



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT REPORT

ON THE

VAAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

(8 November 2024)

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Acronyms

APP	Annual Performance Plan
AQSC	Academic Quality and Standards Committee
ARC	Audit and Risk Committee
BUSSE	Beginning University Survey of Student Engagement
CAD	Centre for Academic Development
CE	Community Engagement
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CoC	Chair of Council
Dean	Executive Dean
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DVC:TLSSS	Deputy Vice Chancellor: Teaching, Learning and Student Support Services
ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
ED	Executive Director
ERT	Emergency Remote Teaching
FYE	First-Year Experience
HEDA	Higher Education Data Analyser (also known as PowerHEDA)
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HoD	Head of Department
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPU	Institutional Planning Unit
ITS	Integrated Tertiary Software
IIP	Institutional Implementation Plan
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LMS	Learning Management System
MANCOM	Management Committee
MIS	Management Information System
NDP	National Development Plan
NDT	Non-destructive Testing

PACD	Programme Accreditation and Curriculum Development
PDP	Personal Development Plan
PIRI	Plan-Implement-Review-Improve
PMS	Performance Management System
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
PQM	Programme Qualification Mix
QA	Quality Assurance
QEP	Quality Enhancement Project QMS Quality Management System
QPU	Quality Promotions Unit
RMC	Risk Management Committee of MANCOM
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SENEX	Senate Executive
SER	Self-evaluation Report
SET	Science, Engineering, and Technology
SES	Student Enrolment Services
SIP	Strategy Implementation Plan
SLP	Short Learning Programme
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SoTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
SP	Strategic Plan
SRC	Student Representative Council
SSS	Student Support Services
T&L	Teaching and Learning
ToR	Terms of Reference
UCDP	University Capacity Development Programme
UoT	University of Technology
VC	Vice Chancellor and Principal
VUT	Vaal University of Technology
VUTe/a	VUT's local designation for the Blackboard learner management system (LMS)
WIL	Work-integrated Learning
WILMS	Work Integrated Learning Management System

Executive Summary

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

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

The following principles guided the institutional audit of Vaal University of Technology (VUT):

1. The primary responsibility for internal quality assurance rests with individual Higher Education Institution (HEIs). Each institution is responsible for the

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>

establishment, implementation, maintenance, improvement, and enhancement of its own quality management and assurance systems.

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

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

A Brief Overview of Vaal University of Technology

The Vaal University of Technology (VUT) was established in 1966 as a College for Advanced Technical Education. It evolved into a Technikon in 1979 and obtained University of Technology (UoT) status in 2004 following the reorganisation of the South African higher education landscape. In 2016, VUT marked its 50th year as a higher education institution.

The institution's main campus is situated in Vanderbijlpark in Gauteng. Initially, it had three satellite campuses: Secunda in Mpumalanga; Daveyton in Gauteng, and Upington in Northern

Cape. A restructuring process led to the closure of the three satellite campuses (Daveyton in 2021, Secunda and Uppington in 2022). The Southern Gauteng Science and Technology Park is an innovation hub situated at the Sebokeng Campus where it is considered as an extension of the main campus (VUT Southern Gauteng Science and Technology Park- Science Park, Technology).

VUT is strategically located in Gauteng Province and is positioned within a highly industrialised area alongside prominent petrochemical, steel, engineering, telecommunications, and manufacturing companies. It is also surrounded by economically disadvantaged communities.

The University has four faculties, namely, the Faculty of Applied and Computer Sciences (FACS), the Faculty of Engineering and Technology (FET), the Faculty of Human Sciences (FHS), and the Faculty of Management Sciences (FMS). In 2022, the combined student headcount, encompassing both undergraduate and postgraduate students, was 19,656. This figure represents a gradual decline from 2018 when it was 21,067 with fluctuations of 21,927 in 2019, followed by 20,293 in 2020, and 19,899 in 2021 (SER, p.8; Student Headcount). The decrease is a result of lower than-targeted First Time Entrant (FTEN) registrations due to the closure of the Daveyton campus in 2021.

The number of students in various faculties at VUT has exhibited declining trends from 2019 to 2022. Specifically, there has been a decline in student enrolment in the faculties related to Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET), namely; Applied and Computer Sciences, Engineering and Technology, as well as in the non-SET faculties like Human Sciences and Management Sciences during this period. Notably, in 2021, the Faculty of Human Sciences experienced the most substantial annual growth (8%), followed by the Faculty of Management Sciences with a 2% increase. However, the Faculty of Engineering and Technology remained stagnant with 0% growth, and the Faculty of Applied and Computer Sciences faced a 6% annual decline in enrolments from 2017 to 2021. These concerning low enrolment trends become particularly significant when considering VUT's core mission, which is to promote and advance SET programmes.

The Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) at VUT is made up of a combination of vocational, academic, and professional qualifications, as influenced by government, industry, professional bodies, community, and national needs. VUT's historical origins and current mandate guide the PQM, which has evolved to address changing industry requirements and expand into management and social sciences to meet regional education needs. While there is a focus on

STEM subjects to align with VUT's mission, the primary emphasis remains on industry responsiveness.

The PQM primarily concentrates on the Diploma level, catering to 90% of student intake, providing essential technical education. The student profile aligns with VUT's status as a UoT with a focus on undergraduate science and technology programmes. The HEQSF has prompted the inclusion of Advanced Diplomas and Postgraduate Diplomas, as a result of these changes, VUT has now increased access to Master's and Doctoral programmes.

Research is regarded as a fundamental mission of VUT with ongoing efforts to enhance research capacity. Thus VUT has a strong commitment to research and has been actively working on enhancing its research capacity. The UCDP has been a crucial funding source for research capacity building since 2017. In 2021, 41 staff members received UCDP funding for Master's and doctoral studies, showcasing the university's support for advanced academic qualifications. VUT has seen a positive trend in research outputs, with an increase from 2019 to 2020, reaching 172.52 units in accredited journals. In 2021, despite submitting slightly fewer research output units (152.46), VUT exceeded its target of 127 units, indicating strong research productivity.

