensive consultations and listening to the voices of staff and students. Feedback from the stakeholders interviewed shows that the majority appreciate the institutional culture, feel “heard,” and feel they belong. However, some students interviewed disagreed: it is concerning that feedback is often considered in isolation or that student feedback mechanisms are inconsistently undertaken across faculties and departments. It is recommended that the university incorporate the “student voice” more holistically through a review of its current feedback mechanisms.

The UWC recognises the role of language in effective learning and teaching, but the language policy dates back to 2003. The institution understands that the use of language is a sensitive and controversial subject in South African higher education and that a more robust debate is needed around the inclusion of languages other than English in learning and teaching. The Panel concurs.

In response to the Covid-19 disruption, a *Flexible Learning and Teaching Provisioning (FLTP) Policy* and a revised *Assessment Policy* were approved by the Senate in 2021: most programmes are consequently to be offered in a blended mode (though some are offered entirely online), and the need for appropriate digital literacy skills for staff and students is addressed. The policy includes *A Didactical Framework for the Designing of Blended Learning Arrangements*. It is noted that the UWC is developing an *Integrated Implementation Framework* for the 2021 *Curriculum Transformation and Renewal Framework*. The *Integrated Implementation Framework* will be supported by the development of integrated faculty implementation plans. The university is commended for taking a holistic view of implementing these related policies, which should be showcased to university stakeholders. Implementation needs to be monitored and evaluated.

The UWC has made good progress around the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), ensuring that research activities inform curriculum development and revision. Published research outputs around SoTL are included in faculty reports to the STLC, and some academic staff present their research during Academic Week or offer faculty seminars. However, the SoTL research is often individually- or interest-driven, and structures for the holistic integration of SoTL research are limited. It is recommended that the UWC strengthens processes to support shifts in thinking *across* faculties to improve student experience and performance.

The UWC recognises that its curricula must prepare students for a technologically sophisticated world and global workplace. The forced Covid-19 disruption shone a spotlight on the need for digital literacy skills for both staff and students, as well as the need for an enabling technological infrastructure. Due to the pandemic, innovations in the use of technology for teaching and learning included the increased use of the LMS and the use of data analytics. The Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies focuses on using emerging technologies for learning, teaching and assessment.

The University acknowledges that further reflection is required on the digital learning and teaching experience. While the CIECT shares innovations around blended learning and teaching, more formal approaches should be considered to disseminate insights about blended learning and teaching, which is now the default mode of learning. The long-term blended learning strategy and the associated pedagogies must be monitored, and lessons shared across faculties.

Aligned to the University's IOP and ICT plan, it is recommended that the long-term ICT infrastructure of the whole university (including matters related to systems, devices and Wi-Fi) consider future needs, and that the UWC is appropriately provisioned to enable learning, teaching and research in an increasingly digital world. This can be achieved through developing and monitoring a digital transformation strategy.

Commendations

- e. The UWC is commended for its promotion of dynamic discourse, comprehensive consultations and listening to the voices of staff and students to promote evidence-based engagement. The general perception is that many staff and students have a sense of belonging to the institution and feel heard.
- f. The UWC is currently developing an *Integrated Implementation Framework* for the *Curriculum Transformation and Renewal Framework* (2021), the *Flexible Learning and Teaching Provisioning (FLTP) Policy* (2021) and the *Assessment Policy* (2021). This *Integrated Implementation Framework* is to be supported by faculty-integrated implementation plans. The University must be commended for taking a holistic view of implementing these three related and essential policies and frameworks.

Recommendations

39. It is recommended that the UWC should do even more to hear and incorporate the “student voice” holistically in decision-making by undertaking a comprehensive review of current student engagement, feedback and reporting mechanisms to streamline these processes and identify areas for improvement. This evaluation could be undertaken using the adapted Dunne & Zastra (2011) model for students' voices.
40. It is recommended that the integrated policy implementation approach aligned to the *Curriculum Transformation and Renewal Framework*, the *Flexible Learning and Teaching Provisioning Policy*, and the *Assessment Policy*, should be further expanded across university policy areas in future.
41. It is recommended that once approved, the University's *Integrated Implementation Framework* and faculty-integrated implementation plans be showcased to the University stakeholders, and the implementation of these frameworks and plans be effectively monitored and evaluated.
42. It is recommended that, under the structures of the DVC: Academic, the UWC gives attention to processes that support a shift in thinking across faculties to embed further research-informed teaching, learning and assessment as ways to improve student performance and the student experience.
43. It is recommended that the DVC: Academic and related structures look at implementing far more formal approaches to learning about, sharing and reflecting on the effectiveness of blended learning and teaching as the new default mode of learning and teaching. The long-term blended learning strategy and the associated pedagogies must be monitored, as must staff development plans. Any lessons must be shared widely across faculties to inform the learning and teaching experience.
44. It is recommended that the UWC develop a digital transformation strategy aligned with its current plans to ensure the growth and sustainability of the university's long-term ICT infrastructure (including matters related to systems, devices and wi-fi). Such a strategy would need to anticipate future needs and appropriately provisioning to ensure facilitate learning, teaching and research in an increasingly digital world. A monitoring and evaluation mechanism should also be put in place as part of the strategy to ensure its implementation.

