Stellenbosch
University
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UNIVERSITEIT

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forward together
sonke siya phambili
saam vorentoe

Institutional Audit

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1. Introduction

This improvement plan responds directly to the findings from the Institutional Audit Report on Stellenbosch University (23 August 2023), including the recommendations and commendations as published in the executive summary of the report.

The Council on Higher Education initiated this round of institutional audits in 2021 with the overarching purpose, as described in the Framework for Institutional Audits (2021), to *"…evaluate the coherence and effectiveness of an institution's internal quality assurance system in enabling student success, and improving its core academic functions, namely learning and teaching, research, and community engagement".*

For the most part, the audit panel deemed Stellenbosch University to have a functioning quality management system; however, concerns were raised about two of the sixteen standards, deemed to need substantial improvement.

- In terms of Standard 3, relating to the alignment between the institution's quality management system and its strategic goals and management processes, the audit panel found insufficient connection between the University's intention to drive transformation, its practices, and the utilisation of data to support transformation.

- In terms of Standard 16, relating to how institutions engage with and reflect on the employability of their graduates, the audit panel found that the University should improve the way and extent to which issues of employability are considered (e.g., how the information from graduate tracking surveys and employability studies is used for academic and curriculum renewal).

For the purposes of this improvement plan, the University decided to group the recommendations and commendations under four interrelated themes as follows: (a) Transformation, (b) Student success and academic renewal, (c) Committees, policies, processes, and (d) Quality management.

Table 1: Consolidated improvement themes, as discussed by the University's institutional audit steering group on 23 January 2024 and related recommendations and commendations (as numbered in the executive summary of the institutional audit report)

#	Improvement themes	Related recommendations and commendations
a.	Transformation	Nine recommendations: 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, 14, 18, 19, 31 Two commendations: b, j Other related recommendations: 5, 6, 9, 10, 11

#	Improvement themes	Related recommendations and commendations
b.	Student success and academic renewal	Nine recommendations: 9, 25, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38 Ten commendations: a, d, e, f, h, i, k, l, m, n Other related recommendations: 5, 6, 20, 28, 29, 30, 31
c.	Committees, policies, processes	Eight recommendations: 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 21, 26, 30 No commendations Other related recommendations: 14, 35
d.	Quality management	Twelve recommendations: 5, 6, 7, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29 Two commendations: c, g Other related recommendations: 26, 34, 36, 37

This document is structured accordingly in four sub-sections that follow under section 4, each with a brief narrative and a tabulated action plan which is unpacked in further detail in an accompanying Excel document.

Although grouped according to four discrete themes, it is acknowledged that many of the audit report recommendations are interrelated and speak to more than one theme. If one overarching recommendation were to be prioritised, though, it would be *"…that the University should intensify its efforts on the path that it has started on to address transformation in its broadest sense, and to ensure that centrally held ideas, policies, processes and practices become embedded throughout the University and that all stakeholders are aware of and implement the transformation agenda".*

This is a key recommendation for the University as it closes out its current Strategic Framework 2019-2024 and initiates the <u>process for the appointment</u> of a new Rector and Vice-Chancellor *"…who will enable [the University] to fulfil its vision to be a world-class, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, research-intensive African University in service of society,"* to quote the Chair of the University Council, Dr Nicky Newton-King.

2. Background

The institutional audit process for Stellenbosch University was initiated by the Council on Higher Education on 20 July 2021.

In preparation for the institutional audit site visit, Stellenbosch University compiled a <u>Self-evaluation report</u> (24 June 2022) and uploaded a comprehensive portfolio of evidence to a shared Microsoft Teams site. The University also responded to the audit panel's additional requests for further information, and compiled an internal interim improvement report, based on an initial analysis of the good practices and 30-odd improvement areas listed in the Self-evaluation report (*cf.* tables 17 to 20 on pages 239-243). The improvement areas and actions that were already

underway at that point in time before the site visit commenced, were grouped under six themes, as summarised in the table below.

Table 2: Initial analysis of the improvement areas identified in the University's Self-evaluation report, as discussed by the University's institutional audit steering group on 18 October 2022

#	Draft improvement themes	Interim improvement areas and actions underway
1.	Quality management and support	The QA management system will be reviewed after the institutional audit, in preparation for the next QA cycle due to start in 2024/2025.
2.	Transformation	The first draft of the Transformation Policy has been released for consultation. The University submitted its response to the issue raised by Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and Innovation.
3.	Academic renewal	A project charter has been drafted. Progress has been made by the Divisions for Information Governance, and Learning and Teaching Enhancement regarding the development of indicators for the core theme: Collaborative and networked learning and teaching
4.	Student and graduate feedback and information for improvement	The Centre for Learning and Teaching has a comprehensive revision of the student feedback system underway. Graduate tracking and employability surveys should be considered by a task team, including role-players from the Divisions for Development and Alumni Relations, and Information Governance, and the Unit for Graduand Career Services. The next step is for a draft mandate of the task team to be drafted and tabled at an upcoming Committee for Learning and Teaching for its consideration.
5.	Policy development and mandates	The Registrar's Division is overseeing the update of the Delegation Framework and Institutional Rules. They have registered the need for faculty feedback on institutional policy development to be improved. Some faculties drafted new committee mandates, or identified timelines for doing so, where needed. Student Governance has taken note of the recommendation that postgraduate representation in student committees needs to be strengthened.
6.	Staff Wellness	The Staff Health and Wellbeing Plan is being implemented and overseen by the Campus Health Service and the Institutional Committee for Staff Health and Wellbeing.

The institutional audit site visit took place in hybrid format from 31 October to 4 November 2022. This was followed by a draft audit report, dated 23 March 2023, to which the University responded in detail in a Response Report (9 May 2023) submitted to the Council on Higher Education, along with an annotated version of the draft audit report.

To note, is that many parallel processes have been unfolding at the University during the same period from July 2021 to June 2024. This includes deep transformation work as facilitated by the Committee for the Institutional Response to the Commission's Recommendations (CIRCoRe), but also very operational matters, such as the adoption of new student information- and financial systems. Within the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement, a new Centre for

Student Success is in the process of being established, and as an institution, the University joined The Kresge Foundation's Siyaphumelela initiative.

Although not reported explicitly in this improvement plan, these parallel activities have impacted and will continue to impact the timelines for addressing some of the improvement areas, as they are multi-year concurrent projects.

3. Consultation, preparation, and approval

Stellenbosch University received its institutional audit report on 28 November 2023 and tabled it for discussion at its first steering group meeting of the following year, on 23 January 2024. The executive summary was uploaded to the University's institutional audit website and communicated to all staff. The full report was distributed to Council, the Executive Committee of Senate, the Institutional Forum, the Quality Committee, and Senate.

During February and March 2024, the project management team liaised with key role-players from the divisions for Transformation and Social Impact, Human Resources, and Strategic Initiatives and Information Governance, and adopted a collaborative approach to draft a first version of this improvement plan, which was then iteratively discussed, debated, and updated by different stakeholder groups during April and May, reviewed, and approved by the steering group and Rectorate in June for submission to the Council on Higher Education. Separate meetings were also held with the Registrar's Division's Centre for Governance Function Support, the Centre for Graduand Career Service, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance.

The original date for submission, as specified by the Council on Higher Education, was 30 April 2024, but in February 2024, the University requested a two-month extension, which was granted until 30 June 2024.

Further consultation will take place during the implementation of this plan, and progress will be monitored and evaluated by the University's Quality Committee as well as the steering group which was constituted for the purposes of the institutional audit. As such, this improvement plan will remain a "living" document to be used and updated as the improvement actions unfold.

4. Analysis of findings according to improvement themes

This section and its four sub-sections contain the main part of the improvement plan. Each sub-section is supported by a narrative on one of the four themes and identifies the related improvement areas and actions.

