



# VC's VOICE



## Advancing Nelson Mandela University Consolidating the gains, charting the future

**Nelson Mandela University Vice-Chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa presented an address on 29 March 2023 to mark the start of her second term in office, from 2023-2027.**

Speaking at the Business School on Second Avenue Campus, Prof Muthwa acknowledged progress made over the past five years since she took up her post in April 2018. At the same time, she encouraged all stakeholders to work together on the path ahead in co-creating the dynamic African university bearing the name of Nelson Mandela.

"Today is an affirmation of a chosen culture of collective accountability for, and communal celebration of, the life and advancement of our beloved institution," said Prof Muthwa. "We have made strides and need to continue to make this future together."

"We need to be responsive, agile and adaptable if we are to thrive and contribute to the positive remaking of the world.

"This is not only because we carry the humanising name of Mandela. It is also because, as an African university, we must work at giving

the world a more human face – as Biko so profoundly argued long ago."

The Vice-Chancellor's address highlighted the unique importance of the African identity of the University, suggesting that it offered many gifts such as knowledges, cultures and languages from across the continent.

"It should also offer us a different way of encountering the world."

### Vision 2030 and strategic trajectories

Crafting the University's Vision 2030, approved by Council in 2021 as an institutional "road-map" for the future, had highlighted distinctive intellectual issues and strategic opportunities for the institution, said Prof Muthwa.

"Vision 2030 reaffirms our commitment to harness our core academic missions," she said. In this regard, the University had over the past

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five years been strengthening its key strategic trajectories, which included:

- **Revitalisation of the humanities**, integral to imagining the transformative potential of all disciplines to awaken African scholarship and systems of thoughts.
- The **Medical School**, which opened in 2021. This, she said, was accentuating primary health care and its unique community-focused approach and early career interprofessional collaborative practices set it apart from programmes at other universities.
- **Ocean Sciences**, where expertise and capacity continued to grow with partnerships in Africa and globally. The construction of a

**Science Centre** and **Digital Dome** on Ocean Sciences campus is due for completion later this year and should significantly enhance engagement programmes with schools and the public generally.

The Vice-Chancellor further outlined distinctive intellectual niches and strategic opportunities such as:

- **Equalising forms of engagement.** The work of the Hubs of Convergence, established within the new Engagement and Transformation portfolio, increasingly reflected what a social and embedded university could look like in the real world.

- **Research and innovation**, including ramping up research outputs.
- Developing new **international partnerships** and strengthening existing relationships. Prof Muthwa said there was “appetite internationally” to partner with Mandela University.
- Increasing **student access and success**. She noted that the University’s Learning and Teaching portfolio had substantive programmes in place to do this.

In addition, the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CRISHET) and the Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS) also were positioning the University.

## Key priorities for the future

After reflecting on the period from 2018 to 2022, Prof Muthwa outlined key priorities for the next five years.

### 1 Youth employability and student entrepreneurship

Building on the successes of its Student, Employability and Entrepreneurship Development project and Madibaz Youth Entrepreneurship Lab, the University is gearing up to create a youth entrepreneurship incubator in partnership with the national Department of Small Business Development.

To be known as the Mandela Africa Hub for Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation, this incubator will be an integrated platform for collaborative partnerships and co-learning. The goal is to develop Afrocentric young entrepreneurs and social innovators in critical sectors.

Prof Muthwa noted that significant progress had been made in mobilising support for this hub provincially, nationally and internationally.

### 2 Food security and food sovereignty

She reflected how many local communities – including a disturbingly high number of university students – knew hunger or food insecurity first-hand.

“Food security and food sovereignty a key indicator of just, sustainable development,” she said, adding that the issue was linked to the nexus of water and energy challenges.

In response, Nelson Mandela University has a highly productive Food Systems Working Group and now will set up a Food Systems Research Chair to help address the challenge of hunger in the context of climate change in southern Africa.

