



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT REPORT

ON THE

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-

NATAL

(5 April 2024)

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Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|-------|--|
| ADO | Academic Development Officer |
| AMS | Academic Monitoring and Support |
| APP | Annual Performance Plan |
| CAAB | College Academic Affairs Board |
| CE | Community Engagement |
| CHE | Council for Higher Education |
| DHET | Department of Higher Education and Training |
| DPS | Director of College Professional Services |
| DQM | Data Quality Monitor |
| DVC | Deputy Vice-Chancellor |
| EMC | Executive Management Committee |
| EMS | Enterprise Management System |
| ERTLA | Emergency Remote Teaching, Learning and Assessment |
| FYE | First-Year Experience |
| GBV | Gender-Based Violence |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| HEMIS | Higher Education Management Information System |
| HEQC | Higher Education Quality Committee |
| HEQSF | Higher Education Quality Sub-Framework |
| HLTs | Human Language Technologies |
| HR | Human Resource |
| ICS | Information and Communication Services |

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|--------|---|
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IF | Institutional Forum |
| IK | Indigenous Knowledge |
| IP&G | Institutional Planning and Governance |
| IQA | Internal Quality Assurance |
| IQMS | Integrated Quality Management System |
| IT | Information Technology |
| ITS | Information Technology Services |
| KPA | Key Performance Area |
| LMS | Learning Management System |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NRF | National Research Foundation |
| NUC | Natal University College |
| PG | Postgraduate |
| PMS | Performance Management System |
| PoE | Portfolio of Evidence |
| Q1–3 | School Quintile 1 to Quintile 3 |
| QAF | Quality Assurance Framework |
| QMS | Quality Management System |
| QPA | Quality Promotion and Assurance |
| RAM | Resource Allocation Model |
| SA | South African |
| SARCHI | South African Research Chairs Initiative |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| SER | Self-Evaluation Report |

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|------|--|
| SRC | Students' Representative Council |
| T&L | Teaching and Learning |
| UDW | University of Durban-Westville |
| UEIP | University Education Induction Programme |
| UKZN | University of KwaZulu-Natal |
| UTEL | University Technology Enhanced Learning |
| UTLO | University Teaching and Learning Office |
| UTLP | University Teaching and Learning Portfolio |
| VC | Vice-Chancellor |

Executive Summary

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) was established through the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997, as amended) primarily to assure quality in the South African (SA) higher education (HE) sector, and to advise the Minister on aspects of higher education. The National Qualifications Framework Act (No. 67 of 2008, as amended) conferred additional responsibilities on the CHE as the quality council for higher education, with overall responsibility for the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). The CHE executes its quality assurance responsibilities through its permanent committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The CHE, through the 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 with the new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)³ that was approved by the HEQC and the CHE in September 2020, and which is implemented in the medium term by the CHE. Institutional audits are strongly influenced by both the specific context within which each higher education institution (HEI) works, and by the national transformational agenda within which higher education functions. The HEQC has identified a need to do full audits of all HEIs in South Africa. A full audit of an institution determines whether and to what extent, the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems, policies and procedures of an institution ensure the effective provisioning of good quality higher education that enhances the likelihood of student success through quality teaching and learning, research opportunities and integrated community engagement (CE). The emphasis is less on ensuring that required standards are met at a particular threshold than on the deliberate, continuous, systematic and measurable improvement of the student experience, as well as on building reflexive praxis to develop quality cultures in institutions.

The following principles guided the institutional audit of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN):

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>

1. The primary responsibility for IQA rests with individual HEIs. Each institution is responsible for the establishment, implementation, maintenance, improvement, and enhancement of its own quality management and assurance systems.
2. The uniqueness of the size, shape, location, context, and mission of each institution 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 the institutional Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS).
5. The institutional audit is a peer-driven and evidence-based process to ensure that the HEQC and its audit panel reports are transparent, informed, and consistent.
6. Institutional audits are developmental, and intent on supporting continuous quality improvement and enhancement.
7. Institutional audits are required to balance their developmental character with the regulatory requirement that the CHE and the HEQC act on poor provisioning where institutions have no clear commitments, processes, practices, or plans to improve.
8. Institutional audits are a key component of the broad-based quality assurance mandate of the HEQC.

Aligned with international practice, the HEQC uses a review methodology consisting of an institutional self-evaluation report (SER), and an external peer review, which verifies, triangulates, and validates the self-evaluation of the institution. The external peer review consists of a document analysis of the SER and of the institutional portfolio of evidence (PoE), as well as a site visit during which interviews are conducted with constituencies, and physical infrastructure is visited. This audit report forms the outcome of the institutional audit of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

UKZN was formally established as a university in 2004 through a merger of the University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville. The University of Natal had its origins in 1910 when it was established as the Natal University College (NUC) in Pietermaritzburg, with the subsequent establishment of a campus in Durban in 1931. In 1949, the institution was granted full university status and formally established as the University of Natal. The second partner

to the merger, the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), was initially established in 1960 as the University College for Indians at Salisbury Island in the Durban Bay area. In 1970, it was granted full university status, and shortly thereafter, moved to what is presently the Westville campus.

UKZN is academically structured around four Colleges:

- College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science
- College of Health Sciences
- College of Humanities
- College of Law and Management Studies

Each College hosts a suite of Schools, and a School hosts a cluster of cognate disciplines. This management and administrative arrangement support academic disciplines that offer qualifications, often at more than one of the five campuses or sites of delivery of the University. Where the same qualifications are offered at different sites, the full suite of academic staff, teaching arrangements, and learning facilities is largely contained at each site of delivery. Students undertake the same assessments on all campuses and receive their qualifications from the central university.

The Head of a College is also a Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC), who is a member of the Executive Team and reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor (VC). Each School is headed by a Dean (Head of School), while disciplines are headed by Academic Leaders. UKZN also hosts approximately 60 institutes, centres, and units that are focused on research and CE initiatives. These entities are structurally located within Colleges and their reporting lines are to a Head of College, the Dean, or the Head of School as appropriate. UKZN is a multi-campus institution, with Colleges and in some cases, Schools, which are located on more than one campus.

At the time of the merger to form UKZN, there were approximately 38,000 students at the University. By 2020, the student count was 47,000, a decline from approximately 50,000 students in 2018 and 2019. Postgraduate (PG) student numbers declined by 11% between 2004 and 2020, which represents a decline from 29% to 24% of the proportion of PG students enrolled. The University has done well in increasing and narrowing the band of throughput rates for students from different school quintiles and, by 2020, there was no obvious correlation between student throughput rate and the quintile status of the feeder school.

Approximately 45% of enrolled students either live in student accommodation, which is owned by UKZN, or in facilities where the University has a formal lease or rental arrangement with

the owners. At present, approximately 55% of UG and 14% of PG students live in such residences. The formal agreements the University has with private owners allow the University to have a direct influence on the operational and student support activities in these residences.

The University has seen a strong increase in the number of African students over the period 2016 to 2020, with the proportion increasing from 70% to 81% over this period. Female students comprised 59% of the total student enrolments in 2020, an increase from 57% in 2016. In the same period, a steady decline in the proportion of Indian students from 23% to 15% was noted. Coloured and white students each make up approximately 2% of the student population. UKZN has also purposefully encouraged enrolments of learners from quintile 1, 2, and 3 schools (Q1–3). At the time of the panel visit, the student enrolment from Q1–3 schools was estimated at 56%.

In 2020, UKZN had 2 956 academic staff members and 7 468 professional services staff. As in the case with several institutions in South Africa, there was a significant growth in services support staff in areas, such as cleaning and gardening, as a result of a decision to insource such services. Of the academic staff, 42,5% are full-time permanent appointments. In 2020, 61% of academic staff held doctoral degrees, and an estimated 65% were black (African, coloured, and Indian). In 2020, student-to-academic staff ratios ranged from 11:1 in the College of Health Sciences to 40:1 in the College of Humanities, with an estimated overall average ratio of 30:1.