The per capita publication subsidy units per instructional and research staff member increased from 0.43 in 2019 to 0.51 in 2020. However, VUT's research output is below the sector average, suggesting potential areas for improvement.

VUT has maintained consistent postgraduate student registrations, with 416 Master's and 124 doctoral students registering in 2021. The university has consistently met or exceeded postgraduate registration targets, indicating a healthy enrolment in advanced degree programmes. There's a positive trend in Master's graduations, with 60 students graduating in 2021, surpassing the set target of 37. However, there's a decline in doctoral graduations, with 14 students in 2021 compared to the target of 7. This could be an area of focus for the university to understand and address the factors contributing to this decline.

In terms of infrastructure development, the university is currently facing visible signs of distressed infrastructure across its campuses, encompassing both buildings and services infrastructure. The surge in the university's population over the years has not been met with proportional infrastructure development, primarily due to inadequate planning and funding. The strategic decision in 2020 to close satellite campuses has further exacerbated the challenges, requiring a comprehensive approach to consolidate institutional programmes within the Vanderbijlpark and Science Park campuses.

The university took a significant step in 2019 by approving its Campus Infrastructure Masterplan (IP23). To spearhead this initiative, a multi-disciplinary professional team was appointed in September 2022. The primary goal of this Masterplan is to guide infrastructure planning, funding, and development in the medium to long term.

The University is accelerating the re-procurement of infrastructure and deferred maintenance items, aided by the release of R185 million in 5th Cycle funding by DHET in the last quarter of 2021. However, the reduced funding led to a re-prioritisation of projects, focusing on student facilities, ICT infrastructure, Student Study Centre, laboratories, and residences.

In 2018, the total staff count stood at 3,019, but it had dropped to 2,162 by 2022 (SER, p.11). The decline was primarily due to the institution's financial difficulties owing to leadership challenges, which were also aggravated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Another consistent issue plaguing the University is the high proportion of temporary positions that outnumbers permanent ones (1,173 temporary positions compared to 989 permanent positions in 2022 SER, p.12). This was raised as a concern by the interviewees that the quality of teaching and learning is affected by a lack of accountability as a result of more temporary versus permanent appointments. To address these challenges, vacant positions worth R105-million had to be frozen, leading to the prioritisation of critical roles for filling.

In 2018, VUT underwent a difficult period characterised by *“governance, leadership and managerial constraints and challenges that it needed to overcome to move forward”* (SER, p.5). The Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation appointed two independent assessors to provide insights into the extent of the challenges. This intervention by the Minister was guided by Section 45 of the Higher Education Act. The interim report from two independent assessors led to the appointment of the Administrator. A final report was submitted to the Minister on 18 October 2019. The 2019 Assessors' Report concluded that: *“the Vice-Chancellor's inability to provide strategic leadership and effective management placed the university's sustainability at risk”* (SER, p.5). By invoking Section 49B (1) of the Higher Education Act,(Act 101 of 1997, as amended) (the Act) notwithstanding any other provision of the Act, the Minister placed the institution under administration (SER, p.6).

An Administrator was appointed for a period of 24 months (15 August 2019 – 31 July 2021), assuming the role, power, functions, and duties of the VUT Council as well as the leadership and management oversight role of Vice-Chancellor and Principal from August 2019 to August 2021

(SER, p.20). The Administrator's mandate also included stabilising the university, establishing a new Council, and facilitating a smooth governance transition. Notably, the university's statute was revised and promulgated during the Administrator's tenure in February 2021 (SER, p.38).

The Strategic Plan (2020-2023) was also approved during the tenure of the Administrator. However, the Strategy period was adjusted from 2019-2023 to 2020-2024 after consultation with the Management Committee (SER, p.38). After the end of the Administration era, the new Council was inaugurated in August 2021 (SER, p.39) and the new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in February 2022 (SER, p.20).

Following the Administrator's efforts to stabilise the institution, a period of negative publicity (as described by the Acting VC during his presentation) and reputational risk ensued, leading to heightened conflicts between the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor and Chair of the Council. The latter culminated in the resignation of the Chairperson of the Council, the Chancellor, and the Ombudsman. The Vice-Chancellor was then placed on special leave. An Acting Vice-Chancellor was subsequently appointed. These events negatively impacted staff morale, operational efficiency, and overall performance. However, despite all these challenges staff members showed resilience.

The general dysfunctional environment at VUT has been cumulative over a prolonged period, which can be largely attributable to years of dysfunctional Councils and in some instances, the actions of members serving self-interests, interfering with management responsibilities, and making unprocedural appointments. The Acting VC described this as “*Blood-on-the-Wall*” during his presentation to the Panel. The unprofessional conduct on the part of some ultimately resulted in a collapse of governance and the emergence of a leadership vacuum resulting in years of neglect and degradation. It must be emphasised at the outset that the assumptions, observations, conclusions, and judgments in this report emanate from the first point of reference, the SER. In compiling this report, the Panel repeatedly noted that the SER was wholly inadequate, and in many instances, did not provide the requisite evidence to enable the Panel to obtain a fuller picture of the institution to generate alternative conclusions and recommendations.

The 2020-2024 Strategic Plan (SER, p.4, IP8) outlines the vision of VUT as an “*African university that leads in quality teaching and learning, informed by research and driven by innovation and technology*”. The CHE Panel used this plan as a point of departure and reference. However, during the site visit, the Acting VC presented to the Panel the 2033+ strategy.

External stakeholders (WIL employers), emphasised the point that, in their experience, several VUT students had theoretical knowledge but lacked attendant competencies and skills. Postgraduate students expressed similar sentiments and intimated that they could not compete equally in the job market or operate at the same level as peers from other institutions during work-integrated learning. Students ascribed their lack of skill and competency development to the outdated laboratory equipment that often was not functional. Students stated that much of their work was purely academic and not linked to application, compared with peers in the field.

A Brief Overview of the Audit Process

The purpose of this institutional audit was to evaluate the integrated quality management system in place and assess its alignment with the university's fundamental activities, which encompass teaching and learning, research, and community engagement, and to determine if these core activities were aligned with the university's strategic plan.

