



# **Audit Report on the University of Zululand**

**Report of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)  
to the University of Zululand**

## **Executive Summary**

**December 2010**

**1 Quintin Brand Street, Perseus Technopark, Brummeria, Pretoria, 0002,  
P O Box 94, Perseuspark, 0020  
Telephone: +27 12 349 3853, Fax +27 12 349 3927, E-mail: [lange.l@che.ac.za](mailto:lange.l@che.ac.za)  
Visit our website at <http://www.che.ac.za>**

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1 Quintin Brand Street  
Perseuor Technopark  
Brummeria  
Pretoria  
0002

P O Box 94  
Perseuorpark  
0020  
South Africa

Tel: +27 12 349 3853

Fax: +27 12 349 3927

Website: <http://www.che.ac.za>

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ADU</b>	Academic Development Unit
<b>APQ</b>	Academic Planning and Quality Division
<b>CEEL</b>	Centre for Cooperative Education and Experiential Learning
<b>CFO</b>	Chief Financial Officer
<b>CHE</b>	Council on Higher Education
<b>ETQA</b>	Education and Training Quality Assurer
<b>HEMIS</b>	Higher Education Management Information System
<b>HEQC</b>	Higher Education Quality Committee
<b>HoD</b>	Head of Department
<b>HR</b>	Human Resource
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>IOP</b>	Institutional Operating Plan
<b>NIH</b>	National Institute of Health
<b>NRF</b>	National Research Foundation
<b>SAQA</b>	South African Qualifications Authority
<b>SRC</b>	Student Representative Council
<b>UniZulu</b>	University of Zululand

## **OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT**

### **Introduction**

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), which was constituted as the Quality Council for Higher Education in terms of the Higher Education Amendment Act of 2008 and the National Qualifications Act of 2008, has a statutory responsibility to conduct institutional audits of higher education institutions.

The audit of the University of Zululand (hereinafter referred to as 'UniZulu') was conducted by the HEQC in terms of its mandate. This document reports on the audit process and findings based on the Audit Portfolio (AP), appendices and other material provided by UniZulu; supplementary documentation requested from the institution; and interviews and observations made during the audit visit that took place between 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> March 2010. The Panel also consulted the Institutional Profile of UniZulu prepared by the Advice and Monitoring Directorate of the CHE. This report<sup>1</sup> contains an overview of the audit visit, the findings of the Panel in relation to the audit criteria set by the HEQC, and a list of commendations and recommendations that are based on the findings.

### **The audit process**

In May 2007 the Executive Director of the HEQC secured the consent of the Vice-Chancellor and the senior management team at UniZulu that the University would participate in an institutional audit in October 2008. This date was later moved to March 2010 at the request of UniZulu.

UniZulu conducted its institutional self-evaluation between February and August 2009 and produced an Audit Portfolio which was submitted to the HEQC in December 2009 for review by the audit Panel. The process for the generation of the Audit Portfolio had started in 2007 when the Academic Planning and Quality Division of UniZulu established five Institutional Audit Task Teams which met and reported regularly to the Council of the University. The Task Teams also developed a project plan, which included a review of the 19 audit criteria of the HEQC (AP: 15).

The HEQC constituted an audit Panel consisting of senior academics and academic administrators from the higher education community, all of whom had taken part either in previous audits or in audit preparation workshops run by the HEQC. An Audit Portfolio meeting was convened in Pretoria on 27-28 January 2010 at which the Panel considered the Audit Portfolio and identified additional documents to be requested from the University prior to the audit visit.

The Director of Institutional Audits and a manager then undertook a preparatory visit to the University in February 2010. During that visit, the format and other details of the audit visit were discussed and agreed to by the senior management of the University.

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<sup>1</sup> The report includes four appendices. Appendix A lists the objectives of HEQC audits; Appendix B provides the names of the members of the Audit Panel; Appendix D lists the documents submitted by UniZulu; and Appendix D contains the audit visit schedule.

The audit visit took place from 13-19 March 2010. The Panel viewed the infrastructure of the main campus at Kwa Dlangezwa and Richards Bay campus and conducted interviews with a wide range of UniZulu's staff, students and other stakeholders. The interviews were completed on 18 March and verbal feedback was given to the Vice-Chancellor and her invitees on 19 March.

Open sessions were also available for staff, students or members of the community to meet the Panel and make a submission. Some staff members made use of this opportunity.

In total, the Audit Panel interviewed 296 people in 41 interview sessions during the audit visit, including:

- Council members
- The Vice-Chancellor and members of her executive management
- Members of Senate and senate committees
- Executive Deans and heads of schools
- Academic and academic support staff
- Professional and administrative staff
- Undergraduate and postgraduate students
- Representatives of staff unions
- Representatives of the Student Representative Council
- Civic and community representatives
- Alumni.

This report reflects the audit process and findings based on the Audit Portfolio provided by UniZulu, the profile of UniZulu prepared by the Advice and Monitoring Directorate of the CHE, supplementary information requested from the institution, and interviews and observations made during the audit visit. Every effort has been made to understand the complex nature of the context in which UniZulu operates, as well as the quality arrangements at the institution at the time of the audit visit, and to base the Panel's findings on the documentation submitted, the interviews held and the observations made.

It is expected that UniZulu will use these findings to strengthen its internal quality management systems and thereby facilitate the improvement of the quality of its core academic activities. Decisions about the manner in which this is done, and the priority accorded to the various recommendations, is the prerogative of the institution. It is expected that, five months after the publication of the audit report, UniZulu will submit to the HEQC an improvement plan based on the HEQC Audit Report.