At the time of this quality audit, the University, in an initiative led by the VC, was in the process of reviewing the continuing value and appropriateness of the College model as an organisational arrangement for the future of the institution. This was one of the components of a broader project initiated by UKZN, called Project Renewal that was emerging from a series of consultations with different sectors of the University community. The development process and possible outcomes of this organisational review project influenced the considerations of the Panel, and this is reflected in the comments and recommendations contained in this report.

In undertaking this quality audit, the Panel spent some time considering the self-evaluation report (SER) together with the supporting documents and information provided by UKZN. This was followed by an on-site visit during which the panel held in-person and simultaneous online interviews with members of the University community, mainly at the Westville campus, over five days, and involving around 400 interviewees. In some sessions, when the group being interviewed was particularly large or when multiple groups were to be interviewed on a similar area of enquiry, the panel chose to split its members to allow parallel interview sessions to be conducted. Panel members also managed a morning of visits to and interviews at the

Pietermaritzburg, Howard, Edgewood, and Nelson Mandela campuses of the University. A visit to the Edgewood campus was planned but did not take place for logistical reasons. Short structured interview sessions were held at each of the campuses visited, and involved Senior Management at the campus, the academic and support staff as well and the students who attend classes on the campus. The campus visits also allowed for a brief assessment of the infrastructure and facilities available at the campuses. One panel member also visited facilities at the Westville campus.

In all these meetings with staff, students, and external partners at UKZN, the panel appreciated the active engagement during discussions and the generally frank and open way in which matters were raised. The organisation and administrative arrangements for the visits were well managed, and members of the panel were appreciative of the time and care showed by all the members of the UKZN team who took charge of the institutional audit process. It is also important to mention that none of the interview sessions held during the audit was recorded nor was a designated scribe included in the interviews. In compiling this report, the panel has relied on their internal discussions and their notes made during the interviews and site tours.

It is important to mention that, while the panel engagement and visit to UKZN took place in 2023, the information, data, and analyses provided by the University cover the period up to 2020. This time lag was caused by a series of unforeseen interruptions and delays in the preparatory phase of the quality audit. Some of the reflections presented in this report will necessarily include aspects or developments up to the time of the visit in the last week of March 2023.

The reflections and recommendations in this report are intended to point to areas of enhancement and development, as UKZN strengthens the quality of its student development activities. In this report, the reader will find a wide range of reflections and suggestions for quality improvement in terms of the ways that UKZN supports and develops its students to the point of successful graduation. Where the matter was considered by the panel to be of sufficient importance or where the impact was deemed to be of sufficient gravity, the suggestion has been elevated to the status of a recommendation, which requires an active and directed response from the institution.

As appropriate, the recommendations are clustered around each of the 16 CHE standards. The CHE and the panel hope that UKZN finds this report useful in contributing to its plans for enhancing the learning experiences of all its students.

The following is a summary of the panel's commendations and recommendations for UKZN.

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 the *governance, strategic planning* (as contained in the *vision, mission, and strategic goals*), *management*, and *academic leadership of an institution* play in its quality management in order to enhance the likelihood of student success, and to improve the quality of teaching, learning, and research engagement, as well as accommodating the results of constructive, integrated community engagement.

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

Since the establishment of UKZN in 2004, the University has been through a series of strategic planning processes, which resulted in the adoption of its first Strategic Plan 2009–2016. This plan informed the restructuring of the traditional faculty structures into a college model in 2012. This was followed by the adoption of the second Strategic Plan 2017–2021, which clearly expressed the vision, mission, and strategic objectives of the University. In light of the Project Renewal initiative, which aims to assist the University to reflect on the effectiveness of its current structural arrangements and consider the possibilities for amending these arrangements, the Council approved an extension of the 2017–2021 Strategic Plan to allow for a new Strategic Plan to be developed and approved, following the outcomes of Project Renewal. In December 2022, the Council consequently approved a new Strategic Plan, intended to cover a 10-year period (2023–2032).

Project Renewal was motivated by a sense of the changing socio-political context and changes in the HE landscape of the region, a sense of concern about the gap between secondary and tertiary education, the need to harmonise the distinct cultures and characteristics among the different campuses of the University further, the need to create a more unified UKZN culture and value system, concerns about sustainability, adding impetus to the pursuit for academic excellence, the need for greater accountability for the use of public funds, and the need to address national imperatives better.

The panel was provided with a copy of this latter Strategic Plan (2023–2032) during its site visit to UKZN but has not formally engaged with its substance as the timeframes were beyond the scope of the current institutional audit. The adoption of this strategic plan raises questions about its acknowledgment or response to the recommendations of Project Renewal, which have yet to emerge. The panel is therefore concerned about the coherence of the strategic planning process at the University as well as the effectiveness of communication about the Strategic Plan within the institution.

The current Strategic Plan (2017-2021) clearly articulates the mission and vision that UKZN has set for itself, and it commits the University to achieve positive race, class, and gender transformation goals. Importantly, the Strategic Plan (2023–2032) strongly signals an intention to respond to the low enrolment of poor and working-class students in higher education. The Strategic Plan also aims to ensure that its ‘African-ness’ and commitment to ‘African scholarship’ are important features of institutional identity at UKZN.

The panel found much evidence – both in the documentation provided and in responses and comments from interviewees – to indicate that the intentions of the 2017–2021 Strategic Plan were well understood and supported by the different constituencies within the University. There was however not a uniform acknowledgment or appreciation of the debates around the value and meaning of UKZN as an ‘African’ university and its intention to focus on ‘African scholarship’. In some cases, interviewees considered this an objective especially focused on humanities disciplines rather than on the sciences.

Recommendations

1. The panel recommended that the University bring Project Renewal to a close with institution-wide sharing of its findings and recommendations. This should include the adoption of an implementation plan, which is properly aligned with the new 10-year strategic plan.
2. The panel recommended that, while the concepts are complex and it is unlikely that uniform understanding will be found, the University engage in more institution-wide discussion, debate, and advocacy on the meaning of its identity concepts, such as African scholarship, the decolonised curriculum, and its commitment to developing isiZulu as a strategy for bilingualism to ensure that all staff feel a sense of ownership and can find expression of the ideas that shape the institutional identity.

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 [National Development Plan] and related national planning), as well as sectoral, regional, continental and global imperatives (e.g. Africa Vision 2063 or the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]).*

The vision of UKZN is to be ‘the premier university of African scholarship’. As stated in the SER (p. 26), this scholarship is intended to “cut across the core academic functions and is designed for high societal impact”. The University leadership emphasized the importance of ‘purposefully’ responding to societal challenges, grounded in its research-led character as well as the location of the University in the greater eThekweni region, with its multiple economic and social challenges. The SER identifies four broad research areas, namely social cohesion, African health, Big Data and Informatics, and African cities of the future, all of which are in alignment with national, continental, and global priorities. These thematic areas, in turn, resonate with the focus of the 13 South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) chairs hosted by UKZN in 2022.

UKZN places much emphasis on the social transformation of its staff and student bodies in response to the national call for the necessary transformation of SA society. This is aimed at addressing the social distortions caused by apartheid, but also to respond positively to the global patterns of social exclusion based on aspects such as race, class, and gender. Furthermore, the University has actively chosen to transform its academic and intellectual posture to emphasise its role and place on the African continent, by highlighting its African identity in teaching and research activities and through the development of African languages. In 2020, the undergraduate (UG) student body comprised 81,2% African, 14,8% Indian, 1,9% white, and 1,7% coloured students. Between 2004 and 2020, the number of African students increased by 70,5% thus reflecting the demography of the province better. Furthermore, the University has taken the policy decision to recruit an increased proportion of its students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, resulting in an estimated average of 56% of its student enrolment from quintile 1 to 3 (Q1–3) schools in 2023.