The institutional audit of VUT was a comprehensive process that involved a panel of six members (see *Annexure 1*). Prior to commencing the audit, the CHE organised several induction workshops for the Panel. The CHE also furnished the Panel with pertinent documents to aid in their audit preparations. The review process was conducted meticulously, entailing a comprehensive assessment of the SER, the presented evidence, and the interviews conducted during the Panel's on-site visits.

VUT provided panel members access to evidence through an email on the VUT Team's platform. The audit took place through a combination of on-site visits and virtual sessions, with additional documents being procured during the site visit. The on-site visit occurred from July 10 to 12, 2023, with virtual continuation on July 13 and 14, 2023. The Panel met daily to reflect and refine its inquiries for the following day.

The site visit's planning and organisation proceeded well although with some glitches, however, the panel extended their gratitude to the VUT team. Engagements with staff, students, and stakeholders were candid and cooperative. Not all scheduled persons attended some sessions (both in person and virtually), and technical challenges were encountered during virtual sessions. In some sessions, it was observable that the Panel was talking to the same people (both staff members and students), which is considered an impediment to achieving a cross-pollination of ideas.

The discussion sessions included governance (the Council, Institutional Forum, and the Student Representative Council (SRC) and all levels of management including the Management Committee (MANCOM), senior management, the registrar, executive directors, Executive Deans, heads of academic and support departments, as well as members of the Senate. The staff/students' sessions included staff of support departments, research professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, emerging researchers, research entities, post-doc fellows, trade unions, students (undergraduate and postgraduate), Alumni, and external stakeholders. Some students attended both the Alumni and Postgraduate students' sessions.

The site visit included the VUT's campus tour in Vanderbijlpark (library, laboratories, residences, Isak Steyl Stadium) and the Science Park at Sebokeng Campus. The detailed site visit schedule with sessions and participants is provided in *Annexure 2*.

The panel diligently cross-referenced the SER with information gathered from the interviews during site visits, virtual interactions, and campus tours. Consequently, any recommendations developed should be considered in light of the operational context within which the Panel conducted its review. The audit report provides comprehensive findings and recommendations based on the panel's observations as outlined above.

VUT has a rich history of evolution from a College for Advanced Technical Education to a University of Technology. Over the years, it has faced various challenges, including governance and leadership issues that led to a period of administration. While the institution has outlined strategic plans and missions, there is a need for greater clarity, alignment, and communication on these fronts. Enrolment trends, especially in science, engineering, and technology faculties, are concerning, and there are questions about the quality of education and resources available to students.

The executive summary highlights essential recommendations pertaining to each focus area and standard. The report offers a plethora of insights and suggestions aimed at enhancing quality across various aspects. It specifically underscores critical issues presented as recommendations, necessitating proactive responses from VUT. Prioritising these recommendations is crucial for bolstering the institution's overall quality effectiveness. In summary, the audit was meticulously conducted and offers valuable guidance for VUT's continuous improvement endeavours.

The following is a summary of the audit Panels' recommendations for VUT.

Focus Area 1: Governance, strategic planning, management, and leadership support the core academic functions

The four standards in Focus Area 1 concentrate on the role that an institution's *governance, strategic planning* (as contained in its *vision, mission and strategic goals*), *management and academic leadership* play in its quality management in order to enhance the likelihood of student success and to improve the quality of learning, teaching and research engagement, as well as accommodating the results of constructive, integrated community engagement. These standards are:

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

The Vaal University of Technology's (VUT) statute was amended and promulgated by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr BE Nzimande, in February 2021. The statute outlines the authoritative and accountability functions of the institution and provides clear guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Council and its Committees, the Secretariat of Council, the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Senate and its subcommittees, the Institutional Forum, the Student Representative Council (SRC), and Convocation.

In 2018, VUT faced governance, leadership, and managerial challenges that threatened its sustainability. The Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation appointed independent assessors who found the Vice-Chancellor's inability to provide strategic leadership and effective management placed the university's sustainability at risk. Consequently, an Administrator was appointed for 24 months to take over the VUT Council's duties and oversee the leadership and management responsibilities of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal. The Administrator stabilised the university and revised its statute by February 2021. However, negative publicity and conflicts between the new Vice-Chancellor and Chair of the Council followed, leading to the resignation of key figures and placing the Vice-Chancellor on special leave. These events negatively impacted staff morale, operational efficiency, and overall performance. However, despite these challenges, staff members demonstrated resilience.

The university currently has an approved Strategic Plan for 2020-2024 that outlines the vision as an "African university that leads in quality teaching and learning, informed by research and driven by innovation and technology". However, during the site visit, the Panel learned about the development of a new Strategic Plan for 2033+ with a focus on "learning innovation," presented by the Acting Vice-Chancellor. This new Strategic Plan is still in draft form and has not been shared with stakeholders. The Panel found no clear rationale for starting a new strategy midstream, while the existing 2020-2024 plan has not been thoroughly reviewed or fully implemented. Additionally, no review was available that underpinned the development of another Strategic Plan.

Lack of clarity regarding which SP is being followed created confusion to the panel regarding the version to be used as an evaluative tool has had a detrimental and negative impact on the way staff understand, plan, and approach their duties. Transitions from one SP to the next were not clearly articulated to the VUT community, resulting in variations of thought and execution. The executive management's approach to questions during the site visit reinforced the Panel's view that the focus was on futuristic plans rather than plans already in existence.

A process is in place to devolve the Institutional Implementation Plan (2021) to faculties and departments (SER, p.23), with each developing its respective SPs as well as Implementing the APPs (SER, p.23). However, upon scrutiny of the available evidence, the Panel concluded that there were inconsistencies in the evidence provided in that the IIP of 2020 (Annexure 1.2a) and the IIP of 2021 (Annexure 1.2b) refer to institutional and not faculty or department strategies or implementation plans, respectively. Key performance areas appear in Deans and Heads of Department (HODs) performance contracts. The Panel could not obtain Faculty and department-level strategic and implementation plans. During interviews with Executive Deans, Heads of Departments, and unit staff members, the Panel also verified inconsistencies regarding the initiation and outcome of such processes and determined where in the governance structures these were adopted officially.