The HEQC would like to thank UniZulu for the co-operative manner in which it has participated in the audit process. The HEQC would also like to express appreciation for the openness and confidence shown by UniZulu in allowing the Panel to conduct interviews and to have access to key documents. The hospitality and assistance of UniZulu personnel is

appreciated. Professor C. Kistan and his team are thanked for the preparation of the documentation and their efforts towards the organisation of the audit visit.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Brief Overview of the University of Zululand**

1. The University of Zululand (UniZulu) is a rural-based higher education institution located in KwaZulu Natal, north of the uThukela River. UniZulu has two campuses, its historical seat and main campus at Kwa-Dlangezwa, situated on land donated for development by the Mkhwanazi people and a new urban campus in Richards Bay, which opened in 2008, dedicated to the offering of vocational programmes.
2. As part of the 2002 government-led restructuring of the higher education system, the institution was marked to become a comprehensive university offering vocational, professional and general degrees. In 2010 UniZulu has 13 896 students enrolled across its four Faculties: Arts, Education, Commerce, Administration and Law, and Science and Agriculture; with the majority of students being enrolled in the first two Faculties. Approximately 97% of the enrolment consists of African students and 60% female students. In 2007 UniZulu had 739 permanent staff members of which 231 were academics.

### **Institutional mission and identity**

3. The vision and mission were developed through a consultative process that involved management, staff, students, and other stakeholders and was approved by the University Council. UniZulu has translated its mission into four primary goals that direct institutional activities and functions. However from interviews with senior management and academic staff as well as the examination of a variety of strategic documents, it seems that there is not a consensual understanding of the academic identity and mission of the institution among its main stakeholders. The Panel found that there is not only confusion about the conceptualisation of the comprehensive and rural character of the University, but also that there is considerable internal tension about the implications of the comprehensive status of the institution and its expansion to the urban industrial context of Richards Bay.
4. Many staff members see UniZulu's rural character as a matter of geography and a source of disadvantage while others see it as an opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the overall social development of Northern KwaZulu-Natal. The Panel found some good examples of programmes that respond to the specific social and economic needs of the region. However, an examination of the academic programmes historically offered by the institution suggests that more thought needs to be given to the implications of the institution's rural location for its programme offerings in

general and the extent to which UniZulu's programmes can, and should, be more directly responsive to the needs of its rural context.

5. The Panel concurs with the Vice-Chancellor that the position of UniZulu in the Durban-Richards' Bay corridor can become a strategic advantage: for the future growth of the University; the balance between its rural and its urban orientations; and its ability to influence and support integrated socio-economic development in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Although the Panel understands and acknowledges the weight of historical disadvantage, it would also like to encourage the institution to think of itself outside a deficit framework, as a first step to fulfilling its potential. The institution's leadership might like to explore more systematically the organisational and programmatic implications of being a University serving a rural area. This, in turn, could be the beginning of an approach to forging new partnerships with the local community and other external stakeholders of the University.
6. Interviews with different layers of staff indicated that the academic identity of the institution as a comprehensive university is even more contested than its rural orientation. There is confusion about the meaning and implications of being 'a comprehensive university' for the offerings of programmes and therefore for the different faculties and departments.
7. It is apparent that most staff members, even those with senior management responsibilities, are not familiar with the enrolment targets agreed with government by the institution and are not aware of a gradual approach to the conversion of the institution into a comprehensive university. As a result enrolment targets are not being met for qualifications except at masters' and doctoral levels (AP: 41). Enrolments by disciplinary field are also not being met.
8. Lack of information, and possibly lack of understanding about enrolment targets are compounded by the absence at system level of a sufficiently conceptualised blueprint as to the focus of comprehensive universities. All of this has resulted in a much greater preoccupation with the proportion between degree and non-degree programmes than with the pedagogic and curricular underpinnings of programmes more oriented to the labour market. The Panel believes that the recent appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor creates a good opportunity to tackle these issues, particularly as they seem to have a role in the demoralisation of academic staff, an issue which was pointed out in several of the interviews.
9. In relation to the expansion of the University to Richards Bay, the Panel agrees with the institution that an academic project, which responds to the overall strategic direction of the institution, needs to accompany this expansion. This was far from being conceptualised at the time of the audit visit.

## **Recommendation 1**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand engage with its history, location and current constraints to unpack what it means to be a rurally-based comprehensive institution with an urban footprint in Richards Bay in terms of maintaining a balance between programme offerings and enrolment planning. This needs to be done with explicit reference to the implications that the refocus of programme offerings to give effect to the comprehensive nature of the University would have for academic departments and staff and a clear sense of who are the institution's partners and stakeholders in this process.**

### **Transformation at UniZulu: Equity, Redress and Institutional Culture**

10. The ethnic base for the creation of the University not only determined its rural character but also conditioned its relationship with the surrounding community. Given its location and history, the University not only has provided access to higher education but it has also become a main source of employment for the locals. The Panel understands and supports the importance of the relationship between the community and the University. However, it has learned that certain aspects of this relationship might be undermining UniZulu's chances of overcoming some of its challenges in terms of the provision of quality service and education to its students. Investigating the ways in which the University can contribute to the socio-economic development of the rural community constitutes one possible area in which UniZulu might want to explore the notion of 'transformation'.

## **Recommendation 2**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand enter into a new dialogue with the local community to establish the terms of a new partnership in which the institution's obligation towards the local community is translated into concrete projects of development, including the provision of appropriate skills and qualifications. This needs to be accompanied by due cognisance of the University's autonomy in relation to admissions and hiring of staff.**

11. In relation to the mission of the University to facilitate access to higher education, enrolment figures indicate that over 60% of UniZulu's students are female. The Panel was pleased to note that, contrary to national trends, there has been a steady rise in the number of female students enrolled in the previous three years in the field of Science, Engineering and Technology. While the Panel is aware that these figures might be a reflection of the demographics of the province, having such a large number of female students should encourage the institution to focus on making the campus and its institutional culture a welcoming and supportive environment for female students.