Accompanying this improvement plan, is an Excel document that provides more detail according to the structure proposed by the Higher Education Quality Committee Guidelines for the Preparation of Institutional Audits Improvement Plans.

The University's Quality Committee will oversee the tracking, monitoring and evaluation of the improvement areas and actions discussed below. This will be in addition to the scheduled self-evaluations, peer reviews, improvement plans and follow-up actions of the professional academic and administrative support service entities whose work is closely related to this plan's improvement themes, areas and actions. E.g., the Transformation Office had its peer review site visit in October 2022, while the Registrar's Division, and the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement's next peer reviews will be scheduled for 2025 and 2026, i.e., within the University's sixth quality assurance cycle, currently being phased in.

According to the decision at its meeting on 11 June 2024, the institutional audit steering group will continue to meet each semester from 2024 to 2026 to provide further support for the successful implementation of this improvement plan.

Although many of the institutional audit recommendations are already being addressed as part of the University's self-identified improvement areas, some of the timelines remain dependent on processes that must yet unfold. E.g., the implementation of any draft policy is dependent on the number of consultation rounds requested by committee structures. As such, this improvement plan makes use of years and semesters as target dates, rather than fixed timelines, and these may have to be adjusted as the different improvement actions unfold. This fluidity is needed as the improvement plan remains a "living" document. To be noted as well, is that most improvement actions require a continuous multi-year implementation approach. Also, where there are capacity or financial constraints, the full implementation of some of the recommendations may not yet be feasible within the next quality assurance cycle. E.g., Recommendation 28 asks that the University should include formative undergraduate degrees in the six-year internal quality assurance cycle. This will be attempted, but only for some identified programme review and renewal projects, as the main unit of self-evaluation and peer review will remain the academic department.

What follows is a discussion of the four themes, the recommendations listed under each one of them, and the identified improvement areas and improvement actions. These are discussed for the four improvement themes: (a) Transformation, (b) Student success and academic renewal, (c) Committees, policies, processes, and (d) Quality management.

a. Transformation

The observations made in the Institutional Audit Report about transformation are acknowledged and supported by Stellenbosch University. Given the history and challenges of transformation at the University, the recommendations of the audit report are particularly welcome as they provide further reinforcement to the urgency of and need for deep systemic change.

The change in the function and discourse of transformation is well illustrated in the recent Human Sciences Research Council report on [The State of Transformation in South Africa's Public Universities](#) (2023). The research report identifies three periods of transformation in the South African higher education context: The first period, 1994-2003, is characterised by *demographic equity*. In 2004-2013 the second period focuses on *equitable outcomes* in higher education. The third period, 2013-2021, is characterised by what is referred to as matters of *deep transformation*. Deep transformation is about the staff and students' experience of higher education, and questions around epistemological equity and social justice. This periodisation of transformation is not discrete; still, if we bring this in relation to the recommendations that came out of the audit report, we may find that some of the issues highlighted relate to demographic equity, while others relate to equity of outcomes.

The University's Transformation Plan of 2017 (updated in 2019) set out to drive transformation in both quantitative and qualitative ways. On the quantitative side the aim was to address statistical diversity of the University's students and staff. On the qualitative side the aim was to address issues of institutional culture. Seven years after the Transformation Plan*,* Stellenbosch University has seen change; however, the recommendations coming out of the institutional audit suggest that there is still much work to be done.

We realise and our experience shows that performance-orientated transformation does not deal appropriately with the complexities of social, institutional and personal change. Demographic quantification is important. Certainly, transformation is not achievable in the absence of demographic equity but taken by itself demographic equity can hide an institution's inability to interrogate transformation itself. Because Stellenbosch University experiences some of these constraints, we propose now to look at transformation from the perspective of knowledge.

The literature has helped identify two knowledges that help understand why and how challenges of transformation persist at Stellenbosch University. Using these two knowledges it is possible to identify appropriate strategies to address the University's transformation challenges.

The literature distinguishes between knowledge *of* and knowledge *for* transformation. Knowledge *of* transformation encompasses what can be known about institutional, culture, curriculum, and student experience in relation to the overall transformative imperative. Knowledge *for* transformation refers to the way data and institutional research are used to steer change and identify obstacles to transformation.

In some respects, the University has not been able to translate its commitment to transformation into relevant interventions. By interrogating transformation from the knowledge perspective, the University hopes to respond (intellectually and programmatically) to the existing transformation challenges in ways that are relevant and appropriate for the current context. Within this framework, the University aims to cultivate and improve institutional capacity to generate knowledge *for* and *of* transformation, and through this knowledge strengthen the structures that support transformation as well as sharpen programmatic interventions in all portfolios.

Nine of the institutional audit recommendations and two of the commendations have been grouped under this improvement theme as follows:

Table A1: A thematic selection of recommendations from the CHE's institutional audit report

#	Recommendations related to (a) Transformation
1	It is recommended that the University should continue to refine the institutional goals and indicators in each of the core strategic themes to explicitly direct attention to the key transformational challenges faced. [Audit Report Standard 1, p19 and p46]
2	It is recommended that the University should intensify its efforts on the path that it has started on to address transformation in its broadest sense, and to ensure that centrally held ideas, policies, processes and practices become embedded throughout the University and that all stakeholders are aware of and implement the transformation agenda. [Audit Report Standard 2, p19 and 51]
3	It is recommended that the Transformation Plan (updated 2019) must be amended to include clear targets, outputs, timeframes, measurable indicators and identify responsible individuals, for the University as a whole and for each faculty and Professional academic and administrative support service (PASS) division. [Audit Report Standard 2, p20 and p51]
4	It is recommended that the University should ensure that line managers are provided with the required support for the development of meaningful and SMART [specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timebound] transformation KPAs [Key Performance Areas] and KPIs [Key Performance Indicators] for staff work agreements. [Audit Report Standard 2, p20 and p52]

#	Recommendations related to (a) Transformation
13	It is recommended that the University should ensure that, at middle management level and below, KPAs [Key Performance Areas] and KPIs [Key Performance Indicators] are developed, particularly for transformation in its broadest sense, and included in the annual work agreements for all staff. [Audit Report Standard 4, p21 and p63]
14	It is recommended that the University should prioritise the development of a policy for Social Impact including a clear, integrated strategy with targets, outputs, timeframes, measurable indicators, and identified responsible persons, to drive an institution wide understanding and implementation of SI. [Audit Report Standard 5, p22 and p70]
18	It is recommended that the University should develop and implement an integrated, system-wide plan to address bullying and other unacceptable behaviours, facilitate transparent and fair promotion opportunities for, in particular, women and continue to strive for a culture that is more inclusive. [Audit Report Standard 6, p23 and p75]
19	It is recommended that the University is advised to explore the use of a range of survey techniques, including focus group discussions for the wellness and culture surveys, to improve the response rate and the quality of the information gathered. [Audit Report Standard 6, p23 and p76]
31	It is recommended that the University should require the Faculty of AgriSciences to reconsider its approach to the use of languages and actively seek ways to promote the use of isiXhosa. [Audit Report Standard 14, p29 and p104]

Table A2: A thematic selection of commendations from the CHE's institutional audit report

#	Commendations related to (a) Transformation
b.	The University is commended for the inclusion of a transformation KPA [key performance area] in all staff work agreements. [Audit Report Standard 2, p19 and p51
j.	The University is commended, and FEMS [Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences] specifically, for the Accelerating the Transformation of the Professoriate (ATP) project and the University is encouraged to adopt the project as a tool for driving transformation. [Audit Report Standard 12, p27 and p92]

Apart from recommendation 31, which is possibly a misunderstanding of the University's Language Policy (2021), all the recommendations related to transformation (recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 13) are classified as high priority. They will be addressed as part of existing improvement actions, mainly related to the approval of the draft Transformation Policy and the subsequent implementation thereof, including the definition of key performance areas for transformation, and the implementation of the Division for Human Resources' performance advancement framework.