Along the same vein, the institution's mission "to produce employable and entrepreneurial graduates who can make an impact in society" was interpreted in multiple ways by stakeholders, making it a challenge for the Panel to decide on how the vision and mission served as the basis for decision-making and planning at different levels of implementation. While through its mission, the institution was clear on the type of graduate it wished to produce, interviews with external stakeholders revealed concerns regarding the graduates produced, particularly the skill and competency levels of students. They emphasised that, in their experience, several VUT students

had theoretical knowledge but lacked attendant competencies and skills. Postgraduate students expressed similar sentiments and intimated that they could not compete equally in the job market or operate at the same level as their peers from other institutions during work-integrated learning.

The Operational Risk Register outlines 42 identified risks, their root causes, and mitigation and action plans. However, no evidence was available to the Panel on how risks were monitored and mitigated beyond plans. It was unclear to the Panel what the articulation is between the two committees in the Registrar's Office and their articulation with Executive Management and the ARC.

Governance approval processes were also unclear in the SER and responses during the sight visit signalled that key policies were either outdated or not yet in existence. Vacancies at the executive level remain a major risk in the execution of the SP and the long-term sustainability of VUT (Standard 6 has reference). The identified risks in the Risk Register require monitored mitigation plans since these create instability and threaten the sustainability of systems.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

1. The institution must attend to governance and leadership challenges as follows:
 - 1.1 Leadership Development and training should be developed for Management and Council members. Workshops on mediation and conflict resolution techniques to be included in training.
 - 1.2 Governance training sessions with the Council and Management should be conducted.

An effective Performance Management system for leadership positions should implemented to ensure accountability and consequence management.
2. The institution must attend to strategic and business plans as follows:
 - 2.1 Integrate the existing Strategic Planning (SP) cycle (2020 – 2024) with the new SP (2033+) as they implement the new strategy. This should include a review of current areas of risk, improvement, and innovation in preparation for the implementation of the new plan;
 - 2.2 Embark on a consultative process with stakeholders across the institution on fundamental concepts embodied in the vision and mission to ensure alignment and coherence;
Develop a structured approach to Faculty Strategic and Implementation Plans, with clear lines of approval;
 - 2.3 Review and align the APPs with the SP focusing on reconciling objectives, timeframes,

and resource allocation to make them consistent with the overarching strategic direction and core business of the university;

2.4 Develop graduate attributes consistent with the institution's vision and mission;

2.5 Clarify the role of the Registrar in relation to risk management and articulation with other risk management structures, such as ARC and MANCOM.

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

The institution has used several relevant national policies, acts, and frameworks to frame its strategic direction and operations. Furthermore, the institution created a Compliance Unit to oversee regulatory compliance. VUT envisaged that such a unit would expedite the review of outdated policies, support the formulation of new policies where there are gaps, and ensure their compliance and approval. The institution was unable to verify this Unit's efficiency in the context of a number of outstanding or dated policies as articulated in the Policy Register. The Panel concluded that although VUT aspires to better align its strategic vision, mission, and operations with national and international imperatives, systematic plans, with approved documentation, were yet to be finalised.

Using the undated Framework for the Operations of Research Entities as an organising framework, the institution proposes a change to its research niche areas (SER, pp. 26-27). Those outlined by the Faculty reflect articulation and embeddedness in sustainable development goals (SER, p. 27). However, the framing document does not reflect its approval. Interviews with Deans and Heads of Departments reflected a lack of knowledge of its existence. This level of management also responded unevenly concerning the identified research niche areas by Faculty and Department. The Panel could also not verify this in the absence of Faculty Strategic and Faculty Implementation Plans.

During the Campus Tour, personnel from the Science Park confirmed that discussions are underway with the institution to establish a synergistic and symbiotic relationship between the personnel and academics and between the entity and the institution, all of which is still embryonic.

There was no evidence available on the process or approval mechanisms. The institution was in the early stages of endorsing its research niches and setting plans in motion with resources to enhance and promote such aspirations.

The research outputs of VUT indicate a per capita output of 0.5 units (Annexure 5.6k). This was attributed to a lack of resources to support academic publishing. In 2020, VUT attained the highest research output units of 195 units. The impact of the research output was not measured. Interviews with researchers raised their concerns regarding the lack of a research data management system and platform.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

3. The institution must attend to the following in order to realise its research aspirations:
 - 3.1 Finalise and approve the "Framework for the Operations of Research Entities"
 - 3.2 Explore the use of reliable research data management systems and platforms available in most South African educational institutions (Refer to Standard 6).
 - 3.3 Develop a register of approved research niche areas.
4. The institution must formalise the working relationship with Science Park and fast-track its integration into the VUT ecosystem by:
 - 4.1 Designing an appropriate business model to ensure its commercial viability
 - 4.2 Recruiting skilled personnel to maintain the specialised lab equipment.
 - 4.3 Ensuring that it serves as a relevant teaching, learning, and research resource.

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

VUT possesses an endorsed Strategic Plan (SP) for the period 2020-2024, reflecting the vision and mission approved by the Administrator in August 2019. This SP serves as the underlying framework for the Annual Performance Plans (APP) for 2020 and 2021. However, it is evident that both APPs (2020 & 2021) exhibit inadequate alignment with the overarching strategy. Several concerns have been raised in this regard, including discrepancies regarding performance indicators, the absence of clear labels for the four sub-categories (Access, Success, Efficiency, Research Output), and a lack of distinct differentiation between operational and strategic performance indicators.

In terms of Governance structures, as guided by the Statute, VUT has the following: Council; Senate; Institutional Forum; Student Representative Council; and Convocation. Figure 7 (SER, p.35) indicates the various committees of the Council and their functions. According to the SER (p.36), a recent review workshop that assessed the institution's vision, mission, and strategic goals highlighted the need to synchronize governance with the SP. Additionally, VUT introduced MANCOM, in compliance with the Statute, which delegates the responsibility for executing duties assigned by the Council to the Acting Vice-Chancellor and the management team (SER, p.37).