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

The Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) 2021-2025 has three core goals. The first relates to the student experience:

"To facilitate a meaningful and stimulating university experience for students, from initial registration to graduation, by building co-curricular opportunities, responsive support services and institutional cultures that allow for growth and development, and that lay the foundation for lifelong learning; and efficient and effective enrolment management geared towards enhancing the University's overall mission and long-term ambitions." (IOP, Pg. 13)

The UWC values the "student voice," regarding it as more comprehensive than simply the student evaluations that provide feedback. It has adapted Dunne & Zastra's (2011) model for the student voice to guide engagements. It therefore accepts and includes students evaluating their higher education experience, acting as partners or co-creators, participating in decision-making, and serving as agents for change. Student feedback is captured via student module evaluations, graduate exit surveys, student tutor evaluations, and the first-year experience survey and is captured externally via various surveys. In general, the UWC should develop and implement mechanisms to evaluate and monitor the impact of any student support interventions on student success.

The Panel conducted site visits at three different campuses, and similar standards were maintained across the learning and teaching sites. Stakeholders expressed their appreciation for the enabling facilities at the campuses that support learning and teaching success. The Panel noted that the UWC had invested significantly in developing and expanding the delivery sites to support the unique instructional needs of certain disciplines. Its mode of delivery is now moving to blended forms of provision, and it needs to ensure that learning and teaching exposure remain equivalent across the different modes.

Student module evaluations are administered on a semester basis but are not consistently undertaken across faculties and departments. It is unclear how student feedback is incorporated to improve learning and teaching and how it is monitored. A university-wide process is recommended to ensure consistent student evaluation and that data is used and enhances the learning experience and performance. The Academic Planning Unit (APU) needs support with a

system to monitor student evaluations. To encourage the development of a 360-degree, self-reflective evaluation system, it is recommended that the APU also be supported to promote a culture of lecturer self-evaluation and peer evaluations. The UWC should consider incorporating additional student feedback and evaluation at the programme level.

In the Siyaphumelela Project, data analytics are used to improve student success. The university intends to reduce drop-out rates and improve retention via the Student Success Committee, a Sub-Committee of the SAP. Three focus areas relating to data analytics are strengthening business intelligence capability, using learning analytics to enhance student support, and identifying curriculum- and other support interventions needed. Although several dashboards are currently available, the use of data analytics is still in the early stages, being mainly used at the senior management level. For staff across the university to become familiar with using data analytics will take time, and there is a need to incorporate additional data sources (systems). While roadshows have been held within faculties, it is recommended that data analytics be better used and cascaded throughout the different levels within the university to aid access to information and support decision-making around the student experience and performance.

The University emphasises its key role in the region in providing access to a university education and its aim to support students to succeed in their studies, with the intention that these graduates can “plough” their knowledge and expertise back into their communities. Staff noted that student success is much more than pass- and throughput rates. Factors include time-to-completion, graduate employability and global citizenship. However, staff opinions varied as to how student success should be viewed: it is therefore recommended that the university’s definition of student success in the UWC *Student Retention and Success Framework* be further discussed and debated, working towards a common view. The UWC monitors several success indicators: the degree credit success rates and graduation rates have been generally aligned to targets in recent years, however, the degree credit success rate rose sharply in 2020 (possibly related to the Covid-19 disruption and assessment changes). In general, the Panel feels that more evidence could have showcased student work and the university’s celebration of its top-achieving students.

During the Covid-19 disruption, the student voice was heard and incorporated into decision-making through student surveys around online learning and the return to campus, but the move to emergency remote teaching and learning was not entirely experienced by all students as enabling success. It was agreed though that the university did its best to enable the continuation

of learning and teaching through a flexible approach: a catch-up session was organised at the end of the 2020 academic year for students unable to participate during Term 2; support services continued to provide support online. The pandemic's effect on the health and wellness of staff and students during this period is a concern that staff raised. The UWC needs to keep this in mind for its people framework.