### 3 Virtual Academy and greater digitalisation

The University’s work on the virtual academy and greater digitalisation will take centre stage. Rapid technological advances in all sectors of society, accelerated by the impact of the pandemic on the academic project, presents new insights and opportunities for digitalisation in institutions of higher education. Council has given its backing to this thrust, said Prof Muthwa, inviting the full University community to contribute.

### 4 Sustainability Science

Building on science in the sciences and engineering, as well as existing entities and research chairs, Sustainability Science is the fourth priority area for the future.

Prof Muthwa said she envisaged that the portfolio for Research, Innovation, and Internationalisation would lead a new Institute for Sustainable Futures. This would include exciting participatory work on the hydrogen economy.

As the Vice-Chancellor reflected on the past five years and charted future directions, she concluded with a call to action: to commit afresh to embracing the ideals of our namesake, who dedicated his life to creating a more humane and just society.



# Strategic Review celebrates five years of Nelson Mandela University

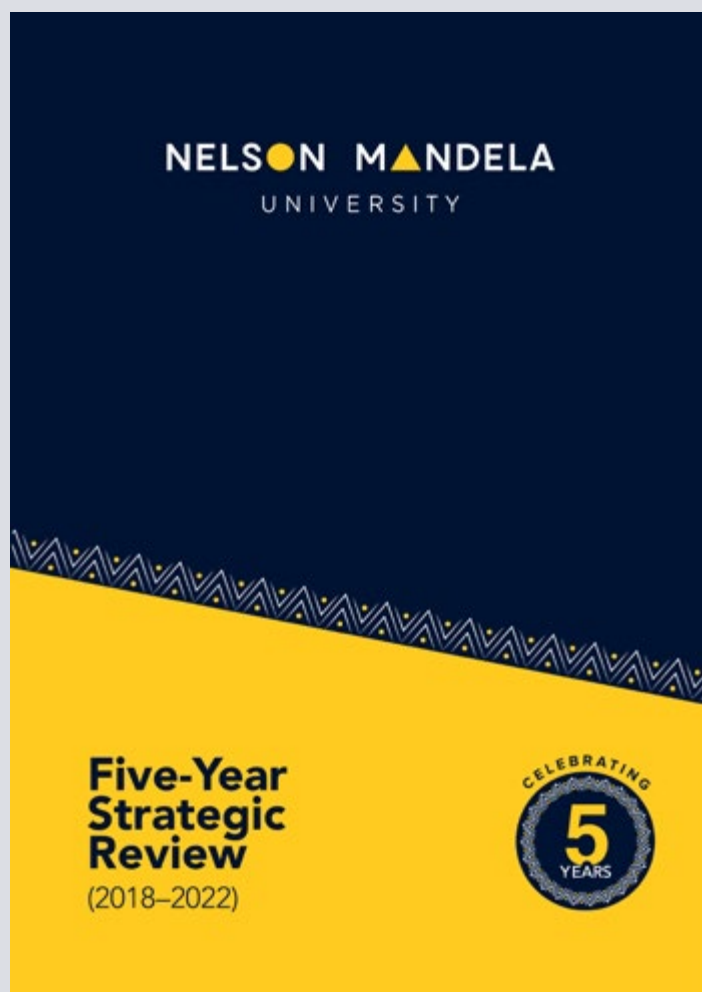
The Office for Institutional Strategy has compiled a [Five-year Strategic Review \(2018-2022\)](#) which celebrates five years of Nelson Mandela University.

It contextualises the landscape of higher education over this period, outlines the state of the University, and highlights leadership philosophy and priority areas for the years 2022-2025.

The review concludes that Nelson Mandela University is well on its way to carving out a niche nationally, continentally and even internationally, embracing its comprehensive identity in an innovative way that reflects its commitment to social embeddedness.

It also highlights how Mandela University in particular is committed to ensuring strategic continuity at a time when the higher education sector in general is under sustained fiscal pressure. Stable and strong executive leadership will be a powerful tool to advance our institutional position and reputation, scholarly depth and vibrant growth.

[Read the full Strategic Review](#)



# Enrolments for 2023 are already close to 100% of target

Student enrolments had, by 22 May, reached 99.8% of the target for 2023 (final figures for will only be available later in the year).