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of VUT's senior management is significantly hampered by the prevalence of acting positions lasting 2-3 years thus posing a huge risk for VUT to achieve its optimal performance. The governance arrangements are fluid, due to the instability of MANCOM, as well as the long-drawn strategic and organisational realignment that is underway. Furthermore, the lack of human resources capacity in the quality promotion unit impacts negatively on the effective implementation of a quality management system at the university.

To ensure the annual delivery and accountability of key management staff, VUT offers agreed performance-based contracts, as stipulated in the Performance Management Policy (Annexure 9.2a) (SER, p.33). These contracts are subject to quarterly reviews (SER, p.33). The Panel noted the existence of this structural framework but found insufficient evidence of its effective functioning. Staff interviews revealed concerns about the absence of a fully operational Performance Management system (PMS), which, in turn, contributes to a lack of staff accountability. Consequently, there is limited consequence management and monitoring in place (SER, pp.69,71). Furthermore, the SER (p.3,4) highlights an implication from the SP review findings, indicating a misalignment between the APP and the SP. This misalignment results in KPIs on performance contracts that are not clearly defined or aligned with the core functions of staff members (Refer to Standard 9).

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

5. The institution must develop a human capital and talent management framework with an allied strategy and implementation plan. This plan must include the following:
 - 5.1 An Operational Plan, aligned to the implementation of the new SP, to address the imbalance between permanent and temporary /part-time positions (Refer to Standard 6).
 - 5.2 The Operational Plan must prioritise the filling of vacancies in Executive Management, Senior Management and Executive Directors of the Library, IPU, QPU, HEMIS

Administrator, and other critical academic and support vacancies.

6. The institution must compile Performance Standards for different categories of academic staff to include teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.
7. The institution must prioritise the development of a functional Performance Management system, which will be implemented across the whole institution to ensure accountability at various levels.

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.

VUT has put in place clear and structured institutional governance frameworks that specify roles, responsibilities, and the composition of its members. Under the administration's tenure, they developed and approved the Statute and Delegation of Authority documents, which offer comprehensive guidance on the unique functions and responsibilities of governance bodies, managerial entities, and academic leadership. The presence of an Administrator at VUT created some form of stability, instilling hope in the institution that was formally characterised by low morale and a lack of systems and structure. Additionally, the Institutional Rules offer direction on aspects such as the election process for governing structure members, their composition, terms of reference, as well as the functions and procedures followed during meetings. The current council understands the challenges that VUT is experiencing, and it is evident that there is a commitment to addressing them and making VUT a university of choice.

VUT possesses both the Senate Charter (Annexure 4.6d) and the Institutional Forum (IF) Charter (Annexure 4.6e), as detailed in the SER (p.40). These charters outline the specific roles and obligations of these committees. Nonetheless, during interviews with Senate members, they voiced their discontent regarding the limited oversight role of the Senate in academic matters. Their responsibilities primarily revolve around the approval of results and note reports, lacking a more substantial review of processes. Academic staff expressed the inadequacy of support and noted that decisions regarding academic matters are predominantly made by support staff rather than academics themselves. They articulated their primary source of frustration as the existence of a "silo mentality." The Panel observed that Senators appeared to lack orientation regarding their roles and responsibilities, despite the availability of the Senate Charter.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

8. The institution must update its existing policy dashboard by incorporating approved policies along with exact approval dates and proposed review dates.
9. The institution must conduct road shows on Codes, Charters, and Work Plans to ensure a common understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all council and committee members.

Focus Area 2: *The Design and Implementation of the institutional quality management system supports the core academic functions*

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

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

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

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

The VUT has a developing policy and governance environment. Most of the policies were developed during the period of administration. It was confirmed during most interviews that the Administrator assisted the University greatly by establishing the necessary policy environment. There is however a need to augment the policies and strategies for the Postgraduate and research environment. Quality assurance at the institution is anchored, by a quality Assurance policy that was still under review during the site visit.

Academics, Deans, and HODs revealed in interviews that there was a lack of clarity in the process for initiating programme reviews, obtaining approvals, and conducting monitoring. Additionally, there was a noticeable absence of defined roles and collaborative efforts between the CAD, the QPU, and the Institutional Planning Unit (IPU). The initial policy draft on quality promotion stated that "the QPU is responsible for promoting a culture of quality by coordinating and facilitating quality management initiatives across academic, administrative, and support services within the institution." Nevertheless, this policy did not address the roles fulfilled by the CAD and IPU, despite their vital functions in providing support to academic departments, faculties, and directorates in maintaining the quality of academic offerings.

Senate is the academic statutory structure in accordance with sections 21-30 of the VUT Statute. The SER (p.40) presented a Senate charter, which defines the functions and responsibilities of the Senate (Annexure 4.6d). There are indications (through agendas and minutes) that the Senate was functional during the period of administration. However, the presence of Senate subcommittees such as Senex was not elaborated. The SER did not include the terms of reference; agendas and minutes of this committee during and post-administration. No additional information was provided even after the request during the site visit.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

10. The institution must develop a dashboard to update Quality Improvement Plans for internal quality reviews.
11. The institution must clarify and map out working relationships between IPU, QPU, and CAD to ensure a seamless process to create cohesion in the quality management system.
12. The institution must develop Terms of Reference for Senex to clarify its role in the quality management system.

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

Human, infrastructural, knowledge management, and financial resources are all compromised at VUT due to the understaffing of critical units. This is evidenced by understaffing in critical directorates responsible for quality management systems. The academic and support

environment has a high percentage of part-time and contract employees which impacts negatively on the quality of provision. The end result is inadequate support for the delivery of the institution's core academic functions across most elements of the academic project.