Student success is dealt with under the UWC *Student Retention and Success Framework*, and several interventions have been put in place which include additional tutoring, mentorship, peer learning and boot camps. The university also has a first-year experience and transition programme, a Tutor Enhancement Programme and the Accelerated Excellence Programme. High-priority modules are also identified and supported. The addition of teaching and learning specialists at the faculty level has also helped. As part of the *Student Retention and Success Framework*, the UWC aims for a "Caring and Inclusive Environment" from pre-orientation to graduation. The majority of students appreciate the institutional culture, feel "heard" and experience a sense of "belonging". They indicated that they would choose the UWC again to study, a finding supported by most students in the 2021 Graduate Exit Survey.

According to the SER (pg. 84), "*Complaints are usually managed on an ad-hoc basis as they are received or escalated, based on the nature of the complaint*". Student complaints may, however, "bounce" from one office to another, causing delays and frustration, and student emails or phone calls are sometimes not responded to. While certain helpdesks can monitor student queries and report on these (such as the Registrar's office and the CIS), the Panel agrees with the SER recommendation that a complaint management and reporting structure be developed. The UWC also needs to guard against institutional bureaucracy and different silos of operation that negatively affect responsiveness to student needs.

Staff culture surveys are undertaken on a three- to five-year basis, with the 2018 results as evidence. It is recommended that in the future such surveys include items related to quality, student experience and success. Support staff are encouraged to attend training, and an annual Registrar's Recognition and Rewards ceremony is held to confer various support staff awards. All new academic staff are expected to complete the semester-long *Professionalisation of Teaching and Learning Programme*, which culminates in an e-portfolio. For academic staff promotions, a submission of an evidence-based learning and teaching portfolio is required that includes educational achievements and their impact on students. It is noted that staff embarking on a PhD are assigned a mentor. In general, there may be a greater need for mentoring

opportunities for emerging academics. From interviews with staff, overall support for emerging academics appears to be inconsistent across departments and faculties.

Recommendations

45. It is recommended that a comprehensive process be established for holistically tracking the results of internal and external student surveys, as well as the intended actions resulting from analysing the results and monitoring their implementation.
46. It is recommended that a university process be followed or amended to ensure that student evaluations are consistently undertaken across delivery and modes of provision, and that the data is used to improve the learning experience and student performance. The Academic Planning Unit (APU) needs to be supported to monitor student evaluations through a robust monitoring system.
47. To encourage the development of a self-reflective and a 360-degree evaluation culture, it is recommended that the APU be supported to establish mechanisms to promote a culture of lecturer self-evaluation and peer evaluations.
48. It is recommended that the expansion of the availability of data analytics be cascaded throughout the different levels within the university to improve access to information and decision-making around the student experience and performance, particularly across sites of delivery and modes of provision.
49. It is recommended that the UWC's broad definition of student success in the *Student Retention and Success Framework* be further discussed and debated to ensure greater awareness and to foster a common view throughout the institution.
50. It is recommended that the DVC: Student Development and Support, together with the Registrar's Office and other structures, develop a complaint management system and a complaints-reporting structure to identify and monitor how student complaints are managed and responded to in different parts of the university to promote responsiveness, particularly across sites of delivery and modes of provision.
51. It is recommended that future staff culture surveys include items related to quality, student experience and student success.

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

The UWC conducts internal graduate exit surveys and relies on the Universum Talent Survey for data about the employability of its graduates as well. Data from the graduate exit survey comes as an interactive dashboard allowing staff to explore and disaggregate data. The results from these surveys are used to identify areas for improvement. The IOP (2021-2025) focuses on indicators for improving graduation and success rates but does not include one around graduate employability.

The Office for Student Development (OSD) is commended for excellent career support services that enable graduate readiness. A career app (Career Xplora) assists students in creating CVs, receiving job notification alerts and allowing interaction with the UWC Careers Service.

The role of industry in the curriculum formulation is currently under development. Examples of programmes being developed in partnership with industry, such as a Masters in Data Science, already exist. The Panel was unfortunately unable to interview any employers of UWC graduates, so the present information is from the university's perspective only.

The UWC strives to maintain two-way communication with alumni through the Alumni Relations Office. There is a newsletter; several alumni events are held per year and an annual UWC Alumni Phone-a-thon is held to engage with alumni. During the Covid-19 disruption, virtual events were held. Keeping the alumni database is an ongoing challenge: maintaining alumni relationships with graduates overseas is especially difficult, but an online alumni portal has been established to strengthen engagement. Alumni relations are reported in the UWC Annual Report, and an above-industry satisfaction level with UWC's alumni services is reported in the 2021 Universum Talent Update. Alumni relations success is measured via engagement numbers, fundraising, the number of active networks and media coverage.

Commendation

- g. The Office for Student Development (OSD) is commended for its achievements in supporting students in preparing for graduate readiness in recent years, such as the recognition received by graduate employers.

Recommendation

52. It is recommended that the process for acting on graduate employability findings be strengthened so that the results and the impact of these actions are monitored and evaluated.