The panel noted the declining percentage of Indian (52,3%), white (86,8%), and coloured (43,3%) students between 2004 and 2020. While recognising that, in part, demographic realities contribute to these declines, the panel was of the view that UKZN, like other SA universities, should ideally reflect the racial and cultural diversity of the population of the

country. Similarly, in relation to gender, in 2020, 58,1% of the student body was female. The percentage of male students declined from 51,39% in 2004 to 41,9% in 2020.

The University set a strategic target of 30% enrolment of students from Q1–3 schools, and this has been supported by academic outreach interactions with learners from such schools in the region. As a result of the generally large demand for space by school leavers in South Africa, together with increased access to state funding for higher education, UKZN had a significant growth in enrolment of Q1–3 students to a level where, in 2021, Q1–3 students made up 46% of the enrolled student population, with some Schools reporting up to 70% Q1–3 students in 2023. While this is a remarkable and noteworthy achievement, it has demanded increased teaching, learning, and pastoral care support of students in ways for which the University has not always been fully prepared. In 2020, when 58% of new students enrolled were from Q1–3 schools, the VC noted the strain that this development was placing on the facilities, the teaching capacity, and staff workloads at UKZN. This diversion of academic attention was also acknowledged as a risk to the research productivity of the University.

The University continues to make progress in transforming the race and gender profile of its staff composition, driven by a host of staff recruitment and appointment policies and practices and targeted capacity-building initiatives, which are elaborated in the SER, and largely supported by the experience of the staff, at different levels of the staffing structure at the Institution, who were interviewed by the panel. It was evident during interviews with academic staff that young and emerging academics, especially female researchers appear to experience different levels of support and integration into the academic community at the University. The panel heard of a high level of marginalisation and little support for women academics in a particular School. On the other hand, there were also reports of exceptional levels of support, guidance, and integration into the academy for emerging women academics. The difference in experiences appears to be related to differences in approach by particular Colleges, Schools, and/or mentors.

In the area of staffing, the panel was concerned about the overall decline in the number of academic staff from 1 563 in 2004 to 1 270 in 2021. In contrast, the number of support staff increased from 2 436 to 3 134 in the same period, spurred in part by the insourcing of some of the support services functions. Added to the decline in full-time academic staff numbers are the trends towards increasing ‘juniorisation’ and casualisation of the academic staff cohort (see Table 8 and Section 6.3 of the SER), all of which have a negative effect on student-to-

academic staff ratios and on the general workload of those who have to teach and attend to the learning needs of students.

The University has prioritised its cultural transformation through the promotion of multilingualism, aligned with provincial and national policies for the advancement of African languages. At UKZN, the focus is on developing isiZulu as a language of communication and increasingly as a medium of instruction. The development of multilingual dictionaries and the offering of language courses to academics, Academic Leaders, and students continue to strengthen this initiative. The Directorate of Teaching and Learning takes responsibility for supporting bilingual classes and tutorials and, wherever possible, multilingual tutoring.

At UKZN, there is an institutional emphasis on the decolonisation of the curriculum as a response to national concerns. From the interviews, it was however clear that there is an uneven understanding of the concepts and expectations of the initiative. In general, the academics interviewed considered the primary issue a need to transform the content of the curricula to be more acknowledging of African scholarship and intellectual approaches. The initiative was therefore seen as primarily aimed at disciplines offering humanities and liberal arts programmes with little meaning for the sciences and applied sciences programmes. This is a narrow conception of the intention of the decolonisation initiative in higher education, and UKZN would benefit from a broader engagement with the concepts of this initiative.

During interviews with academic staff and more detailed engagement with the Performance Management System (PMS), it became clear to the panel that Senior Management at the University still places a stronger emphasis on research performance compared to performance in other academic activities, such as teaching, as the primary indicator of the academic standing of the institution, and in the performance expectations of academic staff. Nevertheless, the panel was convinced that increasing emphasis is being placed on teaching and learning, driven by both the senior leadership and the academic staff themselves. There is also a growing emphasis on the scholarship of teaching and learning, not primarily as research output but as providing the research and evidence base for further development of teaching and learning (T&L) policies, strategies, and procedures. The panel is of the view that T&L activities should receive comparable weighting to research and scholarship activities in terms of key performance and promotion criteria. Moreover, UKZN is encouraged to ensure that senior academics teach at the lower UG levels. Students should be able to identify with and be exposed to and inspired by the role models and acknowledged intellectual leaders in the field of their studies.

Academic staff are encouraged to focus on research and knowledge generation in the areas of national, continental, and global priorities. As a good example of this approach, academics and researchers at UKZN were at the forefront of research and evidence-based advice to government and public sector initiatives, both locally and internationally, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The preparedness of the intellectual capacity at the University and the well-defended ethical positions of those presenting advice on managing the effects of the pandemic were notable demonstrations of the value of HEIs in society.

In the area of CE initiatives, UKZN has developed an institutional concept paper to redefine community engagement and to improve its coherence and integration with the teaching and research activities at the University, the three core functions of the institution. The University intends that all stakeholders should benefit from CE initiatives and that care should be taken by academics to ensure that all stakeholders are seen as partners in research and teaching engagement projects. As with the general experience of HEIs in South Africa, UKZN however does not yet have confident control of the quality management process for its CE activities. The establishment of communities of practice amongst staff involved in CE activities has proved to be a useful approach to ensure positively structured partnerships and lines of accountability. Challenges in this area, however, remain, particularly in relation to the misalignment that sometimes occurs between the delivery expectations of the community and the professional accountability of the students and academics involved in the project. There are also challenges and concerns related to monitoring, evaluation, and measurement of the impact and sustainability of the CE initiatives.

Recommendations

3. The panel recommended that, in consideration of the importance of diversity of world view and opinion as an important stimulus to the intellectual project and in the next phase of its enrolment planning, UKZN address the declining trends in enrolment of Indian, coloured, and white students at the University.
4. The panel recommended that the Senior Management at the University respond to the variation in institutional and development experience that new and emerging academic staff find in the Colleges and Schools, to ensure that such academic staff have reasonably similar and positive developmental experiences.
5. The panel recommended that the University ensure, as part of its implementation of the new strategic plan, that strategies and resources are in place to stem any further negative developments in the size and shape of the academic staff cohort, such as increasing 'juniorisation', casualisation, and the loss of senior and promising

academics (see discussion under Standard 6). Furthermore, the University is encouraged to work towards agreed targets for academic staff-to-student ratios for each of its Colleges.

6. The panel recommended that UKZN actively encourage senior academics to teach modules and courses at the basic UG levels, to stimulate the positive intellectual aspirations and learning habits of students,
7. The panel recommended that UKZN formulate and implement mechanisms to monitor and measure the quality of its CE activities, and to respond when quality enhancement support is needed.

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

The overarching strategic plans of the University are the key instruments for giving effect to its vision, mission, and goals. As prescribed by statute, the Senate is ultimately responsible for the delivery of the academic quality management processes of the University, with governance oversight being provided by the Council. A multi-year strategic plan is implemented and monitored primarily through Annual Performance Plans (APPs), which are well documented in the Annual Reports of the University. The APPs include institutional performance indicators for each of the core academic functions (teaching and learning, research, and community engagement), which are devolved, in turn, to College and School levels as well as being aligned with the performance objectives for individual staff members.

Given the College model, it is not entirely surprising that UKZN has multi-layered organisational arrangements for the quality management of its academic activities. To the panel, the quality management arrangements appeared unnecessarily complex with repetitive functions at the Central, College, and School levels, resulting in unclear reporting and accountability lines. This is an important concern because one of the repeated features of the panel's interaction with the University on matters of the operation of the quality cycle was a sense of a system that undertakes much planning and implementation of quality improvement initiatives but without sufficient review and analysis of the needs and subsequent outcomes of the interventions. Despite the emphasis at UKZN on measured data, there was little evidence that the appropriate data are used at the module and programme level as the basis for quality improvement in teaching and learning.