12. The Panel understands that the 2009 registration was difficult to manage by most South African higher education institutions and that most enrolled more students than planned. UniZulu exceeded its projected enrolment by 1348 students (AP: 40). This has aggravated an already untenable situation in relation to the carrying capacity of the institution, both in terms of educational infrastructure and residence space. The Panel wants to point out the impact that overcrowded lecture halls and campus infrastructure have on the institution's capacity to function at acceptable levels of quality. The Panel found that lack of water is a constant feature of campus life. This not only creates dangerous conditions on campus, it also conspires against the creation of a space conducive to the development of academic life.
13. The Panel heard from students and staff of overcrowded residences. The Panel also heard of residences regularly vandalised by students, unhealthy food, and a lack of safety and security on campus. The Panel is of the view that poor infrastructure and student services will be aggravated by over-enrolment unless the institution agrees with the Department of Higher Education and Training on an enrolment plan that takes into account the actual carrying capacity of the institution in terms of physical, educational infrastructure and staff. Important in this regard would be the development of a five to ten year plan for infrastructure development.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand institute a comprehensive audit of the state of its campus infrastructure and of the impact that the state of the infrastructure (from lecture halls to residences and sanitation) has on the education enterprise and develop a five to ten year plan for the replacement, maintenance and expansion of campus infrastructure.**

14. The Panel is disturbed by the presence of a tavern on campus. The Panel has examined this issue extensively and reached the conclusion that the reasons that led to the establishment of the tavern have backfired on the institution. The tavern is a source of violence, crime, and unhealthy and unsafe conditions on campus, which jeopardise the educational purpose of this institution. The Panel interviewed many staff, students and senior managers who expressed the view that the tavern should be closed. The Panel urges the institution to re-assess its ability to manage the tavern in terms of enforcement of legislation on the consumption of alcohol, discipline, and the location of the tavern premises, which is currently opposite the library.

### **Recommendation 4**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand review the presence of a tavern on campus and the effects this has on reported violence and crime, and its impact on student life. This information should constitute the basis for a plan of action to change the current situation.**

15. The institution's aspiration to offer a caring and diverse teaching environment and to the development of students that are schooled in good citizenship is jeopardised by endemic conflict and intolerance at the institution. The political rivalry between the ANC and IFP in provincial and national politics has infused the relationship between the student formations of both parties that are active on campus. The consequences of this are devastating the University. Residence life, academic offerings and the overall quality of the student experience at UniZulu is endangered by political hostility between rival student formations. Students are forced into political alignment, threatened and beaten by competing political factions with the result that there is a substantial number of students who live in terror. The Panel had the opportunity to listen to the testimony of both politically-aligned and non-politically aligned students. It is clear from the information gathered that this environment is not conducive to learning and constitutes a fundamental obstacle for the provision of quality education at the University.
16. Political intolerance, violence and fear also permeate the life of academic and support staff, and even management. Complicit or fearful security services seem unable to intervene on time or to intervene at all. Most attempts at dealing with political violence on campus have failed. The Panel understands that this situation is a consequence of political parties' influence on student politics and their use of student politics to further their provincial and national interests. The Panel is concerned that management, despite having met with the relevant parties, does not seem to comprehend fully the extent to which students live in fear and the negative effect that this has on learning processes.

### **Recommendation 5**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand put in place a carefully thought through process aimed at stopping political interference, violence and intimidation on campus. This process should involve discussions with the highest level of leadership of both parties, training of student leadership, improvement of residence security, and a focus on the quality of student life.**

17. The Panel is of the view that for the institution to realise its goals of providing 'access to students from diverse backgrounds and to provide an enabling and caring teaching and learning environment', the University's management should take the responsibility of creating a campus culture that is based on democratic virtues such as deliberation, tolerance and accountability. Appropriate allocation of responsibility, resources and lines of accountability for student leadership and student services should support both processes. Failure to deal with these issues will seriously undermine the viability of the institution.
18. Diversity is a value embraced by the institution yet reference is made to incidents of perceived racism and xenophobia in 2008 'when the union published a document accusing staff and students from neighbouring African countries and at the same time

demeaning the presence of Indian staff on campus' (AP: 141). The Panel was not able to ascertain the actual role of the staff union in this regard, but it heard in various interviews of concerns about racism and xenophobia among staff, and would like to encourage the university leadership to investigate the reality and extent of this problem.

19. The Panel learned that the increase in enrolments had not been matched by an increase in academic staff, and that the ratio between academic and support staff (1:2) is not conducive to offering quality teaching and learning to their students or to the production of research (AP: 35-37). Lack of sufficient staff creates a heavier workload that, together with uncertainty in relation to academic leadership and the future of academic offerings, demoralises academics. The over-hiring of support staff might be related to the assumed role of UniZulu as the local employer. However, the Panel heard in a range of interviews with staff that the reduced number of academic staff seems to be caused by poor salaries, high workloads as well as the unattractive institutional environment. The Panel also heard in interviews with external stakeholders, students and some senior managers of academics and administrative personnel not taking responsibility for their duties and having a poor work ethic. Taking all of this into account, UniZulu needs to reflect on its institutional culture. This includes the attitudes, behaviours and values displayed by all the members of the university community.
20. The above notwithstanding, the Panel also found many cases of dedicated, committed and capable academics contributing to their disciplines and concerned about their students' well-being. Students referred to these academics with respect, admiration and gratitude. The Panel read evaluations of courses in which students thanked their lecturers for having 'changed their lives'. The Panel is pleased with these developments and encourages these academics to provide leadership in the creation of an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. This will enable the institution to achieve its transformation goals of becoming a comprehensive university characterised by excellence, academic freedom and social responsibility.

### **Recommendation 6**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand enter into an institution-wide exercise to confront its institutional culture, in order to address demoralisation and alienation among different internal constituencies. This exercise should be designed to value and showcase work ethics, accountability and dedication in different sectors of the institution, and to come to a consensus about the values that the university community at UniZulu want to espouse.**

## **Institutional Planning, Resource Allocation and Quality Management**

21. The difficult political and strategic context of the University requires a Council aware of its strategic and fiduciary responsibilities as well as of the difference between oversight and management. In several interviews the Panel heard of the inability of successive University Councils to rise above the prevailing political fractiousness at UniZulu thereby not being able to provide the necessary leadership for the institution to solve some of its challenges and deep-rooted problems. The Panel noted the current Council's efforts in this regard and wishes to impress upon members of the need to make this into a fundamental priority.
22. In terms of the relationship between Council and Senate the Panel examined a variety of documents and interviewed members of both bodies as well as a number of staff and senior managers at the institution. The Panel is of the view that the lack of clarity about the meaning and scope of academic reconfiguration as well as inertia and resistance on the part of Senate, has led Council to take a closer look into academic matters. This has resulted not only in disempowered and demoralised academics, but it has also entrenched a simplistic approach to academic planning, which is based on cost effectiveness instead of academic and pedagogic appropriateness and consistency.
23. The Programmes Review Task Team established in 2004 is chaired by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO). While the Panel understands that cost effectiveness is an important dimension in the management of academic offerings, it cannot take priority over academic considerations. It is unusual for a specialist in finances to chair a task team that is supposed to be grappling not only with one of the core functions of the University, but also, in this case making decisions about the future academic direction of the institution. It is difficult to accept the institution's explanation that the only person capable of chairing a task team that included the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic Affairs is the CFO.
24. On the part of Senate, the Panel heard that there has been a lack of intellectual leadership in the academic function at the institution, which is evident in the superficiality of the debate in many Senate committees. Documentary evidence and interviews with relevant members of the University indicate that overall, there has been a lack of engagement in determining the principles and concepts that define the institution's academic identity. Lack of engagement has engendered the feeling that top-down decision-making did not leave space for initiative or creativity. This has been further reinforced by a non-academic approach to planning the core business of the institution, the limited regard for the role of the Deans, and a number of Senate committees.