While the SER (p.58) states that the University-approved blended learning strategies enabled teaching and learning to continue while plans to improve the infrastructure were being drafted, the approved strategies could not be verified. The SER (p.71) further references how the VUT IT Roadmap (2021-2022, Annexure 9.3c) enabled continued teaching and learning and increased the number of Wi-Fi spots through which the academic community can access the content. The triangulation of this statement during the interviews revealed that staff laptops and computers in student labs had not been upgraded due to financial challenges, and that students' ICT support was reportedly inadequate and outdated. During the interviews, students raised concerns about the lack of access to WIFI in University-owned residences. This confirmed that the IT Roadmap was neither approved nor implemented. The closure of satellite campuses led to integrating of students from these sites into the main campus. There is no evidence that the move was matched by adequate infrastructure and resources necessary for student success. Instead, the status quo is characterised by the lack of a conducive ICT infrastructure at VUT-owned residences and the growing student population at the main campus.

The 2021 Annual Performance Report (Ver. 1.9. Annexure 3: p. 26) depicts the non-use of Infrastructure and maintenance grants (the 2021 expenditure was R0.00), resulting in the deteriorating state of specialised academic labs like Biotechnology and Chemistry. This situation is so, despite the Dean's and students' endless requests outlined in Annexure 6.4c (six emails sent in November 2022), bearing serious complaints and grievance memos from postgraduates about a range of infrastructural problems ranging from gas leaks, the unacceptable state of chemistry labs, the F-block power outages, etc. How the VUT 2022 Capital and Operational budget (annexure 6.2a) addresses this critical issue is unclear. A booking system is in place for the computer labs; this system might regularise and optimise the sharing of limited computers, but as mentioned earlier, maintenance and refurbishment of these facilities are impaired by the ineffective procurement system. Annexure 6.4a refers to the problems with software license renewal for the Fashion's CAD lab and the inadequacy of meeting academic needs because of the state of the T&L spaces. Fashion's CAD lab is still running on outdated software, Windows XP and Windows 7, which Microsoft no longer supports; this is a potential risk to the VUT network.

The information and communication technology infrastructure has not been upgraded and improved due to a lack of financial resources for an extended period. This has a negative impact

on the optimal functioning for staff members and students and at the end compromises quality provisioning. Library services require governance oversight from Senate in order to ensure alignment with the academic project.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

13. The institution must develop a master infrastructure and energy plan, giving specific urgent attention to the following:
 - 13.1 Upgrading facilities to provide an enabling technology-rich teaching and learning environment in residences, computer labs, and library facilities.
 - 13.2 Establish consistent and reliable access to stable Wi-Fi both in residences and on campus (Refer to standard 15).
 - 13.3 Upgrade the hardware and software in specialised academic labs such as Biotechnology and Chemistry, to facilitate the fulfillment of their core business, and enhance students practical experience.
14. Establish and resource a functional staff wellness programme. The process of recruiting competent staff must be prioritised and the institution to encourage a culture of wellness by dedicating time for staff to consult and use the facility effectively.

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

VUT relies on ITS for systematically capturing staff and students' data. This is a credible and reliable data storage system used by most institutions of higher learning in South Africa. PowerHeda is utilised for the analysis and dissemination of the captured data. This is also consistent with practice in other institutions. This allows the institution to comply with DHET's legislative agency HEMIS. There is, however, a need to augment the office responsible for HEMIS compliance since this may negatively impact the first stream income (government subsidy). The institution relies mainly on quantitative data collected from students. There is a need to diversify by including qualitative data from both staff and students and to prioritise the collection of data from staff. The capacity to use the stored data to inform consistent and sustainable decision-making also requires attention.

The SER (p.60) highlighted that the Student Enrolment Services (SES) is responsible for collecting and storing student data along with other unspecified data. Student data is recorded in the Integrated Tertiary System (ITS), as noted in the SER (p.60). The SER (p.60) also mentions that SES oversees Management Information Systems (MIS). This presents an inconsistency with earlier statements, which suggested that the IPU was responsible for information management. The precise coordination and collaboration between SES and IPU in managing and processing information remains unclear. The SER lacks details on the collection and storage of staff and infrastructure data within an integrated MIS. Furthermore, during interviews with staff members concerning general information and data management at VUT, it was commonly stated that the university predominantly employs paper hard copies stored in physical files for data retention.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

15. The institution must develop a framework to map the governance and processes of information management, articulating the relationship between IPU and SES.

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

Decision-makers at the strategic level have access to the ITS and PowerHeda data required for basic decision-making. The limited scope of the data, results in the compromised ability to make informed decisions on the quality management of the core academic functions of the institution. Apart from the ITS-sourced data, evidence from interviews indicated that VUT still relies on manual forms of information management, especially with activities relating to staff data including Performance Management.

Engagements on aspects of quality management (implementation, support, enhancement, and monitoring) are said to take place at all institutional levels. The SER (p. 63) describes the committee structures of VUT and membership to the committees, with a particular focus on student representation through the Student Representative Council (SRC). An interview with SRC indicated a strained relationship with management. The members of SRC complained about the inadequate student support both on and off campus. They further raised issues regarding financial support (budget) for SRC; training and administrative support by Student Life and Governance. It is evident from the SER and through the interviews that VUT does not have specific documented engagements among staff and students specifically to enhance quality management.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

16. The institution must ensure that a structured relationship exists between all components of the institutional quality management system, by doing the following:
 - 16.1 Develop a holistic data collection and management framework that ensures the collection, management, and dissemination of both quantitative and qualitative data to include staff and infrastructure data for decision-making purposes;
 - 16.2 Develop a plan to establish an integrated management information/digital/ automation system, which includes:
 - 16.2.1 a university-wide IT strategy that will advance the institution to achieving digital transformation and innovation;
 - 16.2.2 data integrity for decision-making such as identifying modules and students at risk for timeous interventions;
17. The institution must develop a framework and allied procedures for substantive engagement with staff and students regarding quality management.
18. The institution must develop a business continuity plan, to ensure that the institution is adequately prepared for possible disruptions in the future.
19. The institution must develop systems to ensure online assessment integrity and authenticity. This is identified as a risk but needs urgent attention.