Recommendation 14 will be addressed by the approval and implementation of the Social Impact Policy, while recommendations 18 and 19 are considered to be medium priority, already being addressed by means of the University's [Staff Health and Wellbeing Plan](#) (2021) and the performance advancement framework.

Stellenbosch University's transformation journey is similar to that of most of South Africa's Historically White Universities (HWUs). This includes the growth in the number of black students from the mid-1970s and in particular post-1994; name and symbol changes to herald in a changing dispensation; institutional shifts that meant to change the institutional cultures; the establishment of institutional structures and offices for transformation and employment equity, and a plethora of policies that provide new modes of doing and being in a democratic dispensation.

But there are also some differences between Stellenbosch University and other HWUs. These include the University's continued challenges regarding discrimination and racism that seems to plague this institution and that often end up in the public domain. Further to this, the University is often criticised for the slow pace of transformation in terms of demographic changes in both the staff and student bodies. Often these challenges are linked to institutional culture and a strong influence of the "town" on the University.

At the time of preparation of the self-evaluation report, the University was dealing with an incident of racism that took place at one of its residences. The incident led to the appointment of an independent commission under Justice Khampepe to investigate the incident itself together with the elements of the University's institutional culture that may be contributing to the manifestation of unacceptable practices and instances of racism.

The recommendations of the Khampepe Report are far ranging. In response, the university leadership established a [Committee for the Institutional Response to the Commission's Recommendations](#) (CIRCoRe). Under the auspices of the Rectorate a collective of staff and students has been organised in five workstreams with a central coordinating point located in the Rectorate. The work done under CIRCoRe will shape important aspects of the initiatives needed in transformation, both in the medium and long term. The five workstreams relate to: (i) Student life and communities, (ii) Curriculum, (iii) Institutional culture, (iv) Race, human categorisation and science, and (v) Strategic organisational alignment.

The institutional audit report acknowledges the progress made by the University in the area of transformation, but it also points out that important aspects of a

comprehensive understanding of transformation are not sufficiently present in university practices in the core functions, especially in teaching and learning.

Given the overall panel observations, in this regard, the University has decided to approach the improvement plan by outlining a conceptualisation of transformation that is in line with the University's policies and at the same time brings to the fore the importance of data to identify areas where interventions are needed and to support the monitoring of these interventions. In this way we can move from a simplistic analysis of transformation as only demographic change to a more careful interrogation of institutional practices.

The University is committed to the development of knowledge *of* and knowledge *for* transformation to guide practice in all areas of work. The findings and recommendations from the institutional audit report suggest that the University has not produced sufficient knowledge *for* transformation; neither has it, despite its excellent technical capabilities, developed a shared knowledge *of* transformation.

The audit report specifically elaborates on transformation matters in relation to the embeddedness of and consistency between strategic goals, policies, and practices (1, 2, 3, 14); accountability and performance management (4, 13, 8, 9) and institutional culture (18, 19 and 31). The audit report also mentions transformation matters in relation to the way the University uses and presents its data in student success (5), in data profiles in departmental reviews (6) and the extent to which staff are capacitated and empowered to make appropriate use of data.

Stellenbosch University is taking all these recommendations together in its reconceptualisation of transformation including the way data is defined, used, and shared to monitor the achievement of strategic goals and specific targets.

Two improvement areas will address the nine recommendations listed above:

A1. Explicit and deliberate attention to the key transformation challenges

The University is committed to drive the transformation agenda by giving explicit and deliberate attention to the key institutional challenges. This starts with the implementation of the Transformation Policy and associated plan; greater alignment of the University's transformation goals with strategic management indicators and building greater accountability and transparency around the achievement of transformation.

The University has identified five transformation priorities for itself, namely:

(i)   Staff diversity at senior level
(ii)   Student diversity
(iii)   Transformation competencies
(iv)   Academic transformation
(v)   Universal access

In addition, the University has reviewed the staff performance system so that performance objectives show greater alignment with our institutional goals. This review has led to the development of a new performance advancement framework (PAF) which will be implemented as from January 2025.

The Transformation Plan, derived from the Transformation Policy will give greater consideration to the resourcing of the interventions necessary to achieve identified goals.

The first improvement area under this theme relates specifically to recommendations 1, 2, 3, 13 and 14.

A1	Explicit and deliberate attention to the key transformation challenges	
	IMPROVEMENT ACTION	**STATUS**
a.	Approve and implement the Transformation Policy and Plan, and the Social Impact Policy.	The approval of the Transformation Policy and the associated Transformation Plan will elevate transformation to a Council priority. The draft Transformation Policy and the draft Social Impact Policy are underpinned by the University's Restitution Statement. Both the Transformation Policy and Social Impact Policy are currently in draft form and is set to be approved in the second semester of 2024
b.	Refine the strategic management indicators (including weighting of disaggregated data) that relate to Transformation, and Social Impact.	The strategic management indicators will be refined in line with the implementation of the Transformation Policy and the Social Impact Policy. The achievement of the transformation priorities and social impact is further supported by the Employment Equity Plan, the performance advancement. framework, the Staff Health and Wellness Plan, and the related University Capacity Development Programme project.
c.	Improve alignment between institutional goals and Transformation and Social Impact priorities.	The approval of the Transformation Policy and the Social Impact Policy will inform the next version of the Strategic Framework, to be developed in 2025 for the period 2026 to 2030. The strategic management indicators are derived from the Strategic Framework.

A1	Explicit and deliberate attention to the key transformation challenges	
		The University pays heed to the issue of inequity of student success and has developed specific initiatives to address this issue. Parity/equity of success links to concerns of transformation and our related progress.
		The University has submitted a project proposal to the Department of Higher Education and Training for University Capacity Development Programme funding. The proposal has met the approval of the DHET. This project proposal includes the establishment and appointment of academic advisors. The role of academic advisors is to improve student support for student success. Additionally, there are plans to reintroduce the First-Year Academy.
		A broader conceptualisation of student success is being taken up to improve the University's responsiveness to the diverse needs of students. The University's efforts will grow in sophistication as it increases the use of institutional data to inform decisions and approaches to student success.
		To further support professional development in the area of teaching and learning the promotion criteria for academic staff will be revised so that it gives equal weight to research productivity and achievement in teaching and learning.
d.	Integrate the Employment Equity Plan into the staffing plan.	Historically the staffing plan's focus has mostly been on staffing cost-planning, but going forward, employment equity will be embedded into the staffing plans. Related to this, are the following: - The development of a succession planning model. - The development of guidelines for the advancement and promotion of support staff. - The incorporation of employment equity in performance contracts. - The strengthening of the Human Resource process of collecting exit-interview data to ascertain the main factors that contribute to resignations.

A2. Utilisation and expansion of our institutional research capabilities to inform transformation endeavours

The University will use and expand its institutional data and institutional research capabilities to improve its knowledge *of* and *for* transformation to address existing barriers to transformation and identify opportunities to advance transformation.

The refinement of the strategic management indicators will help to build the University's capabilities for generating knowledge *for* and *of* transformation.

In turn the structures responsible for driving transformation will be strengthened by the availability of actionable information.

These structures include the transformation committees. Additionally, the University is committed to the development of reflexive competence across staff levels so that over and above demographic targets there is a greater understanding and insight into the ideological processes shaping the nature of power and privilege and how they may manifest at the University.

As such, the second improvement area addresses recommendations 4, 18, 19 and 31.