### **Recommendation 7**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand consider reviewing the terms of reference, intellectual standing and efficiency of the committees and task teams originated in different governance structures as part of an attempt at strengthening and reviewing the role and functions of Senate at this institution.**

25. Since 2010 UniZulu has not had a fully functioning Student Representative Council (SRC). This is a concern as it tends to impact negatively on the governance of the institution. The 2009 controversies around student elections have deprived students of effective representation in terms of the democratic governance of UniZulu and also with regard to academic matters and, particularly, in relation to its responsibility for the quality of the academic experience of students. Further, the contestations around elections have fuelled political intolerance on campus. The Panel urges the institution to take its responsibility in developing the student leadership seriously. The Panel recognises that the constitution of UniZulu's SRC allows for the Dean of Students to manage the input of students into other governance structures including Council. In interviews the Panel heard of suggestions that the constitution of the SRC should be reviewed and revised every five years. The Panel suggests that these revisions should be done in a transparent fashion and also involve the student body.

### **Recommendation 8**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand revise the manner in which students participate in the governance structures of the University. One aspect of this should include the development, implementation and monitoring of programmes for the development of student leadership not only for the Student Representative Council but also for all students. Another aspect could be the investigation of alternative student governance models, as a possible long-term solution to its current problems. In the meantime, the University is encouraged to ensure that a functioning Student Representative Council is installed as soon as possible.**

26. The institution has reconfigured the academic management of the institution into a devolved model with four Faculties each headed by an Executive Dean who takes responsibility for the achievement of faculty as well as institutional level goals. However, the Panel heard that Deans have neither sufficient administrative support to exercise their executive function nor control over resources that would allow them to tackle directly issues such as the filling of vacant positions. The Panel encourages the institution to integrate the Deans more fully into executive management by giving them sufficient support and resources. By the same token, the Deans must understand that their role as executives requires of them to be simultaneously academic leaders

and managers responsible and accountable for the institution's achievement of its strategic goals.

27. The issue of the power of the Executive Deans becomes particularly important in the context of the University's difficulty in recruiting well-qualified staff, especially at senior academic level. There are currently many vacancies and several departments that have acting academic heads. This is not conducive to the offering of quality programmes or to the development of a research culture at the institution. The institution may wish to revise the manner in which academic appointments are managed and the role of the Deans is in this regard. Overall the sense of the Panel is that at UniZulu there is a lack of vision and delivery of an academic project which is being steered from a clear place of intellectual leadership at the centre of the University. The inertia in implementing the career-focused programmes demanded by UniZulu's new comprehensive status seems primarily to be caused by support services taking financial decisions that seriously compromise the core academic function of the institution.

#### **Recommendation 9**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand reassess the effectiveness of the organisation of its management. This should include: the strengthening of academic leadership at the centre of the University; the review of delegation of authority for staff selection committees; and the strengthening of the role of Deans as academic leaders and accountable managers.**

28. In general the Panel found not only that most administrative and support services are dysfunctional but also that there is no culture of service at the University. The Panel did not see convincing evidence of systematic collection and analysis of institutional data to decide on interventions on the core functions. Similarly, the Panel did not find sufficient evidence of the centrality and efficiency of academic planning despite the institution's acknowledgement of its importance. In this regard the Panel is concerned about the fact that the planning and the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) functions reside in different departments. The Panel is also concerned about the current lack of capacity in the Academic Planning and Quality Division to undertake planning and quality assurance.
29. No detail was provided on the budgeting process that informs resource allocation or on how the distribution of resources would be changed as UniZulu transforms into a comprehensive institution. The overview of income and expenditure provided in the documentation suggests that UniZulu is now financially healthy after several years of financial crises, but it was unclear to the Panel how resource allocation enables faculties to achieve the plan of building a new reconfigured comprehensive institution.

### **Recommendation 10**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand undertake a careful assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the administrative support functions with a view to enlist finances, human resources, and information and communication technologies to enable the institution to achieve its strategic objectives. This will necessitate the establishment of a system for accountability and quality assurance of the support services available at the institution, with a view to improve the quality of student experience and minimise the administrative difficulties faced by academic staff.**

### **Recommendation 11**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand consider the development of a planning framework and the recruitment of the necessary capability and capacity to resource its planning function.**

30. The University has an Academic and Planning Quality (APQ) Division that has taken the HEQC definition of quality as its own. APQ aspires to engage with all staff and students and has a developmental approach to quality aimed at strengthening capacity within the institution. There are a number of structures and committees to review the provision of quality and the development of policies to enhance and monitor the quality management systems. The Panel is aware of several developments in terms of support in this area. While the Panel heard that APQ's work enjoys fairly general appreciation, it also noted that the Unit is under-capacitated to undertake the many tasks and projects necessary at the institution with sufficient depth.
31. Although the institution claims that quality processes form part of the planning and resources allocation in the core activities, very little or no evidence was available to indicate the embedding of such practices in the institution. The Panel gained the impression that often, quality assurance was taken by academic departments as a compliance exercise. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to build on the consensus generated in the area of quality assurance in the preparation for the audit in order to ensure that quality assurance is not just a mechanical exercise but a serious process of reflection and improvement on the quality of programmes, teaching and learning, research, and community engagement at department and faculty levels.
32. UniZulu has a number of formal committees, which have, as part of their function, the regular review and monitoring of quality in order to promote and improve the core activities of the University. In addition, the Panel heard that the Institutional Forum views itself as having an oversight role regarding policies that govern quality. While the interest in quality assurance is welcomed, the Panel would like to caution the institution about the proliferation of committees that has resulted in the lack of implementation of policy. Since no single entity assumes final responsibility for

quality management, the lack of accountability which seems to characterise some aspects of the work of the institution continues unchallenged.