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

The four standards in Focus Area 3 concentrate on the coherence and integration of the various components comprising the institutional quality management system and on how these work in concert to support the likelihood of student success and improve the quality of learning, teaching, and research engagement, as well as accommodating the results of constructive integrated community engagement (CE) in accordance with the institution's mission. These standards are:

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

Although VUT has an approved quality system with procedures for teaching and learning and research but not clearly for community engagement, the implementation of the system is not effective. Community engagement is not quality-assured, integrated or managed. Misalignment was reported between the quality promotion unit, support departments, and academia. Several challenges were reported with VUTela and the integrity of the online assessment. The data management/digital systems are not effective and, in many instances, not available.

Data management at VUT was not integrated between support departments (academic administration, finance, and faculties) and in some cases, data is manually captured. Examples include the use of logbooks to capture challenges at residences, the lack of early warning systems, and integrated management information, lack of research data (raised by researchers refer to standard 5) (SER, p.67 and staff interviews).

The Policy on Performance Management (PM) (Annexure 9.2a, SER, p.73) is not implemented and formalised across all staff in VUT, although this policy indicates the process and personal development plans clearly (SER, pp.69,71 and staff interviews). The unevenness of implementation of PM of staff engaged in core academic functions impacts accountability and quality assurance. *“The University acknowledges that implementation is still imperfect.”*(SER p. 69). *“The VUT management has identified the need to formalise and implement measures to monitor and evaluate the performance of staff across the institution. Work has commenced in this regard, including the development of a Policy on Performance Management”* (SER p.69 Annexure 9.2a).

Various infrastructure issues that impact the academic project and residences were reported.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

20. The institution must develop a digitalisation and digitisation strategy to transition from paper-based systems to digital solutions including: (Refer to Standard 8)

20.1 the migration of its Policy and procedures on Performance Management onto a digital platform to hold staff accountable in their management of quality in relevant departments

20.2 creating a tracking system for the management of quality reviews

20.3 developing a community engagement database, which also monitors quality and sustainability of activities;

- 20.4 monitoring budgets and expenditure as well as ensuring appropriate use of all resources; (Refer to Standard 11);
- 20.5 creating an automated digital system and a dashboard for UCDP to improve efficiencies (Refer to Standard 11);
- 20.6 implementing a digital system for the Alumni database (Refer to Standard 12);
- 20.7 developing an electronic database such as Microsoft SharePoint as a secure repository to store, organise, share, and access QA information (Refer to Standard 13).
21. The institution must establish a *VUTe/a* Technical and Steering Committee to manage *VUTe/a* digital learning, assessment, and tracking to ensure monitoring, risk, integrity, and security.

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

VUT indicates that regular and dedicated governance and management oversight of the quality system are provided through:

- The Performance Management system
- The Risk and Audit system
- The Quality Promotion *Unit and*
- *The procedures for Executive Management accountability.*" (SER, p.73).

The Senate, with its subcommittee, namely, the AQSC regulates teaching and learning, academic support functions, and community engagement (SER, p.76 and staff interviews). The Performance Management system (PMS) is not functional at all levels (SER, p.73) and is addressed in Standard 9. Pockets of good practice are recognised by the allocation of awards.

Recommendations

Refer to Standard 3 (p.19) and 9 (p.27)

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

VUT has clear budget policies and processes in place, but monitoring is hampered by the lack of an online system. The annual planning of academic work is not effective because of the absence

of approved frameworks for workload and hybrid working. This is exacerbated by the imbalance ratio between temporary and permanent staff, slow filling of vacancies and long periods of acting appointments.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

22. The institution must finalise a Workload Framework as well as the Hybrid Work Policy.

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

A policy framework exists for resource allocation, but it is inhibited by economic and financial realities as well as the absence of some standard operating procedures. Staff indicated that the implementation of policies and procedures are not effective and challenges with procuring essential laboratory materials are detrimental to the academic project. During panel interviews, staff both from management and academia indicated insufficient processes and turnaround time to procure essential materials, equipment, and maintenance of equipment (some laboratories were forced to close) to enable quality teaching and learning as well as research. Staff indicated that specific laboratory materials have sole providers and they are not allowed to purchase these materials. In addition, the services provided by support departments (HR, Operations and Logistics, Cleaning services, Procurement, and General Maintenance) were not always satisfactory (staff interviews).

Interviews with Alumni indicated that they are not aware of an Alumni office, policy, or Convocation but have effective relationships with individual academic staff in specific programmes such as Photography and Fine Arts. The Alumni Office is not functional because of structural changes, limited resources, and the absence of an online Alumni database (SER, p.105, Alumni interviews). The Alumni Office does not track graduates' placements (SER, p.114). Meaningful communication with Alumni is not in place. Some pockets of interaction initiatives are available (Alumni Facilitates Initiatives, Annexures 16.3a, SER, p.114).

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

23. The institution must review the Supply Chain Management Policy in consultation with staff and management to improve the challenges that impact the academic project.

24. The institution must revitalise the Alumni Office, with a clear communication strategy supported by an online database (refer to standard 9).

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

The four standards in Focus Area 4 concentrate on how effectively the institutional quality management system enhances the likelihood of student success, improves learning and teaching and supports the scholarship of learning and teaching. These standards drill down in greater detail in Focus Area 2. These standards are:

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

The SER (p.88) details VUT's clear procedures for programme design and development, as well as for programme approval and review, which are informed by national and sectoral regulatory structures and policies, including the QAP, which was approved in 1999 and updated in 2022. An updated Teaching and Learning Policy (Annexure 13.4v) and an updated Academic Teaching and Learning Plan dated June 2020 (Annexure 13.4g) are available. Both these were updates in response to the migration to remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 era.

While there is a policy, although not approved as yet, the Panel was to establish the existence of a framework to shape the quality management policy. QPU staff emphasised the need to differentiate between the assurance system, and the quality management system and how these are implemented in faculties. Appropriate terminology is yet to be ascribed to the various components, which results in structural anomalies. This is compounded by the gross understaffing at QPU, which currently has two (2) permanent staff and a contract position. The absence of adequate staffing to fulfill its diverse mandates and functions compromises QPU's ability to sustain an effective quality system.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

25. The institution must clearly outline the various components of the quality management system together with the functions and interrelationships with each.
26. The institution must differentiate between the quality assurance system, and the quality management system and how these are implemented in faculties.
Refer to standards 3 (p.19) and 5 (p.20).