A2	Utilisation and expansion of our institutional research capabilities to inform transformation endeavours	
	IMPROVEMENT ACTION	**STATUS**
a.	Continued integrated reporting on Employment Equity and Staff Diversity that provides insight on both quantitative and qualitative transformation.	Although the Integrated Report on Employment Equity shares key insights on for example the movement of staff, there is a need for greater integration between the goals and objectives set out in the Employment Equity Plan and the data that is presented in the Integrated Report on Employment Equity and Staff Diversity. The data presented in the Integrated Report must include insights on the achievement of the goals and objectives listed in the Employment Equity Plan.
b.	Over the next five years report to the Human Resources Remuneration Committee (HRRC) on the impact of staff plans on the new Employment Equity Plan	Report due in first semester of 2024.
c.	Integrated institutional reporting on the University's Staff Health and Wellbeing Plan that includes reporting on governance, management and collects evidence on the success of the plan.	Instruments are in use and in development for tracking and evaluating progress on staff health and wellbeing, including the biannual Staff Health and Wellbeing, Climate and Culture Survey and the monitoring of staff turnover.
d.	The Committee for the Institutional Response to the Khampepe Commission (CIRCoRe) and its five workstreams will continue its work and research over the next ten months.	CIRCoRe focuses its work and research in five areas each with an appointed workstream, namely: Institutional culture; race, human categorisation and science; curriculum which focuses on the transformation competencies of staff and students; the alignment of transformation structures and policies; and student life/communities.
e.	Institutional research on language and the promotion of institutional and individual multilingualism	Language has in the past been perceived as barrier to entry to Stellenbosch University, both for students and staff. The Language Planning and Management Advisory Committee will continue to monitor and evaluate the faculty and responsibility centre plans and reports, and conduct language surveys to inform decision-making.

b. Student success and academic renewal

The University recognises that its student enrolments is not representative of the demography of the country. The slow progress in the diversification of the University's student profile points to the existence of institutional obstacles to transformation. In relation to the actual composition of the student body, an important area of concern is the existence of an achievement gap between different groups of students. Across all faculties and programmes there is a considerable difference in the performance of white and black students that needs to be addressed.

Nine audit recommendations and ten commendations have been grouped under this improvement theme as follows:

Table B1: A thematic selection of recommendations from the CHE's institutional audit report.

#	Recommendations related to (b) Student success and academic renewal
9	It is recommended that the University should use disaggregated student data in the development of its SMIs [strategic management indicators]. [Audit Report Standard 3, p21 and p58]
25	It is recommended that the University develop strategies to improve the understanding of SoTL [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning] amongst all academic staff. [Audit Report Standard 10, p26 and p88]
32	It is recommended that the University should revise the Policy with regard to Student Feedback on Modules, Lecturers and Programmes so that new academic staff are evaluated in their first year rather than waiting for year 2. [Audit Report Standard 15, p30 and p108]
33	It is recommended that the University should ensure that Faculty-specific minimum requirements for performance appraisal, promotion and appointment are updated to include the decision that SoTL should be considered in evaluation for promotion. [Audit Report Standard 15, p30 and p108]
34	It is recommended that the University should ensure that faculties develop and implement mechanisms to solicit information from their alumni and from industry and that this information is made available during curriculum review. [Audit Report Standard 15, p30 and p109]
35	It is recommended that the University should facilitate the adoption, and careful embedding of the learning-centred approach into institutional policies, plans and processes. [Audit Report Standard 15, p30 and p109]
36	It is recommended that the University should include peer evaluation of teaching as an additional tool in the evaluation process. [Audit Report Standard 15, p30 and p109]

#	Recommendations related to (b) Student success and academic renewal
37	It is recommended that the University should strengthen its surveys of employability and make the data available for programme review purposes. [Audit Report Standard 16, p30 and p111]
38	It is recommended that the University should revisit the way in which employability is calculated, and calculate the percentage employed using the total number of respondents and not a subset. [Audit Report Standard 16, p30 and p111]

Table B2: A thematic selection of commendations from the CHE's institutional audit report

#	Commendations related to (b) Student success and academic renewal
a.	The University is commended for the recent establishment of the two type-3 Schools (School for Climate Studies and School for Data Science and Computational Thinking), which represent a shift of focus to transdisciplinary thinking and research which directly address national and international priorities. [Audit Report Standard 2, p19 and p51]
d.	SU is commended for offering the Scholarship of Educational Leadership Short Course as a contribution to the development of a new generation of academic and educational leaders. [Audit Report Standard 4, p21 and p63]
e.	SU is commended for the excellent websites of the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement (LTE) and its Centres, and the Research Development and Postgraduate Office, which provide staff and students with a wide array of high-quality online guidance and support which together promote excellence in learning and teaching, and research. [Audit Report Standard 5, p22 and p70]
f.	The University is commended for the quality of the infrastructure that supports learning and teaching and research and specifically for the creation of the extended learning spaces that will support innovative teaching. [Audit Report Standard 6, p23 and p75]
h.	The University is commended for the development of the integrated tracking system for student success (SUNSuccess). [Audit Report Standard 7, p24 and p79 (incorrectly marked "g")]
i.	The University is commended on the Teaching Enhancement seminars, the Auxin discussion groups and the annual SoTL [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning] conference and that these resources are available digitally, in support of the ongoing professional development of staff as educators. [Audit Report Standard 10, p26 and p87]
k.	The University is commended for the adoption of creative approaches to both formative and summative assessment of learning outcomes, which focus on deep learning rather than rote learning, and which minimise opportunities for misconduct and breaches of academic integrity, particularly during periods of disruption. [Audit Report Standard 13, p28 and p98]

#	Commendations related to (b) Student success and academic renewal
l.	The Faculty of Science is commended on its SoTL [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning] research and outputs and recommends that this be used as an example of good practice that other faculties should follow. [Audit Report Standard 14, p29 and p104]
m.	The University is commended for the development of the Be-Well Mentor Tracking and the i-FlourishWell4Life systems as tools that will allow staff and students to make data-informed decisions and promote student success. [Audit Report Standard 15, p29 and p108]
n.	The University is commended for adopting a *learning-centred* approach to the design of teaching, learning and assessment experiences for its students. [Audit Report Standard 15, p30 and p108]

The high number of commendations that relate to this improvement theme, is testament to the continuous academic renewal efforts that have been taking place, with evidence of innovation and knowledge-sharing, and a deepening of teaching-learning-assessment practices that are informed by scholarship and infused with a learning-centred approach.

In terms of the recommendations, though, the audit report points to the absence of an integrated focus on student success at Stellenbosch University, including the demographic disaggregation of data on student success (5, 6, 9). Since the audit visit, and informed by our self-evaluation, the University has conceptualised and committed funding to the development of an integrated student success system. Some elements of this, like the student monitoring system, SUNSuccess were commended by the panel.

In the first improvement area under this theme, the new elements of the integrated system for student success are described in more detail; it includes the development of student academic advising at scale, the re-establishment of the University's First-Year Academy, and especially important from the point of view of our commitment to developing improved knowledge *of* transformation, the University is setting-up dedicated student success data analytics capabilities centrally. As this improvement plan was being developed, the University received the news of its successful application to the Siyaphumelela initiative funded by the Kresge Foundation. This programme, which is in its third edition, will bolster the University's commitment to student success by providing technical support, especially in the areas of data analytics and student advice. At the same time, the University will have the opportunity to become part of a national network of universities that have made important progress in relation to the parity of student success.

The disaggregation of success rates in relation to several variables, especially population groups, has been implemented in Power BI and there have been corrections in the way "race" data is presented. (The issue of the language used to refer to "race" mentioned by the panel, is a cultural issue that will be addressed through education of staff and feature prominently in the Transformation Policy and in the work of CIRCoRe's workstreams). Among concrete initiatives is the disaggregation of Black students into African, Coloured and Indian, and the acknowledgement that only South African born Africans can be counted for transformation targets. The University had often in the past counted together African students from the rest of the continent and South African born African students.

The second and third improvement area under this theme relate to the efforts underway to deepen the academic renewal activities in faculties, and to celebrate, recognise and reward the scholarship of teaching and learning across the University.

To be noted, is that Recommendation 9 is closely related to the other three improvement themes; as such, the drive to improve the parity of student success is regarded as a high priority.