### **Recommendation 12**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand (i) review the different structures that have quality assurance as part of their brief; rationalise overlapping roles and areas of competence and establish clear lines of responsibility and accountability in relation to the quality assurance of the different core functions; and (ii) review the resources available to the Academic Planning and Quality Division in relation to its brief.**

### **Benchmarking and Surveys**

33. Benchmarking is not addressed specifically in the Audit Portfolio. The Panel has the impression that the different sectors within the University are not clear about the meaning of benchmarking. User surveys of support services, including graduation opinion surveys, library, student opinion and registration surveys have been conducted by UniZulu and the outcomes were discussed at relevant committees (AP: 54). However, there are inconsistencies in the follow-up of survey conclusions to rectify problems. The Panel could find no evidence of the utilisation of a regular system of user surveys to obtain information that could be used to drive a quality improvement plan. It is not clear whether a policy or system of guidelines exists on how the information contained in these documents is to be utilised, and whose responsibility it is to do so.
34. The Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) states that the curriculum will ensure that programmes accommodate internal and external portability of learning through benchmarking. Further references to benchmarking in the IOP concern academic staff (IOP: 21); programmes (IOP: 22); and student to staff ratios (IOP: 68). Responses to interview questions on benchmarking at various levels of the institution led the Panel to the conclusion that there is currently a disjunction between the objectives that are articulated in plans and compliance at the operational level. Where quality assurance studies are undertaken it appears that their impact on the institution is limited and applied on an *ad hoc* basis.

### **Recommendation 13**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand make consistent, meaningful and strategic use of reviews and benchmarking exercises by conducting appropriate follow-up on reviews and doing benchmarking with comparable institutions nationally and internationally.**

## Teaching and Learning

35. UniZulu provides no indication about the conceptual underpinnings of the institution's approach to teaching and learning. The institution tends to conflate institutional level planning with academic planning and the latter with teaching and learning so no specific engagement with issues of teaching and learning at a more abstract level has been provided. This notwithstanding, the Panel found a plethora of policies related to the management of teaching and learning. The Policy and Procedures on Teaching and Learning (2004) is the most encompassing and conceptually-oriented among these policies. While the rationale for the policy suggests a compliance attitude towards HEQC's expectations, rather than an interrogation of practices, the policy constitutes an important attempt at systematising UniZulu's approach to teaching. The Panel found during interviews with senior staff that the policy is not sufficiently known among staff, nor is there a sense of what a conceptualisation of teaching and learning might entail. This is consistent with the lack of academic leadership in the institution.
36. The documentary evidence analysed and the interviews held with senior management, academics and students allowed the Panel to identify three main areas of concern in relation to teaching and learning at the institution. First, is the lack of engagement with a conceptualisation of teaching and learning at institution level which is sensitive to the institution's mission, location and the profile of its students. In this regard, the Panel would like to encourage UniZulu to ensure that the Policy and Procedures on Teaching and Learning (2004) is discussed, understood and consistently implemented across Faculties. Secondly, the institution seems to have problems in the area of curriculum development; this has been compounded by the institution's interpretation of relevance and a lack of a consistent and clear understanding of the programme changes that the comprehensive character of the institution might entail. Finally, the third challenge is the impact that growing numbers of enrolments have on resources and the quality of teaching and learning at the institution. This involves the capacity and capability of UniZulu's staff to develop appropriate approaches to teaching and learning, and the institution's provision of the educational infrastructure necessary to cope with large student numbers.

### Recommendation 14

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand find ways to ensure that the Policy and Procedures on Teaching and Learning is understood and implemented consistently in all faculties and that appropriate oversight of this implementation is exercised by Senate.**

37. A number of different committees and structures have responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning at the institution, with the Senate being, at least nominally, the body responsible for the quality and integrity of teaching and learning. In interviews with academics and senior administrators, the Panel heard that there is no relationship between the key committees of Senate and Council. This, in the Panel's view, is

exacerbated by the prevailing lack of a coherent planning framework, the fragmented institutional approach to teaching and learning, and the weak capacity in these committees to discharge their responsibilities.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand critically examine the effectiveness of its Teaching and Learning Committee, and that of the structures and functions represented in that committee, as a way of identifying areas in which lack of capacity needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.**

38. **Academic Support Services.** In relation to the tracking of students and the capturing of marks the Panel heard of a number of difficulties faced by the different departments, unreliable systems and the possibility (and reality) of interference with the entering of marks into the system. Despite recommendations for an in-depth review of the tracking and registration procedures incorporating a review of the database management, this problem has not been taken up by any of the structures responsible for teaching and learning at the institution.

#### **Recommendation 16**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand, as a matter of urgency, review its registration and tracking systems, including the technical capabilities involved in the management of databases and the resourcing provided for these activities in order to ensure the integrity of its awards and qualifications.**

39. **Academic Development.** The Academic Development Unit (ADU) has an objective 'To strengthen academic development and other student support activities in order to promote successful learning'. There is, however, little evidence of a sustained, appropriate and effective academic staff development at UniZulu. The Panel also found little evidence of active academic and student support. The ADU is so under-resourced that it is unable to offer much support or many development opportunities to either students or academic staff. Consequently, it is not playing its intended role in the institution. The Panel is concerned about the comparative functional isolation in which this Unit operates and would like to encourage the institution to implement the recommendations made in the 2008 review of the ADU.