UKZN has a Data Quality Working Group, which is a committee of the Senate. This group monitors quality-related data, such as throughput, pass rates, and other T&L performance criteria. The Working Group makes recommendations to the Senate based on their analyses and findings. The panel noted that senior managers have good institutional data available, which are accessible through a detailed and regularly updated intranet site appropriate to their needs.

UKZN relies on both external and IQA processes to provide information and monitor quality improvement needs. In addition to the CHE quality oversight of programmes and qualifications, the University also relies on the quinquennial cycle (usually) of accreditation reviews by statutory and non-statutory professional bodies, in the disciplines and programmes where this is appropriate.

In the course of the panel's engagements with members of the University community from all its campuses and the site visits to the Westville, Howard College, Pietermaritzburg, and Nelson Mandela campuses, there was no evidence of any inconsistencies in provisioning or resourcing of the core academic and support functions at the different sites. UKZN is a traditional contact university and offers very few programmes by way of distance education, and these are in the form of PG programmes.

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

The panel is satisfied that the UKZN Council appears to function well, and there is evidence that the focus areas and role clarification between the Council and Management are well understood and acknowledged by the respective structures. Formal reviews of the functioning of the Council are undertaken, ensuring that the Council is composed of independent but appropriately skilled and experienced members. Institutional priorities, outcomes, performance, student and staff issues, challenges, and trends are reported to the Council, whose members see their primary roles as giving strategic guidance to the University and fulfilling its oversight responsibilities.

The devolved college model structure appears to be unique in the SA university system. Each of the four UKZN Colleges is headed by a DVC (Head of College). There is no traditional academic departmental structure, and each College houses Schools comprising cognate disciplinary fields. Each School is headed by a Dean (Head of School). In addition, each College has a cross-cutting College Dean for Teaching and Learning, a College Dean of

Research, as well as a College Director of Professional Services. In total, there are 19 Schools spread across the four Colleges and different campuses. The College Head has delegated powers to allocate budgets and other resources to the Schools. The third core function of the institution, namely community engagement does not have a separate leadership structure but is integrated in the Teaching and Learning and Research portfolios.

UKZN has a functioning Institutional Forum (IF) that is properly constituted in accordance with the Institutional Statute of the University. The composition of the IF comprises academics, management, Council, Colleges, trade unions, and students. A review of the minutes of IF meetings during 2019–2020 indicated that the matters considered related almost exclusively to senior appointments at the University, which require the consideration and advice of the IF. The specific input by the IF in the Project Renewal process, and the development of the new Strategic Plan were unclear to the panel.

Institutional Forum (IF) members expressed the view that they had not exploited the full potential of their advisory role, for example, through the development of (solicited and unsolicited) advice to the Council and Executive Management on institutional culture issues, such as racial tensions, mental health issues, and gender-based violence (GBV). There is room for the IF to be more proactive in informing the transformational and institutional cultural aspects of the University, especially in how different internal constituencies relate to each other and the 'graduateness' of UKZN students. The panel also noted the need for better induction of IF members to their roles and responsibilities as well as the development of a clearer continuity plan for members of the IF to ensure the stability and continuity of its membership.

The Senate is the apex academic decision-making structure of the University responsible for all academic functions and is constituted in accordance with the UKZN Statute. Senate functions in accordance with its mandate as the custodian of the academic project. It meets at regular intervals and has appropriate committees to advise it on matters of detail related to academic developments and quality.

Given the constitution of the Senate as described in Section 23 of the University Statute, the panel was however concerned about the seeming erosion of the voices of the senior professoriate within the Senate. Unlike the practice in the majority of universities in the country (especially research-led universities), full professors at UKZN are not members of the Senate by virtue of their academic standing. Furthermore, although the School-based elected academic representatives who serve on the Senate must be permanent members of staff, they may be at any rank on the academic structure, and may therefore lack experience in the

broad academic project, as is required of the Senate in fulfilling its mandate. The panel's concerns were echoed by several senior research leaders (including SARCHi and National Research Foundation [NRF] chairs), who voiced their view during interviews that academics had 'given away their authority', and that ways need to be found to strengthen the role of the professoriate in the Senate. Moreover, during interviews, several senior academics also raised concerns about the relatively short duration and representative nature of individual academic membership in the Senate. It was noted that many of the elected academic members of the Senate are at junior levels of academic appointment and that this limits the range and depth of academic experience that they bring to the consideration of academic matters at the Senate since they are expected to contribute to consideration of academic development and quality issues outside of their disciplines.

From the description of the composition of the Senate in clause 23(1) of the University Statute, it was also not clear how most academics at the Senate (clause 23(2)) are maintained. As written, it appears that Senate members drawn from the ranks of administrative staff, students, and those serving in *ex officio* capacities are likely to be more than the academic members. In response to a later question, the University Registrar confirmed that managers and administrative leaders who are appointed from the academic ranks and who serve in the Senate are counted as academic members to satisfy the requirements of clause 23(1) of the University Statute. It was the view of the panel that staff members who hold management and administrative leadership positions and who serve on Senate *ex officio*, are not academic members of the Senate, even if appointed from the academic ranks and even if they continue to undertake academic work while occupying these positions. The UKZN Senate therefore appears not to be correctly constituted and not in accordance with the intention of the University Statute requirement that the majority of Senate members be full-time academic staff members.

Student governance and leadership structures at the University, College, and School level appear to be properly constituted and work well. Student representatives appeared unclear about their roles on the Council, the Senate, and student development structures. They appeared to understand these as negotiating structures and expressed concern that, because they comprised a numerically small presence at meetings, their concerns were ignored, and they were simply outvoted by academics and administrative staff on matters of disagreement. There was also a general feeling of distrust by members of the Students' Representative Council (SRC) towards management structures at the University. At the College and School level, Deans and Heads indicated that regular meetings with student representatives to discuss issues of concern yielded good outcomes and strengthened relationships.

The University Ombud is a one-person office and appears to have been appointed recently. The panel noted the Ombud's understanding of independence that was brought to the tasks of the office and also the supportive relationship that the Ombud found in interactions with the VC and the Council. The Ombud reports trends and policy gaps to the Council, and recommendations are typically accepted. According to the Ombud, there seems to be an improved relationship between the SRC and the University leadership, although frustrations still exist. The Ombud also reported much improved intra-institutional relationships with generally decreasing instances of conflict with or misconduct by University staff. At the student level, there is increasing concern about teaching, learning, and student satisfaction as well as increasing levels of student misconduct, which result in expulsion.

UKZN has an active Alumni Office that maintains communication and liaises with approximately 190,000 alumni. Communication is mainly through email, social media platforms, and the UKZN website. Alumni chapters have been established in local and international regions, and there is a view that alumni are positive about their continued association with the Institution, although it was difficult for the panel to find the evidence to support such a view. Nevertheless, Academic Leaders believe that corporate relations through formal agreements and the development of research collaborations are areas where interaction between alumni and the Institution has not been fully explored and utilised.

The University has an Institutional Planning and Governance (IP&G) Office that generates and makes available targeted data and information, which are updated on its website at least daily. This planning and reporting division relies on a web portal for students, staff, and research data to analyse and report information to the necessary levels of University management, and is intended to support strategic planning and response decisions for institutional development. Analytical dashboards and reports are available to targeted staff who require access to particular categories and forms of such information.

Recommendations

8. The panel recommended that the IF be encouraged and supported by Senior Management to become increasingly proactive in informing the transformational and institutional cultural aspects of the University, especially in how different internal constituencies relate to each other and the 'graduateness' of UKZN students. Processes should also be put in place to induct IF members better into their roles and responsibilities.

9. The panel recommended that the Council, in consultation with the Senate and senior academic staff of the University, review the composition of the Senate. This must be done to bring the Senate into better alignment with the requirements of the UKZN Statute and to find ways of increasing the sustained representation of the professoriate at the Senate to enhance the contribution of senior academics to shape the academic project at UKZN. This review should be undertaken as a matter of urgency.
10. The panel recommended that, at the level of the SRC and other student governance structures, the University pay greater attention to strengthening the capacity of the student leadership to participate meaningfully and effectively in formal institutional forums, for example by clarifying the governance roles and responsibilities of students, creating arrangements for continuity of student participation and involvement between the outgoing and the incoming student representatives.