Recommendations 25, 32, 35 and 36 are classified as medium priority and have been taken up by the Centre for Teaching and Learning as part of the implementation of the draft Teaching and Learning Policy (to be approved in 2024). The student feedback system has been upgraded and has been piloted in the first semester of 2024.

Recommendations 34, 37 and 38 are grouped as a longer-term medium priority. We agree that it is important to liaise with employers and graduates and to feed the information into curriculum renewal activities; however, further investigations are needed to fully understand the needs of faculties and programme leaders in this regard.

Regarding recommendation 33, the audit report raises concerns about the relative importance of teaching and learning in academic promotions. This is a self-identified area of concern in the Learning and Teaching portfolio. As the audit report mentions, the University has a good and comprehensive set of training courses focused on the professionalisation of teaching. The success in this area must be translated into the recognition of teaching in the criteria for promotions to professor. To deal with this, the Senate Appointments Committee has been investigating the promotions' criteria and is reviewing academic promotion criteria with a view to consistency across faculties. At the same time the Centre for Teaching and Learning has initiated work to benchmark the University's promotion

criteria with comparable South African universities with a view to making a proposal on the importance of teaching and learning in academic promotions. This is also seen as a high priority.

Three existing improvement areas will address the nine recommendations above:

B1. Establishment of a Centre for Student Success in support of the SUN-Success strategic project

A programme for the development of Student Success is currently being established to integrate the work done across the University in this regard. This work is modelled on the success of Georgia State University in the United States of America and the University of the Free State in South Africa. The University has dedicated R 10 million from its Strategic Fund to support this project, and as indicated above, the University has successfully applied for funding in the Kresge Foundation Siyaphumelela initiative. Eventually this work will lead to the constitution of a dedicated centre for student success.

This improvement area should address Recommendation 9 in terms of strengthening its central data analytics capacity and reviving some of the good practices established under the First-Year Academy (which was an institutional intervention strategy discussed as part of the University's Quality Enhancement Project submissions in the Council on Higher Education's previous quality assurance cycle).

B1	Establishment of a Centre for Student Success in support of the SUNSuccess strategic project	
	IMPROVEMENT ACTION	**STATUS**
a.	Development of academic advising at scale	Currently, the University is investigating large scale academic advising at the point of registration and throughout the years of study in faculties as well as the co-curricular space, to be conducted in a three-tiered system by (central) professional advisors (e.g., educational psychologists), (decentralised) academics as advisors (within departments that know the academic programmes well) and peers in the curricular and co-curricular space.
b.	Reestablishment of First-Year Academy	A virtual structure has been reestablished with the move of the Dell Young Leaders programme from the Registrar's reporting line to the DVC: Learning and Teaching at the end of

| B1	**Establishment of a Centre for Student Success in support of the SUNSuccess strategic project**	
		2023. However, further investigation must be conducted to understand why the functions of the First-Year Academy were devolved to faculties, and to find an optimum, sustainable structure for the envisioned central sense-making and support needed.
c.	Central data analytics capacity	Strategic funding has been awarded to deliver automated workflows for support and intervention tracking; to diagnose and communicate opportunities for academic and personal growth (e.g., early alerts and flags); monitor and measure the impact of success-enhancing interventions on academic performance, experience and personal-social development; and to deliver an intelligent and customised view of data for both students and academic support staff.

B2. Continued commitment to institution-wide Academic Renewal, which includes the UCDP Programme Renewal Project

Academic Renewal was identified in August 2021 as one of the seven institutional game changers by which the University will use to improve its teaching-learning-assessment practices to respond to the University's Vision 2040. It requires a sharpened focus on interrelated components such as: Programme Review and Renewal (funded through the Department of Higher Education and Training's grant for the University Capacity Development Programme), Re-imagining Assessment (which is a Strategic Fund project), Hybrid Learning (also a strategically funded project, but one which is currently being integrated into the main budget under the Centre for Learning Technologies), the review of the graduate attributes (as part of the revised Strategy for Teaching-Learning-Assessment), and Integrated Student Success (as discussed above in terms of the improvement area B1).

Academic Renewal remains to a certain extent a fluid concept and asks faculties to be responsive to changes within the educational landscape as, e.g., experienced with the recent advent of generative artificial intelligence.

As the graphic below shows, Academic Renewal is viewed as the driver within the broader institutional ecosystem of the curriculum, co-curriculum and extra-curriculum, with learning embodied during the entire lifespan of individuals (i.e., lifelong learning), representing a range of different types of

learning opportunities (i.e., life-wide learning) and different levels of learning (i.e., life-deep learning).
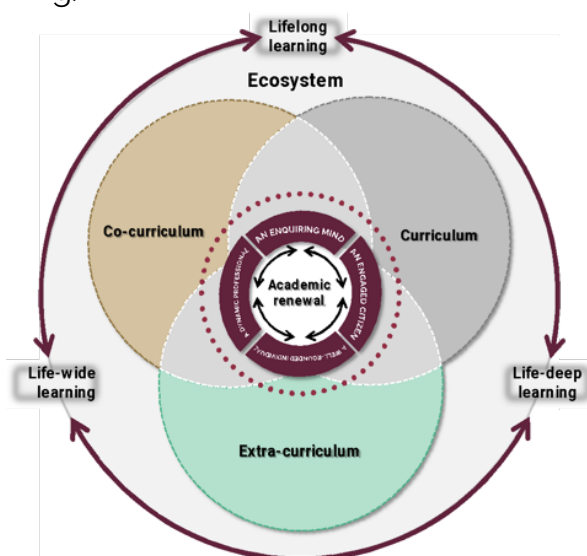
Figure B1: Academic Renewal as driver of student success

This improvement area both directly and indirectly largely addresses all the recommendations under this improvement theme. E.g., the investigation into good practices for sourcing, using and refining student, lecturer, graduate, alumni and employer feedback, forms part of every programme renewal project as nominated by faculties. Each faculty project is informed by a situational analysis and comprehensive review to determine the nature of the redesign or renewal process that should be undertaken and is afterwards evaluated against collectable evidence to determine the impact of each of the programme renewal projects.

B2	Continued commitment to institution-wide Academic Renewal, which includes the UCDP Programme Renewal Project	
	IMPROVEMENT ACTION	**STATUS**
a.	Investigation into good practices for using alumni and employer feedback for curriculum renewal	Committee for Teaching, Learning and Assessment to form a task group from faculties, Development and Alumni Relations, Graduand Career Services and Information Governance to investigate good practices and different options going forward.
b.	Academic renewal	Ongoing game changer at the University since 2021. Overseen by the DVC: Learning and Teaching, and a standing agenda point at the Academic Planning Committee, and the Committee for Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

B2	Continued commitment to institution-wide Academic Renewal, which includes the UCDP Programme Renewal Project	
c.	UCDP Programme Renewal Project	Ongoing strategic project since 2017, managed by the Advisor: Programme Review and Renewal, and overseen by the Senior Director: Learning and Teaching Enhancement, with funding to faculties, managed by the Vice-Deans: Learning and Teaching.

B3. Approval and implementation of the reviewed Teaching-Learning-Assessment Policy, and the updated system for student feedback

As part of the regular review of policy documents, the Centre for Teaching and Learning has been working on several policy and management documents, including those related to the student feedback system. To some extent, these reviews touch on recommendations 32, 33, 35 and 36.

Regarding recommendations 32 and 36, though, it should be noted that the practice of peer evaluation is embedded in the Professional Educational Development for Academics (PREDAC) short course, offered to all new lecturing staff. As part of the "Design for Learning" phase of the PREDAC short course, a new lecturer should: (i) Design learning outcomes to address an area of concern, (ii) Implement it during class and obtain informal student feedback, (iii) invite a peer academic to observe their class, (iv) Reflect on the above within faculty groups, and (v) Write an abstract and design a poster for the annual Scholarship of Teaching and Learning conference.