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

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

The SER (p. 97) outlines the formal structures for consultation and decision-making regarding curriculum transformation at VUT, with a focus on African identity. Despite the lack of clarity on curriculum transformation policies, there is optimism among some disciplines, emphasising the importance of industry relevance. Academics argued that curriculum development policies need to be translated into plans, accompanied by monitoring and evaluation as well as concerted efforts on the part of management to address the workload balance. Aside from individual testimonies, the Panel was unable to locate relevant frameworks, policies, and processes that drive curriculum transformation.

The Deans, who were interviewed, articulated the challenge of curriculum transformation as “how to transform the curriculum without tribalising the university”. Yet, when the Panel posed the question: What are the underlying philosophical and theoretical principles that underpin VUT’s conceptions and understandings of Curriculum Transformation, one Professor responded: “It is disappointing to note that there is no deep understanding of what transformation is and how to bring the African context into the curriculum”. Another noted, “There is a need for senators to define the philosophy of curriculum”. All other interviewees evaded the question, which points to the need to engage in this key component of a university’s mission and vision. Organisational instability, typified by extended periods of administration, also impacts institutional identity, including what being an African university means, what distinguishes VUT as an African University, and how this translates into decisions on what the university wants to be known for and how this manifests this in its curriculum.

Other academics interviewed were less optimistic, arguing that curriculum development policies need to be translated into plans accompanied by monitoring and evaluation to close the loop. They observe, “We haven’t done well on determining programme viability”. While enrolment planning is a tool in determining viability by studying enrolment trends in relation to FTE allocation, some programmes are deemed “not viable but nothing is done about them”.

In interviews with the SRC, members argued that the university does not have the culture of supporting the SRC: “There is no culture of handing over and inducting the new SRC”; “Training is provided at an external venue with entertainment and we don’t see the value of this training which is done by an external facilitator”. Students contend that plans are developed, but there is no budget to act on them and it is not clear to them “what the role of this futile expensive exercise is”.

The IF which was interviewed, recognises its role in the academic project and its support for curriculum transformation. While the Higher Education Act defines the IF’s responsibility to promote transformation, the VUT IF laments its absence in appropriate structures. One IF member noted, “The IF is just being resuscitated but has a long way to go. IF must be given a more prominent role not just rubber stamp executive decisions. We want our voices heard. The scope of our participation must be extended.”

CAD has the mandate to support Staff development, responding to requests for discipline-specific programmes. It hosts Lunch-hour seminars, and an annual conference on the SOTL. The Teaching and Learning Policy notes that staff will evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of their teaching methods by reflecting and responding to the compulsory student evaluations of modules, and through findings from SOTL. The undated Teaching and Learning policy makes one reference to SoTL. Aside from an emailed seminar invitation to a “conversation on SoTL, no other documentation could be accessed.

The CAD also hosts the “Licence to Teach” programme, which is designed to improve teaching capacity (including eLearning and blended learning). However, a document search in the SER returned one attendance register (Annexure 9.1b) and no other documentation to verify what the license to teach entails.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

27. The institution must articulate and document the underlying philosophical and theoretical principles that underpin VUT’s conceptions and understandings of Curriculum Transformation.
28. The institution must define “Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” (SOTL), determine what it entails and clearly articulate mechanisms on how its principles can be applied to enhance teaching quality, while improving student outcomes.
29. The institution must clarify and formalise the role, functions, and communication channels for

the SRC, in tandem with the SRC constitution. This should be accompanied by a clear process of handing over and inducting the new SRC.

30. The institution must formalise the *Licence to Teach* programme and consider making it a compulsory requirement, especially for emerging and new academics without teaching experience.

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

VUT students' experiences of learning and teaching are mixed, with some positive feedback and several concerns about problems such as inadequate campus facilities and unresponsive lecturers. During the interviews, the Panel probed the question of whether students have a sense of belonging that is actively fostered and supported in the institution. Students' responses indicate that while the overall impression is that VUT is an institution of choice for students, interviews with them (students) indicate that some are cynical about some university staff – especially lecturers. For instance, a member of the SRC interviewed indicated that “The relationship between lecturers and students is toxic”. Another indicated “They (lecturers) manipulate the LMS”. While these are individual perspectives and perceptions, they warrant further investigation by the institution to test the veracity of claims.

Students also note that there is no orientation to sports facilities and the campus clinic is not satisfactory: “nurses don't care and refer students to the hospital”; “We live with unclean toilets, elevators, classrooms”; “Besides private accredited residences, Wi-Fi access is only available in the library and not in university residences; The library “used to be a refuge: not anymore – it is always full, with no space for group discussions”. The institution should also develop a student success framework and introduce an electronic student success tracking system.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

31. The institution must design and implement a mechanism to obtain insights into student/lecturer relationships and how these influence the student experience at VUT.
32. The institution must develop a student success framework to guide coherent, effective, holistic student success plans and interventions.

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

The SER (p.113) notes: "Without a track and trace system, it is not possible to respond accurately to this guideline, although there are graduate placement programmes in different pockets throughout the University. These have been limited to where graduate programmes placed Alumni". The SER (p.114) notes further: "Unfortunately, graduate placement is not tracked at all from the Alumni Office or Co-operative Education once the students have completed WIL. However, during WIL placement, the students are placed in positions that directly relate to their programmes".

VUT continues to face challenges in its engagement with graduate employability and placement, which is not tracked from the Alumni Office or Co-operative Education. The reasons for the absence of graduate employability surveys and industry partners' engagement in curriculum development is unclear, and more evidence of the curriculum consultation process and outcomes is required. The institution does conduct reviews and evaluations of curricula in consultation with relevant academic structures. However, it should be of concern to VUT that the Faculty of Human Sciences experienced the highest annual growth in student enrolments between 2017 and 2021 signalling a mission drift and indicating the need for repositioning VUT as a technology-focused university.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends that:

33. The institution must institute a Student Tracker/ tracer system/studies, to evaluate graduate employability, and its alignment to programme viability and curriculum choice to address the absence of graduate employability surveys.