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

The four standards in Focus Area 2 concentrate on how the *design and implementation of an IQMS* in the institution enhance the likelihood of student success and improve the quality of teaching, learning, and research engagement, as well as accommodate the results of constructive, integrated community engagement within the context of the mission of the institution.

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

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

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

UKZN has a Quality Promotion and Assurance (QPA) office, which is a directorate under the University Teaching and Learning Portfolio (UTLP), overseen by the DVC: T&L. This office guides quality assurance and ensures quality management at the Institution. The directorate has four QPA consultants with one each allocated to the four Colleges at the Institution. The necessary policies, processes, and procedures are in place, providing supportive guidelines for the delivery of the core functions of the institution, and these are regularly reviewed. Course

audits are done every semester to check quality issues, including student performance levels. It is evident that feedback on services provided is gathered, as students are allowed to evaluate both the lecturer and the modules taught. Graduate opinion surveys are also conducted to establish the perspectives of graduates on the quality of their educational experiences. The results of these surveys are sent to the relevant College Deans.

The UKZN Teaching and Learning Office (UTLO) includes University Technology Enhanced Learning (UTEL) as a sub-division. Within this structure, strategies were developed to manage teaching and learning during the COVID-19 period as well as monitor the outcome of a blended approach to teaching and learning. UTEL is funded from external funds, and staff are appointed on a contract basis. At the time of the panel visit, this project had been suspended for lack of funds.

In general, the institution has good formal operational systems for quality assurance. Processes for quality checking and monitoring are in place and are generally well-used by academic and professional support staff. Staff members however raised the issue that, although several processes are online and automated, there are still several processes that require manual completion, which seem unnecessarily time-consuming when an automated process could easily be implemented.

The University places much emphasis on its research ambitions, and this is reflected in the inclusion of research performance in the PMS and key performance areas (KPAs) for academic staff. This aspect of academic staff work performance is vigorously implemented, monitored, and evaluated, and academic staff are well aware of the pressure to show evidence of research output. The institutional focus on research has however affected young and emerging academic staff, and the panel heard reports often confirmed by the more senior academic leadership, of workloads that are onerous and difficult to manage. There is also a general sense that the more research-active senior staff are allowed to focus on their research and take very few UG classes, particularly in courses with large student enrolments. This has resulted in experiences of burnout among emerging academic staff, as much is expected from them, including research and CE activities, while they have high teaching loads at a time when they are still maturing as lecturers and scholars.

Regarding student learning support, UKZN offers a wide range of services academic and psychosocial to students. There are Academic Development Officers (ADOs) who provide students with academic advice and who monitor student academic performance. It is through these ADOs that students at risk of poor academic performance can be identified and appropriately assisted. Students also expressed satisfaction with the support services

provided to them. They however also pointed to insufficient information and communication on the full range of support services available.

The First-Year Experience (FYE) programme appears to be inclusive and helpful for new students, especially students from quintile 1–3 schools. During the delivery of this programme, several student support services are communicated, but some students miss this either because the volume of information at this early stage of their studies is overwhelming, or they are not able to attend the orientation and induction programmes due to a worrying pattern of late registrations at UKZN.

The University has a student disability coordinator who liaises with students with special needs and other related support divisions, as well as with the Colleges and Schools. Initiatives have also been introduced to attend to the general well-being of students to improve their academic performance. These include food security, support to students with HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses, disability sports events, and occupational health and safety issues. The interviewed students spoke positively about the influence of such support and felt that this was an important reason for the academic success of students who would otherwise have dropped out of their studies.

Given the strategic intention of UKZN to grow the presence of students from Q1–3 schools, and the success that has been achieved in meeting and exceeding the intended target, the University has acknowledged the need to respond to specific challenges that these students face. These challenges include the need for deeper support in developing academic writing and reading skills, comprehension, abilities in terms of the discourse of knowledge, and computer skills. Many of these students also face challenges at home with which they are expected to deal. Large-class pedagogy remains a challenge for the University. In the context of increasing student numbers and a decreasing full-time equivalent academic staff capacity, large-class teaching has become a significant feature of the course and programme delivery in many Schools.

Several staff members interviewed expressed concern and frustration at the lack of integration of data systems and Information Technology (IT)-based institutional processes. It appears that aspects of student academic administration and research equipment procurement rely on manual processes that staff believe could easily be automated to improve the effectiveness of these processes. This was seen as hindering their ability to support the core academic functions of the Institution better. A particular concern relates to the poor integration between the Learning Management System (LMS) (Moodle) and the Enterprise Management System

(EMS), which reduces the effectiveness of student academic management and analysis of student data.

The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and administrative systems as well as the teaching capacity of academic staff at UKZN were severely challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. With commendable effort from the academic, administrative, and senior leadership staff, teaching arrangements were managed mainly via online systems, and all the academic programmes were completed over this period. The experience also prompted the University to consider its readiness for such disruptions to its teaching activities, together with a strategic consideration of the place of blended learning in its more general approach to teaching and learning.

Commendation

- A. UKZN is commended for providing focused orientation into HE studies for students from Q1–3 schools that acknowledges their learning development needs and demonstrably improves their likelihood of completing their studies.

Recommendations

- 11. The panel recommended that UKZN give attention to improved integration of its IT-based institutional management systems and processes. The weak integration of the LMS and the Enterprise Management System (EMS) results in an undue number of manual processes that can be automated, limiting the capacity of the University to analyse and understand its data and to improve the efficiency of its administrative processes, to support its core academic functions better.
- 12. The panel recommended that the University develop advocacy and communication strategies to make students more aware of the range of available support services and to promote their use.

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

The execution and promotion of the QMS at UKZN are supported by well-established human resource (HR), financial, and physical infrastructure management divisions. The panel met with senior staff members from the central HR and finance offices as well as staff responsible for HR and finance management at the four Colleges. Members of the panel also conducted

site visits at the various campuses to consider the physical infrastructure and administrative arrangements relating to teaching, learning, research, and innovation.

The Council and staff members interviewed expressed concern about the fact that the number of staff in professional and administrative services is significantly larger than the number of academic staff and felt that this requires attention. Between 2016 and 2020, the academic headcount decreased by 6%, and some positions have been frozen or are filled with temporary appointments, pending the outcome of Project Renewal. The University has also seen a disproportionate loss of senior academics over recent years, which many within the University believe has caused increasing 'juniorisation' of the academic ranks (see Recommendation 5 in Standard 2). Staff felt that repeated student disruptions of the academic project and perceptions of non-competitive salaries were among the important push factors causing senior and promising academics to leave UKZN. These and related factors are having a negative effect on the workloads of staff, and the panel heard reports of staff burnout and mental health concerns, with a potential influence on the quality of teaching and research activities.

The College of Health Sciences emphasizes the welfare of its students and staff. The Dean has been instrumental in obtaining external funding for well-equipped spaces for rest and recreation. All administrative and support staff are acknowledged and rewarded for outstanding work.

In some Colleges and Schools, high workloads are addressed through the recruitment of short-term staff to assist with teaching loads, but also to develop their teaching capacity. This is usually done through contract appointment of PG students to assist in various teaching and research areas and to support structures such as UTEL.

The University relies on a formal PMS that is rigorously implemented through reporting line structures to individual staff members. The process appears to work well, and all staff are compliant in responding to the requirements. Nevertheless, many concerns were expressed about the perceived inflexibility of the previous PMS, and there was general support for the review of the PMS, which was underway at the time of the panel visit. However, the review process and the implementation of the outcomes were not communicated to staff.