## **Recommendation 17**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand assess the extent to which the Academic Development Unit is being able to play a constructive role in the improvement of teaching and learning and providing the necessary support to students at the institution and consider the need to resource this unit appropriately for it to fulfil its function.**

40. The institution offers English language support modules which focus on students' competency in the medium of instruction. In 2006 an evaluation of a sample of these modules was conducted by the institution which appointed a Panel constituted of internal and external members to undertake the review. The review process seems to have been thorough and included students both as interviewees and as part of the Panel. The recommendations of the report point to some of the structural weakness in teaching and learning at the institution. However, the Panel is not aware of any follow up of this report at institutional level. The Panel urges the institution's senior management to take these issues seriously.
41. The Centre for Cooperative Education and Experiential Learning (CEEL) has been created to fulfil the mandate of establishing a link between UniZulu and the private and public sectors with a view to providing opportunities for students to experience and apply what they learn in the classroom in a real work environment. A further mandate is to establish advisory councils to provide input and feedback on the quality of student that the institution sends into the business world. The Panel is of the view that CEEL can play an important role both within the institution and the surrounding community, which suggests that the institution should find better ways to market CEEL's work both internally and externally.
42. **Library.** While the library in the satellite campus at Richards Bay is very small and has very limited holdings, the main library is impressive, organized, and efficiently run. The usage of the library has been on the rise and it continues to provide adequate studying space for students, including those with physical disabilities. The Panel is of the view that the library is directly aligned to its mission. Interviews with staff also indicated that the library's holdings effectively support research activities and that, together with other services provided by specialised librarians, have given effect to the advancement of the teaching and learning and research needs of the University. The library also houses a valuable collection of Africana (the Uzulu collection) and Zulu beadwork, pottery and leatherwork in the Anthropology Museum. This section of the library is now utilised for the isiZulu Dictionary Project.

## **Commendation 1**

**The HEQC commends the University of Zululand on the decision to resource the library in such a manner that it supports the teaching and learning, research and community engagement core functions of the University.**

43. **Information and Communication Technology (ICT).** The Panel heard during interviews with both undergraduate and postgraduate students that they had limited access to computer laboratories. Although the main laboratories remain open until late, these are oversubscribed. The provision is also compromised by the lack of a systematic and regular upgrading of laboratories and computer equipment. The Panel concludes that the ICT infrastructure does not address the learning needs of most of the students at UniZulu.
44. The Panel heard from interviews that the number of support staff allocated to ICT services is inadequate. Currently, apart from the Director of the ICT Unit, there are just three technicians and one help desk administrator available to cover the requirements of all staff desktops, which are approximately 750 in number. Moreover, there is an informal system to deal with the interaction between academic provision and ICT support services. In the Panel's view this system is not sustainable. Generally, the Panel concurs with the institution that there is a lack of communication between faculties and between departments and auxiliary units and that this, coupled with unnecessary, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, results in programmes sometimes being unable to access needed ancillary services.

## **Recommendation 18**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand address the utilisation of information technology at the University in terms of availability of hardware, implementation of existing software to manage administrative and educational processes and the adequate resourcing of the Information and Communications Technology Division.**

45. **Certification.** The Panel noted the security measures in place to avoid fraud or the illegal issuing of certificates. The Panel could not confirm that there is a regular review of the effectiveness of quality arrangements for ensuring the integrity of learner records and certification processes. Additionally, in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Ensuring Quality of Certification and Learner Record-Keeping, an annual report should be sent to Senate on the issuing of certificates by the Registrar, but the Panel could not confirm that this takes place.

## **Recommendation 19**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand immediately attend to the safety of the processes involved in the certification and keeping of learner records in order to strengthen good practice and address those areas in which the system is vulnerable.**

46. **Short Courses.** UniZulu has a Short Course Policy, which was approved by Senate in 2004 but not fully implemented until 2007 due to the restructuring of the University. Quality assurance is the responsibility of the relevant Head of Department (HoD) and, according to University policy, all short courses should be offered through the offices of CEEL. It would appear that CEEL is also responsible for the remuneration of the lecturers involved while the Registrar is responsible for the certification process. The Panel heard that, despite HoDs being held responsible for quality assurance, APQ provides the material that will be used. It is not clear whether this relates to content, or only to the physical items, such as course notes that are presumably given to students. CEEL has also introduced a service that arranges for feedback sessions and benchmarking exercises on a regular basis. As a result, CEEL now visits employers of short course graduates to obtain feedback. It is not clear how, or whether, this feedback is used to improve the courses offered.
47. The Panel was concerned about various training initiatives being run by companies or external educational and training authorities that wish to make use of the University logo and name as partners but with little educational input from UniZulu staff. In these instances, the Steering Committee meets to discuss the courses. This normally results in a Memorandum of Agreement between the University and the external provider. While the Panel acknowledges that the offering of short courses can be a good source of third stream income, it is nonetheless concerned that financial considerations seem to override academic standards, particularly where partnerships with extra-institutional entities are concerned. Where the University's name and logo are associated with a certificate that has been awarded, extra care must be taken to ensure that UniZulu's reputation is not compromised.

## **Recommendation 20**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand review its policies regarding the management and oversight of short courses and their quality assurance to ensure that the academic integrity of these short learning programmes is not compromised.**

48. **Programme Development.** The Panel understood through interviews with different structures and layers of academic staff that the comprehensive identity of the institution and its implications for programme offerings is a matter of both contestation and anxiety. One manifestation of the lack of understanding that

characterises the institution's approach to its comprehensiveness was the modularisation of its offerings undertaken in 2001. Under the banner of 'restructured for relevance' the institution undertook a massive exercise to reduce programmes to modules with a view to comply with its understanding of outcomes based education and the National Qualifications Framework. The review of the results of this exercise, commissioned in 2006, indicates the damage that it did to teaching and learning at UniZulu (Annexure 19). While the Panel is aware that in 2008 the Senate of the University instituted semester long courses as a response to the recommendations of this report, the Panel is uncertain of the impact that this had on existing modules and their relationship to programmes from a curriculum point of view. What is clear to the Panel is that, cases of good practice notwithstanding, curriculum design constitutes an area of weakness across the institution.