B3	Approval and implementation of the reviewed Teaching-Learning-Assessment Policy, and the updated system for student feedback	
	IMPROVEMENT ACTION	**STATUS**
a.	Review, approval and implementation of Teaching-Learning-Assessment Policy	Draft version should be tabled at Senate and Council in 2024 for implementation 2025. Overseen by the Committee for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and led by the Centre for Teaching and Learning.
b.	Implementation of new system for student feedback	Piloted in first semester 2024, implemented in second semester.
c.	Recognition and reward for Teaching-Learning-Assessment	Work group currently underway to submit proposal(s) in 2025 for implementation 2026.

c. Committees, policies, processes

This improvement theme addresses a few recommendations that relate to the constitution and functioning of institutional and faculty committees, the review of policy and management documents, and the alignment of strategic, planning and operational processes.

In the executive summary of the Institutional Audit Report the *"Panel concluded that there is alignment between the [University's quality management system] and … Strategic Plan, and that there are the necessary policies, processes and committees in place"* (p15), but that the *"University should continue to discuss faculty autonomy, particularly where there is a need to drive systemic change…"* (p15) and *"…continue to prioritise the review of policies in accordance with the cycle of policy review".*

In this regard, the recommendations are somewhat contrary to the findings of the Quality Enhancement Project in terms of the Institutional feedback report (2016) that says that the *"University achieves a good balance between having institutional policies which faculties are expected to implement while allowing quite a lot of individual faculty autonomy"* and that the *"University is quite deliberate in its actions and efforts to align its processes to achieve its strategic aims"* (as quoted in the University's Self-evaluation report (2022), page 20).

The University recognises that some tensions exist between centralised planning, steering and integrated reporting mechanisms, and faculty autonomy; these tensions should be continuously managed to ensure explicit alignment between institutional goals and faculty priorities. As noted by the audit panel, *"faculty autonomy was strongly defended [by staff] and justified in terms of the significantly different environments in which faculties operate"* (p53); however, the *"alignment between [responsibility centre- and faculty strategy implementation plans is] not always obvious"* (p54).

As the current implementation period from 2019 to 2024 of the Strategic Framework is ending, it is time to reflect on the successes and challenges related to the implementation, reporting, tracking and monitoring of progress. This includes, e.g., the scorecards and indicators used, and the reporting processes (including quarterly management reports) employed as part of the University's drive towards annual integrated reporting. During the Institutional Planning Forum held in February 2022, an amended planning timeline was accepted whereby a framework for the strategy evaluation would be developed in 2023, followed by an evaluation during 2024, and scenario development in 2025. Therefore, it is foreseen that the University's current strategy will remain in place until at least the end of 2026. This will provide time to develop a new strategy under the leadership

of the next Rector and Vice-Chancellor to take over from Prof Wim de Villiers, whose second term will conclude on 31 March 2025

The eight recommendations below are mostly classified medium priority, to be addressed as part of existing improvement actions.

Table C: A thematic selection of recommendations from the CHE's institutional audit report

#	Recommendations related to (c) Committees, policies, processes
8	It is recommended that the University should ensure that Faculty Strategy Implementation Plans (FSIPs) include indicators that are SMART and which allow progress against the plan to be measured. [Audit Report Standard 3, p21 and p58]
10	It is recommended that the University should establish a committee charged with the responsibility of reviewing the extent of the devolution of power and responsibility to faculties and PASS divisions and if and how this devolution of power is inhibiting transformation at SU. [Audit Report Standard 3, p21 and p58]
11	It is recommended that the University should ensure that all faculties have a full set of committees, including for quality assurance and transformation with approved ToRs in place. [Audit Report Standard 4, p21 and p63]
12	It is recommended that the University should ensure that all faculty-based learning and teaching committees include both undergraduate and postgraduate student representation. [Audit Report Standard 4, p21 and p63]
16	It is recommended that the University should continue to prioritise the review of policies in accordance with the cycle of policy review. [Audit Report Standard 5, p23 and p70]
21	It is recommended that the University should ensure that, as and when policies and management documents are reviewed, the review includes accommodation of periods of disruption. [Audit Report Standard 8, p25 and p82]
26	It is recommended that the University consider developing a general framework for work allocation that includes minimum and maximum percent time allocated to learning and teaching, research and SI, and which explicitly recognises time spent on QA matters. [Audit Report Standard 11, p27 and p90]
30	It is recommended that the University should revise policies for educational programme design, development and provision to capture its enhanced approaches to teaching and learning, including flexible learning and Open Educational Practices. [Audit Report Standard 13, p28 and p99]

Three existing improvement areas will address the eight recommendations above. They are:

C1. Review of the Strategic Framework 2019-2024 and related indicators

Although the current Strategic Framework would have come to an end in 2024, it will only be replaced after 2026, in line with the amended planning timeline and the appointment of a new Rector and Vice-Chancellor on 1 April 2025. Therefore, although this is of key importance to the University, this improvement area is currently rated as a medium priority. Although much of the planning is already underway; the exact timelines will be dependent on the consultative approach followed.

The evaluation and review of the current system of annual integrated reporting will be prompted and steered by the Division for Strategic Initiatives and Information Governance as part of its operations. This includes a reflection on the strategic management indicators used, and how faculties and responsibility centres contribute to the overarching strategic framework as part of the annual integrated reporting.

This improvement area and actions below address Recommendation 8 and speaks to some extent to Recommendation 10 as well.

C1	Review of the Strategic Framework 2019-2024 and related indicators	
	IMPROVEMENT ACTION	**STATUS**
a.	Self-evaluation of the system for annual integrated reporting and the alignment with and integration of faculty and responsibility centre strategy implementation plans	To be undertaken by the Division for Strategic Initiatives and Information Governance in the first semester of 2025, in collaboration with faculties and responsibility centres
b.	Draft, consult and approve a new Strategic Framework in line with Vision 2040, considering the quality assurance mechanisms needed to drive systemic change.	Broad consultative approach to be driven by the new Rector and Vice-Chancellor, and the DVC (Strategy, Global and Corporate Affairs) with the view to implement for the period from 2026 to 2030, taking into consideration faculty autonomy vs. centralised steering mechanisms. Process to be initiated by the new Rector and Vice-Chancellor in the second semester of 2025.
c.	Further development and refinement of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timebound, explainable and relative strategic management indictors [Linked to Improvement Area A1 (b)]	Currently, the strategic management indicators are used by faculties, departments and support services to track progress on the six core strategic goals of the University. Most of these indicators are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timebound, explainable and relative; however, it is noted that at the time of the University's self-evaluation, specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timebound, explainable and relative indicators for the core

C1	Review of the Strategic Framework 2019-2024 and related indicators
	strategic theme, "Networked and Collaborative Teaching and Learning" were still under development.
	The approval and implementation of the Transformation Policy will inform the tracking mechanisms to be employed in terms of systemic transformation at the University.

C2. Review of the institutional Guidelines for Programme Committee Chairs and Programme Leaders (2018), and faculty committee structures

This improvement area is classified as a medium priority and will commence in the second semester of 2024. It addresses recommendations 10, 11, 12 and to some extent 26 and 30.

The Committee for Teaching-Learning-Assessment will oversee the review of the existing Guidelines and propose standardised terms of reference and nomenclature for faculty committees in the second semester of 2024. This will include a review of the roles and responsibilities of programme leaders and module coordinators; and provide guidelines for enhancing the student voice.

Parallel to this, the Transformation Office has prompted all faculties and responsibility centres to draft and constitute transformation committees.

To note, is that faculties do not have "quality assurance committees" per se. Instead, quality management is integrated into different academic offering and undergraduate and/or postgraduate programme committees, research committees and social impact (community engagement) committees, often mirrored at departmental level. These committees, along with faculties' transformation committees are overseen by the faculty boards that report to Senate.