The finance management function operates well at UKZN, and financial audits have generally been uncontested over recent years. The University uses an attributable income model to allocate funds to academic units, and the approach seems to enjoy the support of senior leadership at the College and School level. The administrative and support functions related to quality management and student support are funded through their divisional budgets in an

iterative process of request, adjustment, and approval, which takes place in the preceding year. However, at the level of Colleges and Schools, the adequacy of budget allocations for quality management varies, and the view was expressed that the priority status of quality management activities depends mainly on the approach of individual leaders.

Except for the COVID-19 years, the University residences have generally operated on a negative-balance budget. This has necessitated cross-subsidization from the general operating budget, which is not a sustainable approach to residence management. This seems to be a problem at most SA universities and will need a sectoral approach to possible responses and resolution.

The academic environments were generally found to be of good and well-maintained quality, with properly resourced lecture facilities as well as UG and specialist laboratories, including computer laboratories. The physical facilities on the different campuses give the impression of a learning institution that cares about its staff and students, as well as its core academic activities. All campuses have a library, and new students are suitably trained in the use of the library facilities. Electronic library resources are managed centrally and are fully available online to staff and students. Students are allowed to borrow hardcopy material from any of the campuses, and this is generally delivered on the following day.

Commendations

- B. The College of Health Sciences is commended for its emphasis and initiatives that are focused on the welfare of its students and staff.
- C. UKZN is commended for the good and well-maintained quality of the physical infrastructure. The facilities on the different campuses give a sense of a learning institution that cares about its staff and students as well as its core academic activities.

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

UKZN has an established Data Quality Governance Framework that includes a Data Quality Working Group, which operates under an appropriately structured charter. Staff members from the IP&G Office indicated that credible and reliable data on matters such as throughput and completion rates are systematically captured, analysed, and shared with the relevant staff members or divisions in the University. The IP&G Office undertakes quality checks to ensure

that data for Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) reporting is up-to-date and reliable.

An important concern with how UKZN manages its data is that the Moodle LMS has not been properly integrated with the Information Technology Services (ITS) system. This means that student and staff data on the two systems cannot be analysed coherently except through selective manual integration of different data sets. This also means that standard reports on T&L performance, suitably discriminated by area of interest to the University, cannot be produced routinely for reporting, monitoring, and planning purposes.

It was clear that UKZN does not use its available student and staff data effectively to monitor and respond to students' T&L development needs. Aside from critical operational decisions, such as admissions and registration, the University does not appear to use its institutional data to refine its understanding of T&L effectiveness through analyses of student performance in ways that may allow it to make strategic decisions on the forms and levels of support needed by different groups of students and staff. The panel believes that UKZN should give thought to agile and better-focused measures of student learning performance that would direct T&L support to academic staff and students where and when it is needed. Improved use of existing measures and expanded data sets should also be promoted better at the Institution, including to non-academic but interested sectors, such as the student representative structures and residence officers, who could assist in identifying trends and areas for intervention, where they can exercise their influence for improved academic performance by students. While there was much evidence that UKZN is well able to monitor the quality aspects of its academic activities, it was difficult for the panel to find evidence that the results of such monitoring are analysed, integrated, and used as a basis to determine the outcomes of the quality enhancement initiatives at the University and to inform the review and revision of such initiatives.

Recommendations

13. The panel recommended that UKZN give thought to using its data and information to create more agile and better-focused measures of student learning performance, particularly to direct the T&L support, which it provides to academic staff and students when and where it is needed. Improved use of existing measures and expanded data sets could also be promoted better at the Institution, including to non-academic but interested sectors, such as the student representative structures and residence officers, who could assist in identifying trends and areas for intervention by exercising their influence for better academic performance by students.

14. The panel recommended that UKZN take steps to improve the analysis, review, and integration of results from its quality monitoring activities to ensure that such results are used to determine the outcomes of quality improvement initiatives as well as to inform strategic approaches to review and revise such initiatives. This process of the use of quality monitoring outcomes should also be documented properly to inform subsequent quality review processes.

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

Systems and processes to monitor the capacity of the institution for quality management are available, although their utilisation seems to be incoherent. Academic staff members and administrators indicated that they had access to the Institutional Intelligence Data system, which is a system meant to align institutional policies and operational activities. Their concern however was that, although the data are available and regularly monitored, the data presented are not timeous and completely accurate in terms of the latest updated information. ICT staff indicated that the lack of suitable staffing resources to scrutinise and update the data was often a large part of the problem.

The panel noted the positive value of the presence of digital champions in each School who assist with LMSs amongst other responsibilities. Representatives from the UTEL Unit indicated that it serves to support academics to become good teachers. They however also indicated that the Unit has only two permanent members, and it was not functional at the time of the site visit. Staff members indicated that the process of the move to a more digital learning approach has been slow, and this has hampered the development of online short courses.

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

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

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

UKZN has a QMS that seeks to integrate its vision, mission, and goals, its governance and management, core academic functions, and other functions, such as information systems. The QMS is supported by committee structures that allow for ongoing development and enhancement of the system.

Staff are held to account for the management of quality in their functional areas through PMSs, which are key tools for quality management. For academic staff, KPAs include teaching and research supervision, research output (meeting approved productivity norms), PG supervision, community engagement, academic administration, and 'credentialing' for higher degrees (i.e. completion of higher degrees within specified timeframes).

In the discussions held with academic staff at all levels in the academic hierarchy from junior lecturers through to senior professors, all groups raised concerns about the PMS and its relationship to the related academic promotion policy. The picture that emerged is that there appears to be no mutual understanding amongst academic staff of the PMS and its application to the promotion process. This was compounded by confusion resulting from two different versions of the promotion policy, which appear to be in use: a recent version and a version approved a few years ago.

Much of the emphasis on performance management has focused on the academic staff. Performance management of the professional services sector appeared to be lagging, in part, as suggested in the SER, because of limited scope for promotions due to financial constraints. Performance management processes are in place for members of the Executive Management, and these are outlined in the SER.

It was also evident that some areas of management responsibilities are not clear. For example, it was indicated that the Academic Leader who handles Research and Higher Degrees, reports directly to the School Dean and not to the Dean of Research. It therefore seems that there is a dual situation, which relies on goodwill between the Deans and the Academic Leader for proper functioning. Although it was further reported that, in general, this is not a significant obstacle, it would appear that there are some potential challenges with a system that depends on a relationship rather than on a formalised procedure. It was also reported in the SER that, as with all dotted-line management relationships, the system is complex, as accountability is not formalised. This was confirmed when the panel met with academic staff and Academic

Leaders who raised concerns about dual reporting to the Dean of School for academic matters in their disciplines, whereas the professional staff in the same disciplines report not to them but directly to the Director of College Professional Services (DPS) for the technical or administrative work.

Recommendations

15. The panel recommended that UKZN bring closure to the process of reviewing the PMS as soon as possible. Better clarity about and coherence to how the outcomes of the review are communicated and implemented are needed to avoid the current levels of confusion amongst staff on this matter. Moreover, the University must ensure that the results of the pilot project to consider the line-of-sight approach to performance management be fully evaluated before considering its implementation in all Colleges and Divisions.
16. The panel recommended that UKZN review and correct the complexity of the lines of responsibility and accountability for its QMS within the College model of institutional management. The current system appears to put unnecessarily burdensome administrative and reporting loads on staff during the quality management process. This matter should be addressed during the completion of Project Renewal, as indicated in Recommendation 1.

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

The QPA office is headed by a director, supported by five quality consultants (one for each of the four Colleges, and one for professional services) and a Student Evaluation Coordinator. The QPA staff are accountable for activities that promote a culture that fosters continuous improvement of quality at the Institution. The QPA Director is accountable to the DVC: T&L and regularly reports on the performance of the function. In performing the roles of coordinating quality promotion and assurance, the QPA Director serves on key institutional committees and structures, including the Senate and the Professional Services Board. In the academic sector, accountability lines flow from the Academic Leaders to Deans, DVCs, and ultimately the VC, who is accountable to the Council through, amongst others, the annual report, which informs the Council on the successes and challenges of implementing quality management.