49. UniZulu has an extensive array of policy documents and procedures that are meant to guide the processes of design and approval of academic programmes and courses. Although the requirements for establishing new programmes are outlined in detail in several of these documents, the University acknowledges that problems arise in implementing the procedures.
50. **Programme Review** At the time of the site visit, there have been relatively few departmental reviews. The review reports examined by the Panel did not convey the impression of a stringent approach to curriculum and programme review. The Panel found no evidence of a system or strategy guiding the selection of department and the order of the reviews. The review system appears to be left to the APQ Division whose current staff complement is not sufficiently senior to be able to drive important critical review processes on behalf of the University. The Panel is of the view that the main problems confronting the institution are about incomplete implementation of good policies through lack of capacity and capability at different levels of the institution.

### **Recommendation 21**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand initiate a serious and thorough process of programme reviews which focuses on substantive teaching and learning issues and that it takes the necessary steps to develop capacity at departmental and faculty level for curriculum design. This will require that the institution resources its support units appropriately.**

51. **Staffing and Staff Development.** During the audit visit the Panel was consistently told about low staff morale. There was frequent reference to a culture of blame, a pervasive friction between academic and support staff and the lack of a work ethic in some parts of the University. It seems to the Panel that many of these problems are quite old and that not much has been done to address these concerns.

52. In the area of staffing and staff development, the University has a Recruitment and Placement Policy, a Staff Training and Development Policy and a Policy and Procedures for Academic Staff Development. Yet, it is not clear to the Panel that these policies are implemented and if they are, that their implementation is being adequately monitored. In the area of staff development to improve teaching and learning, the Panel did not find that sufficient resources have been made available to academics, or to the units that can carry out the task.
53. The University seems to have difficulty in recruiting well-qualified and experienced staff, particularly at senior academic levels. The Panel heard that academics are not attracted to UniZulu because of poor salaries and the remoteness of the location of the institution. Other interviewees pointed out that some people resisted employing non-South Africans (particularly people from other African countries) and people from 'other' racial groups. In interviews, the Panel heard of various cases of lecturers who are required to teach courses for which they have no academic qualifications. Some students also complained about being taught by under-qualified lecturers. This is a serious allegation which has grave implications for the integrity of some of the qualifications offered by the institution.

#### **Recommendation 22**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand ensure that appropriately qualified staff is appointed as soon as possible to fill academic and technical/administrative vacancies.**

#### **Recommendation 23**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand take the necessary measures to ensure that the different root causes of low staff morale are effectively addressed.**

54. **Assessment.** UniZulu has several policies that regulate the management of assessment. At the policy level UniZulu has done good work. The challenges arise in the practical implementation of these policies. The Panel was advised of ongoing difficulties with record keeping and entering of assessment marks. Cases were reported of missing marks, incorrect marks being entered and even graduation certificates being issued even though there are incomplete academic records. The University recognised these operational issues and took steps to rectify them, but some staff members believe that information technology-based steps like trailing and logging entries of marks are still insufficient to prevent errors or deliberate manipulation of marks. There appears to be too much reliance on the security of passwords of those lecturers entering marks.

55. Given the nature of the predominantly local student intake and their preparedness for university studies, UniZulu has fairly high pass rates in all faculties. Apart from the Faculty of Education, all pass rates have been increasing. The Faculty of Science and Agriculture has an objective to increase the pass rate further despite the fact that, in 2008, the pass rate obtained was 77.36%. While the Panel supports the institution's efforts to improve pass rates across faculties and departments, it would like to caution the institution against the danger of compromising academic standards through undue pressure to lift pass rates.
56. The issue of large classes is compromising the quality of assessment at the University and there is no proactive movement at any level of the institution to develop capacity for the assessment of large classes. The Panel heard of the use of external moderation within the Faculty of Science and Agriculture and of the benefits of bringing external moderators on campus once a year to assist in the evaluation of facilities and approaches to teaching and learning. This process of evaluation includes an inspection of students' assignments. The external moderation process, in this faculty, seems to be working well and is acknowledged by the Panel.
57. In terms of feedback to students the Panel heard of numerous instances in which students were not given speedy feedback on work done. While this could be due to the large size of some classes, and the limited number of academic staff, such complaints should be investigated and suitable action taken. It is the Panel's view that the quality of teaching and learning is affected by many discrepancies in the assessment system, and management in turn should hold staff members accountable for behaviour that undermines provision of quality service to students.

#### **Recommendation 24**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand ensures that appropriate resources are allocated to guarantee that assessment policies are consistently and rigorously applied across the institution; that the security of marks at departmental level is scrupulously observed; and that sufficient capacity exists at the institution to improve the quality of assessment in order to guarantee that high success rates match students' actual competencies.**

#### **Research**

58. The University's mission statement indicates that it seeks to produce research as a comprehensive institution. The 2008-2011 Strategic Plan states eight objectives for the research core function. An analysis of these objectives suggests that there is confusion between aspirations and strategic goals while an examination of the activities geared to achieve these objectives in the Strategic Plan indicates that there is no clarity about the tasks involved to give effect to each objective. From a conceptual perspective and in terms of intellectual direction, the research area shows the same lack of clarity

about the implications of being a comprehensive university pointed out for teaching and learning.

59. The Panel was presented with a Strategic Plan for Research Development Draft 2, 2007 authored by a consultant, the status of which is not clear, and that in many respects is contradictory with the strategic objectives proposed in the 2008 Strategic Plan. In the Panel's view much more work needs to be done to provide an appropriate and realistic direction to the research function of the institution.

### **Recommendation 25**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand revise its strategic objectives in the area of research in line with a more nuanced understanding of its comprehensive nature, its areas of strength and its capabilities.**

60. In research, as in teaching and learning, it seems to the Panel that the institution lacks intellectual leadership provided from the centre. The University does not have a single individual responsible for providing strategic direction, setting specific targets to be achieved within realistic timeframes, and with a clear understanding of what is necessary in terms of staff development and training to empower individuals as researchers. Nor does the institution have the requisite funding for future major capital expenditure on research, and the change management strategies necessary to achieve both short and long-term objectives.
61. The Research Office has as its main function the monitoring of the distribution of research funding to researchers once these allocations have been decided by the Senate Research Committee. It is not clear to the Panel to what extent the Senate Research Committee has a strategic or monitoring function in relation to this core function or what the role of the Research Office is in relation to supporting the implementation of the current strategy. Without the appointment of a Director of Research it is difficult to envisage how the institution will be able to break out of the current system of *ad hoc* research funding arrangements. The Panel noted with concern that the appointment of a Director to the Research Office was rejected by Council. It is not clear what informed this decision, but the Panel agrees with the assessment of the UniZulu's Risk Committee that failure to appoint a Research Director constitutes a risk for the University (AP: 108).
62. In terms of research output, in 2007 UniZulu ranked 17<sup>th</sup> out of all 23 universities (in terms of DoE journal publication figures) and produced 1% of the national research output. The participation of UniZulu authors in publishing articles has steadily increased from about 20 authors in 1990 to about 50 in recent years. However, only a relatively small number of authors are responsible for the total production of article equivalents. For the period 1990-2008, the top 10% of UniZulu authors produced, on average, 13.29 article equivalents and over this period they generated 54% of the

University article output. Indeed, the 30% most productive authors produced 80% of the total article output. Moreover, in 2005-2008 the 5 most productive authors produced 20% of all article output during that period.