C2	Review of the Guidelines for Programme Committee Chairs and Programme Leaders, and faculty committee structures	
	IMPROVEMENT ACTION	**STATUS**
a.	Review of the Guidelines for Programme Committee Chairs and Programme Leaders	The Committee for Teaching, Learning and Assessment will appoint a review team in the second semester of 2024. The review team will conduct a desktop analysis of faculty

C2	Review of the Guidelines for Programme Committee Chairs and Programme Leaders, and faculty committee structures	
		committee structures related to the quality assurance of teaching-learning-assessment matters, and draft, consult and submit a revised Guidelines document for approval and implementation by mid-2025.
b.	Further establishment and refinement of mandates for Transformation Committees for each faculty and responsibility centre	Most faculties and responsibility centres have already established a Transformation Committee, with a mandate. The Transformation Office has representation in these committees and will refine and align their mandates with one another.
c.	Investigation into faculty autonomy, distributed leadership and barriers to systemic change, including the roll-out of the performance advancement framework by the Division for Human Resources	The performance advancement framework has been approved by the Division for Human Resources and will be implemented from 1 January 2025. The definition of Key Performance Areas and related -Indicators are dependent on different policy and management documents to be approved at upcoming Senate and Council level, including the Transformation Policy, and the revised Teaching and Learning Policy. Therefore, it is to be defined during 2025 for implementation in 2026 or 2027.

C3. The review of existing and drafting of new templates for policy and management documents

The third improvement area under the theme "Committees, policies and processes" relates to the implementation of the Glossary of Governance and Management Document Types at Stellenbosch University (2022) and is being overseen by the Centre for Governance Function Support, located in the Registrar's Division, with input from the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance.

The further development of templates and guideline documents is seen as an ongoing process and classified as a medium priority. Recommendation 16 asks the University to *"continue to prioritise the review of policies"* and Recommendation 21 recommends that *"the accommodation of periods of disruption"* be contemplated when documents are under review. Recommendation 12 is addressed by improvement area C2, but the templates will be updated to ensure that consideration is given to both undergraduate and postgraduate student representation in different committee structures. As such, the following two improvement actions will be undertaken as described below:

C3	Review and drafting of templates for policy and management documents	
	IMPROVEMENT ACTION	**STATUS**
a.	Drafting and approval of guidelines and templates for different policy and management document types	The Registrar's Division and the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance has formed a small template review team to consider and update the existing template for policy and management documents, which was originally introduced as an addendum to the Rules for policy and management documents (2012), now replaced by the Glossary (2022). The updated template should include a heading such as "Accommodation during periods of disruption". The new template(s) and guidelines will be tabled at the Academic Planning Committee in the second semester of 2025.
b.	Drafting and approval of guidelines or procedures for how to draft or review policy and management documents	In the University's self-evaluation report, it was found that the procedure for drafting and reviewing policy and management documents may need to be revisited. It is not always clear how review teams should be constituted, how draft versions should be circulated for comment, etc. As such, the Centre for Governance Function Support should contemplate a guideline/procedure document to clarify the procedural aspects of drafting or reviewing a policy or management document.

d. Quality management

Although Stellenbosch University has a functional quality management system, the audit report identifies that not all departmental self-evaluation committees currently reflect, report and act on key issues of concern, including parity of student success and undergraduate curriculum renewal.

There is a need to raise expectations regarding self-evaluation reports, ensuring that self-evaluation committees interpret data critically, conduct rigorous self-reflections and compile sufficient portfolios of evidence that, e.g., report on all the curriculum changes implemented during the period under review.

Sustaining a quality (enhancement) culture requires a commitment from all role-players, regardless of the financial, time and capacity constraints experienced within the higher education sector. This may require the strengthening of

centralised support and increasing the training opportunities for staff to ensure similar levels of understanding and rigour at all faculty and divisional levels.

Twelve recommendations and two commendations are grouped under this improvement theme. Although some of the recommendations could also relate to the three other themes, this sub-section mostly speaks to those improvement actions that can be prompted and steered by the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance and will be overseen by the normal operations of the Quality Committee.

Recommendations 5, 6 and 7 are deemed to be of high importance and will be emphasised as part of the new quality assurance cycle due to start in the second semester of 2024. The Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance has already updated the template for the core statistics report they prepare for departments and will liaise with the Centre for Business Intelligence to investigate the possibility of developing a user-friendly dashboard. The new Quality Assurance Themes and Guidelines document includes the key issues of concern and has been piloted by the Quality Assurance advisor and officer at the end of the fifth quality assurance cycle; these will be emphasised by the Quality Assurance advisor and officer when interacting with departmental chairs, deans, and other role-players.

Recommendations 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28 and 29 are deemed to be of medium importance, to be implemented in a phased approach as the capacity of the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance is (hopefully) strengthened. These recommendations relate to the offering of workshops and training opportunities, the further development of manuals and tools, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with which to measure the impact of the quality management system, and the inclusion of undergraduate programme evaluations in the six-year quality assurance cycle.

Table D1: A thematic selection of recommendations from the CHE's institutional audit report

#	Recommendations
5	It is recommended that the University should ensure that all departmental SERs explicitly address key issues of concern, including undergraduate and postgraduate success rates and particularly those of the Black African students, and transformation. [Audit Report Standard 3, p20 and p58]
6	It is recommended that the University should ensure that the core statistics provided to departments as they prepare their SER include disaggregated data on student success and

#	Recommendations
	include both the percentage of modules passed and throughput rates or cohort analyses. [Audit Report Standard 3, p20 and p58]
7	It is recommended that the University should ensure that departmental and divisional SERs are rigorously reviewed by staff who have this responsibility, and that training is provided on the minimum requirements for an SER. [Audit Report Standard 3, p21 and p58]
15	It is recommended that the University should develop and implement methods to monitor the impact of divisional interventions and activities including workshops, so as to facilitate quality enhancement. [Audit Report Standard 5, p23 and p70]
17	It is recommended that the University should prioritise meeting the staffing needs of the APQ. [Audit Report Standard 6, p23 and p75]
20	It is recommended that the University should develop and offer a comprehensive staff development programme that will empower staff to make full use of the information provided to inform quality assurance and enhancement processes. The programme should include both technical content of how to best use the Power BI dashboards and excel spreadsheets, and educational content that focus on the questions that should be asked and how the data can be used to address them. [Audit Report Standard 7, p24 and p79]
22	It is recommended that the University should include evaluative and QA processes in the normal workload calculations of all staff so that they are not treated as an add-on. [Audit Report Standard 9, p26 and p85]
23	It is recommended that the University should ensure that ongoing training regarding quality, quality management and quality assurance and enhancement is provided for staff so that that all staff, including academic leaders, have a similar level of understanding. [Audit Report Standard 9, p26 and p85]
24	It is recommended that the University should develop comprehensive QA Manuals for learning and teaching, research, and social impact. [Audit Report Standard 9, p26 and p85]
27	It is recommended that the University should develop and implement tools to evaluate the efficiency and efficacy of the QMS. [Audit Report Standard 12, p27 and p93]
28	It is recommended that the University should include formative undergraduate degrees in the 6-year internal quality assurance cycle. [Audit Report Standard 13, p28 and p99]
29	It is recommended that the University should ensure that internal QA processes (6-year review cycle) for departments and programmes require departments to report on any changes that have occurred in the programme compared to what was accredited by the CHE. [Audit Report Standard 13, p28 and p99]

Table D2: A thematic selection of commendations from the CHE's institutional audit report

#	Commendation
c.	The University is commended for the high quality of the online and in-person support provided by the CTL and APQ for the 6-year reviews of departments and PASS divisions, and which form a key element of the QA system. [Audit Report Standard 3, p20 and p58]
g.	The University is commended for the quality and ease of use of the information that is made available to staff to inform QA processes, through the BI dashboards and excel spreadsheets. [Audit Report Standard 7, p24 and p79 (incorrectly marked "f")]

The above recommendations are grouped in two improvement areas that relate to the strengthening the University's self-evaluation processes with the phasing-in of the new Themes and Guidelines for Self-Evaluations, and meeting the staffing, training and institutional research needs for fostering a quality culture. This includes improving the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of improvement actions, also in terms of undergraduate programme reviews.