Good quality management practices are noted and celebrated within the Institution through, for example, end-of-year academic celebratory functions conducted at the College level.

Several university-wide awards recognise outstanding achievements, such as the Distinguished Teacher's Award, the VC's Research Award, the University Book Prize, and the University Fellowship Award. A financial award bonus system was in place at the site visit but has not been implemented for several years due to financial constraints.

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

The annual budget of UKZN for 2022 was estimated at R4,6 billion. The primary income sources are the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) block grant (53%), tuition fees (31%), and residence fees (16%). A Resource Allocation Model (RAM) is applied in the process of determining the annual budget distributions. About 51% of the budget is allocated to remuneration, and a further 26% to what is referred to as 'academic expenditure'. The panel was of the view that the allocation model and associated processes are sufficiently robust to ensure that resources are allocated to the core academic functions of the University, inclusive of all components of the IQMS.

Within this macro framework, an area that requires some attention is the determination of the annual workload of academic staff. Workload distribution amongst academic staff affects the optimal use of overall staffing capacity and capability and, in turn, on the quality of teaching, research, and community engagement. There is a Senate-approved workload distribution model based on a 45-hour working week, equating to 1,800 hours per year, to be distributed to teaching and supervision (45%), research (40%), community engagement (10%), and administration (5%).

As noted in the SER (p. 160), "The system is a blunt instrument in that it is a catch-all for all teaching academics, irrespective of discipline type, rank status, professional orientation (such as with laboratory duties), or level of administrative duties". Academic staff also noted that much of what they do in their daily academic tasks is not accounted for in the workload model but is essential for proper attention to the learning needs of students. Not surprisingly, the panel heard of heavy administrative workloads being borne by Academic Leaders, amongst others. While acknowledging that workload determination is a contested area at most universities, the panel was of the view that there is room to review the UKZN model to allow for some level of differentiation with respect to, for example, rank and academic focus.

Recommendation

17. The panel recommended that the system used for allocating workloads to academic staff be reviewed to account better for the full spectrum of actual work undertaken by

academic staff and to allow for greater differentiation at individual levels of appointment and capacity in different core academic activities. Such a review would also respond to the repeated expression of a high workload and burnout, particularly by junior and emerging academic staff.

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

Across the interview sessions, staff members expressed general satisfaction with the quality assurance system in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. There was agreement that the quality system achieves the strategic goals, which are aligned with the institutional vision, through the optimal and cost-effective use of resources, systems, and processes. The Institution uses a wide range of performance indicators to assess efficiency and effectiveness, including research outputs such as PG students and publications, throughput and pass rates, student evaluations of all modules, and in community engagement, drawing on stakeholder boards to assess service provision, etc.

UKZN has generally done well in meeting its annual performance targets. There has been a significant growth in research output with an increase of 157% from 2011 to 2020, as well as an increase in staff who hold doctoral degrees. The University recorded a low-performance score for its activities in community engagement, and this was ascribed to unformulated or unstructured community engagement and possibly a lack of specific strategies and norms to monitor and assess the outcomes and sustainability of community-based projects. The panel noted however that the University has established a Task Team on community engagement under the leadership of a senior professor to review its approach to community engagement. The outcomes of this important review process are likely to revitalise the area of community engagement, and the panel encouraged the University to conclude the process to the point of adoption of an implementation plan.

Despite the general satisfaction with this area of quality assurance, several aspects that need to be improved were identified in the SER and amplified by interviewees. With specific reference to financial management, some processes are still manual and paper-based, causing delays in processing requests; hence, affecting efficiency. Other processes, such as creditor payments, still require authorisation from the central finance office, as this has not yet been decentralised to the College level.

Several constituencies, including the SRC, staff from the Student Affairs Office, Information and Communication Services (ICS), as well as academics from different Colleges, pointed to

challenges with the online student registration system, which needs urgent improvement. This appears to be exacerbated by the often-repeated extension of late registration deadlines.

Recommendations

18. The panel recommended that UKZN be encouraged to complete the review of its CE activities and to move to the adoption of an improvement plan that would assist in revitalising this important area of its core academic activities.
19. The panel recommended that, in the short term, UKZN resolve the problems that staff and students experience with the online registration system. This includes better management and implementation of registration deadlines.
20. The panel recommended that the University identify and address administrative and management operations that warrant being moved from being manual and paper-based to becoming online and automated processes, and those that can be devolved to the College level.

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

The four standards in Focus Area 4 concentrate on how effectively the institutional QMS enhances the likelihood of student success, improves teaching and learning, and supports the scholarship of teaching and learning. These standards were discussed in greater detail in Focus Area 2.

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

In 2021, UKZN offered around 440 programmes leading to qualifications, ranging from two diploma programmes to 85 bachelor's and professional degree programmes, and 35 doctoral degree programmes. The University approaches programme design as a bottom-up process, starting with a programme development team, which includes academic disciplinary experts, curriculum designers, instructional designers, academic developers and, in some cases, experts from industry. The University also engages with consultants to ensure national and international benchmarking from a quality perspective.

Programme approval takes place sequentially at the School Teaching and Learning Committee, then at the College Academic Affairs Board (CAAB), and finally at the Senate,

through its University Teaching and Learning Committee. As mentioned earlier, concern was however expressed by academic staff that the depth of debate by the Senate on programme matters was shallow and insufficient, and that, in practice, the Senate and its academic oversight committees mostly act to approve programme proposals on purely technical considerations. The Quality Performance and Assurance (QPA) office relies on a Data Quality Workgroup to manage and support internal and external academic reviews at the School, programme, and module level. The approach used relies on documented principles and procedures for quality reviews and for professional body accreditations. Quality assurance strategies include programme and qualification accreditation processes of the CHE and professional licensing organisations, internal and external moderation, input from School Advisory Boards, as well as student reviews of lecturers and modules.

It is clear that UKZN has mostly considered and implemented the appropriate policies, guidelines and activities to ensure that their academic programmes are delivered with proper attention to quality. In terms of its application within the normal operational aspects of the Institution, academic staff however expressed concern that approved programmes and processes are not always followed and that implementation at the School and programme level is not thoroughly monitored and corrected.

Some concern was expressed, both in the SER and interviews with academic staff based in professional disciplines, about the possible dissonance or tension between the curriculum expectations of professional bodies that have licensing authority over professional practice and the expectations of the University. The panel's view was that, on matters of curriculum, the University Senate holds final authority under the Higher Education Act. In its relationship with professional bodies, the University must however listen to the views and opinions of the profession and must give academically defensible reasons for the choices it makes on curriculum development and delivery.

Recommendations

21. The panel recommended that UKZN ensure that academic staff in professional disciplines understand the role and limits of authority of professional bodies in directing curriculum at the University. It should be emphasised that the Senate holds ultimate authority over decisions on curriculum matters, and such authority is exercised with due attention to and acknowledgement of the opinions and expectations of the professional bodies.

22. The panel recommended that, through the monitoring and implementation aspects of its QMS, UKZN ensure that approved programmes and processes are implemented and followed in accordance with the approved arrangements.

Standard 14: *There is evidence-based engagement at various institutional levels, among staff, and among staff and students, with:*

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

There is much evidence that, in the recent past, UKZN has been engaged with questions related to the values and meaning of a university on the African continent, which is ambitious about its intellectual contributions to its community and the growth of global human knowledge. It was clear to the panel that institutional thinking on these matters has had a strong influence on the admission of students, the range and depth of support that is provided to students in response to the changing enrolment patterns, the acknowledgement of the place of African languages in enhancing learning and, perhaps at a more nascent level, on changes to curriculum form, content, and pedagogical approaches.

Some concern was expressed, both in the SER and in discussion with members of the SRC that the academic staff involved with curriculum development or review do not consult sufficiently with students in arriving at curriculum proposals. SRC members also felt that students are not properly represented on College and Senate committees where curriculum matters are discussed and that this compromised their ability to influence the directions of curriculum reform at the University.