63. As far as the demography of research production goes, there has been an overall increase in the number of female authors. In 2005-2008 about 28% of authors were female, compared to 10% in 1990-1992. The share of article equivalents produced by female authors has also increased. In 2005-2008, it was about 27%, compared to 11% in 1990-1992. The 2005-2008 figures for the institution are above the national average where approximately 22% of all article equivalents are currently being produced by women.
64. In terms of race UniZulu's author profile has changed from 82% of white authors in the early 1990s to about 41% of white authors in the most recent period. Particularly, noteworthy is that the share of African authors has increased over the 19-year period (from 12% to 50%). However, the contribution of African authors to the overall article production in 2005-2008 is only 39% (which nevertheless is an improvement over the 29% for 1990-1992). These percentages are significantly higher than the national 'average' where approximately 10% of all output is produced by black African authors (in 2007) and in this sense the institution has to be commended.

## **Commendation 2**

### **The HEQC commends the University of Zululand on the significant increase in the number of African academics who produce research articles.**

65. In terms of the research focus and areas of research strength, the Panel was pleased to note that some of the research conducted addresses local needs. Good examples of this are the Centre for Traditional Medicine in collaboration with the CSIR, Medical Research Council, and the National Ministry of Health. Currently the team is exploring collaborative research regarding the prevention of HIV/AIDS (AP: 130). In the Faculty of Education, a study of traditional healers' conceptions of the roles and functions of internal body parts has shed light on some of the views that students present in science classrooms. The results of the research have been presented at conferences nationally and internationally. Another project concerns the use of isiZulu in the teaching of high school biology, while the isiZulu Dictionary is also being actively researched and compiled.
66. The Panel noted that UniZulu has been increasing its research activity since 2005. The Panel acknowledges the University's 15 NRF-rated researchers. The Panel noted that the University has been awarded a Chair in Nanotechnology. The Chair is one of only three chairs in the area of Nanotechnology in South Africa.

### **Commendation 3**

**The HEQC commends the University of Zululand on its relatively high number of NRF rated researchers, within the context of rural-based higher education institutions.**

### **Commendation 4**

**The HEQC commends the University of Zululand on the increase of its research activity since 2005 particularly in areas that are relevant for the development of Northern KwaZulu-Natal.**

### **Postgraduate Education**

67. Given the objectives of the institution in the area of research, the Panel is concerned that postgraduate students are not singled out for particular attention: no special provision of support services appears to be available. Postgraduate students complained of the limited capacity of the Research Office to meet particular needs. In relation to supervision, the roles and responsibilities of both student and supervisor are clearly articulated in a policy. However, there appears to be little monitoring of the student/supervisor relationship to ensure the continued striving for quality in the research endeavour. Postgraduate students indicated that there is nobody to address problems between them and their supervisors. This, as well as the training of supervisors is a matter that needs addressing.

### **Recommendation 26**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand develop appropriate mechanisms to attract more postgraduates and dedicate appropriate resources to improve the support it provides to these students. This should include the provision of orientation to new postgraduate students, appropriate management of the relationship between student and supervisor, increased capacity in the research office, and improved access to computer facilities.**

### **Community Engagement**

68. There is a long history of community engagement at the institution. However, no formal policy or structure takes responsibility for this function of the University. In 2004 the Overarching Reconfiguration Committee received a report regarding Community Outreach and International Linkages, which proposed the establishment of a Community Service and Outreach Programme (p.126). This did not take place and subsequent attempts at conceptualising and operationalising community engagement at the University have also failed.

69. The transition to comprehensive status and the imperatives of quality assurance, together with the need to embrace a wider understanding of the University's position

in terms of community engagement, has created new intellectual tensions. Perhaps inevitably, the immediate demands have been interpreted as a transition from community service to service learning, with much more systematic attention being given to the idea of implementing work integrated learning as part of skills orientation of the University. There are several conceptual issues that need clarification in this area if community engagement is going to rest on more than individual initiatives.

### **Recommendation 27**

**The HEQC recommends that the University of Zululand develop an appropriate framework for community engagement, based on a clear distinction between the different types of activities included under community engagement as well as an understanding of the comprehensive nature of the University.**

### **Conclusion**

70. With its growing student body, its comprehensive orientation and its rural and urban focus, the University of Zululand has a moral responsibility to provide access to higher education for the disadvantaged communities of Northern KwaZulu Natal. The University has many dedicated staff whose commitment to their students is exemplary, a growing research function and an orientation towards the local community. The Panel has had the opportunity to interact with many of the University's students, and generally, to observe the dedication of the students at UniZulu.
71. Staff and students deserve an environment in which they can thrive. A university at which basic needs like water are not supplied regularly and in which political conflict plays havoc with teaching and learning and the overall student experience, is not a place in which teaching and learning, research and community engagement can flourish. UniZulu has great challenges in terms of administrative processes, institutional and academic planning and infrastructure. The University is also facing problems in the area of staff morale and work ethic.
72. There are many good initiatives at the University but all of them will be meaningless unless the institution manages to control the campus violence and create an environment in which students and hard working staff can get on with their responsibilities without fearing violence and intimidation. Addressing these problems is a necessary condition for the University's ability to respond to the specific academic and administrative challenges pointed out in this report. Failure to deal with both sets of issues will put in jeopardy the very viability of the University of Zululand as a higher education institution.