The University is currently closing-out its fifth- and entering its sixth quality assurance cycle. This involves the scheduling of self-evaluations and peer reviews of 80-odd academic departments and 20-odd professional academic and administrative support service divisions within a six-year period, and processing the reports, improvement plans and follow-up actions via the institutional Quality Committee.

Apart from the six staff members in the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance, capacity should also be strengthened in faculties, and increased collaboration within the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement should be sought to provide comprehensive support.

D1. Phasing-in of the new Themes and Guidelines for Self-Evaluations

Recommendations 5, 6, 7, 28 and 29 relate to steps that can be taken to strengthen the self-evaluation processes in faculties. It speaks to the data that self-evaluation committees should consider, the themes to report on, and undergraduate programme reviews to be included in the six-year quality assurance cycle. These recommendations are being addressed through the introduction of the Themes and Guidelines for Self-Evaluations, developed by the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance and uploaded to their website: www.sun.ac.za/apq. The themes relate to the organisational structure of the entity under review, and its contribution towards teaching-learning-assessment, research, and social impact (community engagement). Additional guidelines and tools are being

developed to further support and enhance the self-evaluation process, ensuring that faculties can systematically and comprehensively assess their performance and impact on quality, transformation, teaching, research, and community engagement.

D1	Phasing-in of the new Themes and Guidelines for Self-Evaluations	
	IMPROVEMENT ACTION	**STATUS**
a.	Update core statistics report provided to faculties and departments	The format of the core statistics report is currently being updated for the sixth QA cycle.
b.	Pilot and regularly update the good practice guidelines for conducting self-evaluations	Piloted at the end of 2023 and being phased-in with the sixth quality assurance cycle, in 2024. The guidelines provide the minimum reporting requirements as well as guiding questions and good practices.
c.	Further development of online resources, including approaches and tools for programme review, redesign, renewal and evaluation.	Continuous, including on how to manage a self-evaluation process; how to structure a self-evaluation report.

D2. Meeting the staffing, training and institutional research needs for fostering quality management

Recommendations 15, 17, 20, 23, 24 and 27 relate to the staffing needs within the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance, and additional manuals, tools, resources and workshops needed to build capacity and foster a quality culture.

D2	Meeting the staffing, training and institutional research needs for fostering a quality culture	
	IMPROVEMENT ACTION	**STATUS**
a.	Develop and present a quality assurance workshop at the annual SoTL conference	Currently in development, to be offered at the annual Scholarship of Teaching and Learning conference as part of its pre-conference workshops, to be offered for the first time in the second semester of 2024.
b.	Improving the monitoring and evaluation of impact, and quality of self-evaluation reports.	This is a self-identified improvement action that will be phased-in during the new QA cycle. The Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance must develop the monitoring and evaluation tools, to be implemented mid-cycle,

D2	Meeting the staffing, training and institutional research needs for fostering a quality culture	
		in the second semester of 2026 when enough self-evaluation and peer review processes have been completed.
c.	Next funding opportunity for faculties to submit Programme Review and Renewal Project funding requests	Ongoing University Capacity Development Programme project, since 2017. The Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance to investigate in 2025 how to include formative programme reviews in the sixth quality assurance cycle.
d.	Submit and consider revised personnel plan for the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance	A revised personnel plan ("wish list") has been submitted to the Senior Director of the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement, for consideration within the responsibility centre.

5. Conclusion

This Improvement Plan for 2024-2026 outlines a coordinated approach with which the University wishes to address the recommendations from the institutional audit report over the next two-and-a-half years. We grouped the commendations and recommendations into four interrelated themes to create a cohesive strategy for enhancing quality assurance and the management thereof among the many different role-players at the University.

The four themes focus on: (a) Transformation (which will be overseen by the DVC: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel), (b) Student success and academic renewal (which will be overseen by the DVC: Learning and Teaching), (c) Committees, policies, processes (which will largely be overseen by the Registrar), and (d) Quality management (which identifies improvement actions that can be implemented by the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance). Under each improvement theme, we identified an improvement area and stipulated a few improvement actions to be undertaken by specific role-players.

Our commitment to transformation remains steadfast and as University we hope to make significant progress, supported by other institutional processes, such as those coordinated by the Rectorate via the workstreams of the Committee for the Institutional Response to the Commission's Recommendations (CIRCoRe). We look forward to the approval of the draft Transformation Policy and the implementation of the performance advancement framework, which will include the definition of key performance areas to ensure that intentional transformation at different levels

of management is included in staff work agreements and monitored as part of the University's performance appraisal system.

Of particular importance, is that faculties work together towards improving the parity of student success – and in this regard we are committed to continuous academic renewal, both in terms of curriculum transformation and pedagogical innovation. We are investing in a Programme for Student Success to help us coordinate our efforts, and to improve our collective sense-making and reflection; also, we have joined the Kresge Foundation's Siyaphumelela initiative, and we are continuing our institutional programme renewal project, which is funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training's University Capacity Development Programme.

In our self-evaluation report, affirmed by the audit panel, we identified the need to improve our policy review processes; ensure alignment between policy and management documents, standardise some of our committee structures and processes, and improve our reporting in terms of well-defined strategic management indicators. Although our policy and management documents are generally of high quality, the Covid-19 pandemic and the sudden ubiquitous access to generative artificial intelligence, have shown us that we need to be more agile in our review processes, and find ways of updating our different kinds of documents in a more systematic way. In this regard, the Registrar's Centre for Governance Function Support will expand on its Glossary of Governance and Management Document Types at Stellenbosch University (2022) by creating templates and other resources to guide policy development and review processes at the University.

Within the quality management space, the University is aware of the current capacity constraints within the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance. This improvement plan does not yet address any staffing issues per se, but the DVC: Learning and Teaching will monitor the impact of the Council of Higher Education's implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework, to see the extent to which it increases the Centre's workload. The interim Senior Director: Learning and Teaching Enhancement has also been tasked to report on the functioning of the different centres within the Division's line function, to see whether there are ways with which to provide more optimal, streamlined support to faculties, and to contemplate the capacity (development) that should be located in faculties as well. In the meantime, the Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance is phasing-in the University's sixth quality assurance cycle. This is supported by the introduction of new quality assurance Themes and Guidelines for Self-Evaluations, which will help departmental self-evaluation committees to critically reflect on their organisational structure, and their core functions of teaching-learning-assessment, research, and social impact. We appreciate the

commendations that relate to the high quality of guidelines, tools and training documents developed by the Division over the review period.

The next two years will see the University developing a new strategic framework in line with Vision 2040. This process will be spearheaded by a new Rector and Vice-Chancellor, to be appointed from 1 April 2025. As such, this improvement plan, supported by the institutional audit report, and the University's self-evaluation report, provides some context and a clear direction for the institutional priorities that lie ahead.

We recognise that true progress involves not only adhering to good practices but also embracing innovative changes that address the complexities of social, institutional, and personal growth. By embedding transformation into our strategic priorities, we will ensure that our efforts are inclusive, forward-thinking, and aligned with our long-term vision, fostering a culture of continuous quality enhancement.

This improvement plan will remain a "living" document until the end of 2026, to be updated and monitored by the institutional audit steering group, in consultation with the Council on Higher Education.

6. Dedication

This improvement plan is dedicated to Mr Ainsley Moos who served in the University Council from 2014. He was elected as deputy chairperson in 2018 and served as chair in 2021 but died unexpectedly on 31 January 2023 at the age of 45.