The University emphasizes the promotion of multilingualism within the Institution as a means of giving greater learning access mainly to students who are first-language isiZulu speakers, but also of advancing the possibility of better social cohesion within the Institution as well as among its graduates. Many of these language development initiatives may be considered as being in the experimental stage, however, UKZN must adopt this initiative, as the outcomes will assist in guiding the SA HE sector on approaches to this complex matter of the place and development of local African languages. Some Colleges and Schools have initiated projects to provide course content and research thrusts that emphasise the African context of their disciplines more strongly, including the introduction of IK systems into teaching and research, where appropriate.

It was however not clear to the panel whether there was a shared understanding of the concepts and motivations for the initiatives amongst academic staff who were interviewed. Some academic staff members showed a shallow understanding of the debates in expressing either support or scepticism of the intellectual engagement initiatives around the meaning of the African identity of the University. Academics from the pure and applied sciences disciplines felt that the decolonisation discussion was related to disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and is unlikely to have an influence on curriculum in their Schools. Very few academics were able to respond to questions on the place of bilingualism in developing student competence in the discourse of knowledge that students in higher education are expected to demonstrate.

As one of its strategic objectives, UKZN has consciously changed the profile of its student enrolments over the past few years to make the Institution more representative of the social class profile of the region and the country. Using the secondary school quintile classification as a proxy for the measure of this change, the University has increased enrolment of students from Q1–3 schools to an institutional average of 46%. This has necessarily brought along challenges in terms of the T&L approach, given the changing levels of student preparedness for HE studies. In response, UKZN has developed a commendable suite of programmes, initiatives and facilities to support students better in their learning needs. Students generally spoke well of the FYE programme, the additional tutorial support, both in the formal curriculum and informally in the residences, the extended curriculum programmes, and the benefits of being back in class and contact teaching mode. The University has also expanded its student psychosocial support facilities at campus and College level to identify students in need of such support better and, when identified, to ensure that students are counselled and guided to the best of the resource limitations of the University. In turn, the academic staff expressed a continued commitment to ensuring that they support their students through their teaching activities. Academic staff however pointed to the increasing demands on their academic time, and that the improving performance of Q1–3 students is a result of increased teaching-related workloads with concomitant influence on their research time and outputs.

The panel found much evidence, both in the interviews with staff and students and during the campus visits, of the positive aspects of the early implementation of blended learning approaches at the University. The University provides good access to internet connections on the different campuses, and students make extensive use of this facility. There are also well-resourced computer centres on all the campuses where students can access computer devices for their learning resource needs. While UKZN is clearly on a positive development

path in its use of ITs for improved teaching and learning, an important technical hindrance is likely to be the poor integration of its LMS with its EMS.

Commendations

- D UKZN is commended for the range and levels of psychosocial support that it offers to its students. From student accounts, the support initiatives appear to have a generally positive effect on the quality of student life and the learning experience.
- E UKZN is commended for giving greater learning access to students who are first-language isiZulu speakers but also for enhancing the possibility of better social cohesion within the Institution as well as among its graduates. This initiative has the potential to guide the SA HE sector on possible approaches to the complex matter of the place and development of local African languages.

Recommendations

- 23. The panel recommended that UKZN take greater care in ensuring that the process of curriculum review and renewal includes the participation of and consultation with student representatives in governance structures as well as recent graduates.
- 24. While the strategic decision to increase Q1–3 enrolments is to be commended, the University acknowledges that it has placed greater demands on the time and effort that academic staff must commit to their teaching activities. The panel therefore recommended that Senior Management and academic staff at UKZN jointly engage in collective reflection to find a shared response to what appears currently to be an unsustainable approach to effective teaching and learning.

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

In discussions with UG and PG students, alumni and recent graduates, students spoke of a generally positive experience in their learning interactions with the University. Graduates mentioned the positive extent of their preparedness for intellectual engagement in the world of work or in pursuing research-based higher degrees.

Students were however less complimentary about some of the administrative processes at the University. They expressed a strong concern with the recently implemented online registration system that seemed to have been a source of much student frustration at the

beginning of the academic year. This concern was also expressed by academic staff who reported that published class lists were mostly unreliable for the early part of the first semester. Indeed, during the panel visit, there were reports of students still being registered even though the University was well into the first teaching semester of 2023.

Student complaints are managed through a formal grievance process, and the view of students and academic staff is that the system is properly functional. Members of the SRC however noted that students do not always follow the accepted procedure to approach the SRC directly with matters that would have been addressed better through the normal process. They agreed with the management view, namely that repeated and more effective communication with students on the grievance procedure was needed at the University.

The University has implemented an Academic Monitoring and Support (AMS) initiative that is underpinned by an AMS Policy. The intention is to give each student regular feedback on his or her academic performance and the level of intervention needed to avoid failure and academic exclusion. The system also gives staff a risk assessment of each student in his or her course and a sense of the student's learning support needs. While the system is intended to rely on data analytics to provide more nuanced information to the Institution on the specific academic or social support needs of the student, it however appears that the information gathered is based only on the grade performance in the courses for which the student is registered.

The process of student module evaluations does not work well at UKZN. The system for module evaluations is in place and students are encouraged to complete the evaluation. There is also a requirement that students evaluate each module annually. The concern noted in the SER, and reinforced in interviews with academic staff, was that students avoided participating in evaluations; thus, reducing the reliability and use-value of the results as a guide for improving teaching. For their part, students felt that their contributions to module evaluations had little to no influence, as they were not aware of the outcomes of the evaluations or the effects that it had in changing the quality of teaching and curriculum revision.

Recommendation

25. The panel recommended that students at UKZN be better informed of the grievance procedure at the School, College, and Institution levels. This will require support and participation by the SRC to ensure sustained and repeated communication on the procedures that students are expected to follow in student-related grievance matters.

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

In discussions with academic staff on curriculum renewal and development, the panel found evidence of concern about the employability of graduates. There were clear indications that the opinions of College or School Advisory Boards were sought in thinking about the knowledge, skills and competencies that are to be developed in graduates to prepare them better for employment in the broad world of work. Beyond this approach to curriculum development, the panel was however of the view that UKZN does not have a well-developed capacity for monitoring the employment patterns of their graduates and using the information to respond better to employment and employability needs in the development of their students.

In their engagements with the Alumni Office, it was found that the pattern appears to be that the priority of older alumni is to 'give back' to the Institution through engagements, such as participation in Convocation activities, participation in Advisory Boards, and financial and in-kind support. On the other hand, the more recent graduates have increasingly been requesting support from the University in terms of job-seeking skills, such as providing workshops and seminars on career development, entrepreneurship opportunities, and CV writing. These needs seem to be a consequence of limited opportunities and encouragement for students to be in part-time employment during their studies as a strategy for them to earn some income, but mainly as a way of acculturating students into the world of work before graduating. The University has a scheme through which students can be employed in part-time work at the University in assistant positions in areas such as the library, laboratories, ICT services, and research. This is useful in alleviating the workloads of staff during busy periods and gives students some experience in developing their workplace preparedness skills. Such employment opportunities are however limited, and a very small proportion of students are likely to benefit from this scheme.

In discussions with students, they expressed a need for a more focused approach to career development at the University, particularly because of their perception of a high level of graduate unemployment after completion of the first qualification. They also called for increased access to PG programmes that may improve their employability profiles.

The QPA office conducts annual graduate opinion surveys at the time of graduation. These surveys include questions on the employment status of the graduates. However, these data are not analysed at a sufficiently detailed level to understand place, time and sector patterns of employment that would assist in developing a response plan in terms of the concerns. There

was also no evidence that the data collected were used in any employability studies at the University.

Recommendations

26. It was recommended that UKZN develop its capacity for monitoring the employment patterns of its graduates and using the information to respond better to employment and employability needs in the broader development of students at the Institution.
27. It was recommended that UKZN consider developing partnerships with employers in the immediate surroundings of the campuses to encourage part-time employment and internship placements of students to the mutual benefit of students and local businesses and organisations.