According to statistics from Institutional Strategy, there has been an average annual growth rate of 3.1% in headcount enrolments over the 2019 to 2022 period.

This is mainly attributed to the high growth in undergraduate (UG) enrolments, which has been at the higher rate of 4.5% on average per annum from 2019 to 2022.

In 2022 in particular, the University received an unexpectedly high number of first-time entering students, 8 563 in total, which was 30.1% above the target of 6 580 students.

This sharp increase placed a strain on resources such as lecturing venues and the student transport system. In addition, the overall student: staff full-time equivalent ratio increased from 27:1 to 29:1 in 2022, which was 3.6% higher than the target ratio of 28:1.

For 2023, therefore, Mandela University set lower first-time entering UG enrolment targets, helping to ensure that the quality of learning and teaching are not adversely affected by enrolment growth.

Over the same period, however, Institutional Strategy has recorded a shrinking number of postgraduate (PG) enrolments. These dropped by an average of -4.9% per annum between 2019 and 2022.

Furthermore, although this is not the final figure for the year, the 22 May PG enrolment of 2 971 is substantially lower than the figure of 3 417 PG students enrolled in 2022.

The fact that such a large percentage of students at Mandela University depend on NSFAS funding, which is not available at PG level, means that a large proportion of students wanting to progress from UG to PG level cannot do so. In addition, many of these students qualify for bursaries and scholarships which they cannot take up to register for PG studies due to historic debt.

Other reasons include a lack of supervisors, caused largely by the retirement of senior academics with doctoral qualifications, and declines in international student enrolments, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Total international student enrolments decreased from 1 039 in 2022 to 794 in 2023.

Internationalisation is an important vehicle through which Mandela University delivers on its academic missions and transformation agenda. However, there was a significant decline in international student enrolments across the globe over the pandemic.

In view of the decline in PG enrolments, as well as the sharp decline in international enrolments, the University has established a dedicated PG and internationalisation task team under the auspices of the institutional Enrolment Management Committee. This task team will focus on analysing the trends with a view to developing strategies and interventions to reverse these trends.

## 2023 ENROLMENTS

Current enrolments against  
2023 enrolment plan targets

| TARGET   | ACTUAL        | VARIANCE                                   |
|--|---------------|--|
| <b>Undergraduate</b>   |               |  |
| <b>27 540</b><br><small>inclusive of occasional students</small>   | <b>28 341</b> | <b>2.9%</b><br><small>above target</small> |
| <b>First-time entering students</b><br><small>(registered for the first time at a university)</small>                            |               |  |
| <b>7 185</b>   | <b>6 877</b>  | <b>96%</b><br><small>of target</small>     |
| <b>Postgraduate</b><br><small>(enrolments have closed, except for first-time master's and doctoral students by research)</small> |               |  |
| <b>3 840</b>   | <b>2 971</b>  | <b>77%</b><br><small>of target</small>     |
| <b>International Students</b>  |               |  |
|  | <b>794</b>    |  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   |               |  |
| <b>31 380</b>  | <b>31 312</b> | <b>99.8%</b><br><small>of target</small>   |

Information supplied by the Office for Institutional Strategy as of 22 May 2023.

## Cross-cutting teams address perennial challenges

The return of the full student body to Nelson Mandela University after two full years of the COVID-19 pandemic was tempered by various challenges, particularly NSFAS funding issues, at the start of the 2023 academic year.

In addition to protests from 20 February, staff and students have also had to adapt to sudden water outages and the ongoing impact of loadshedding on learning and teaching.

Two cross-cutting management teams – the Safe Campus Coordinating Team (SCCT) and the Enrolment Management Committee (EMC) – were established in 2022 to prepare for the forthcoming year and proactively manage the perennial challenges.

The challenges include, but are not limited to, financial aid, transport, student housing, student access and enrolments, venue readiness, loadshedding, water outages, timetabling, security, registration, overcrowding, student data and devices, cleaning, catering and specific academic issues.

While positive strides were made in addressing most of these issues, ongoing student protests eventually led to the issuing of a court interdict on 24 February.

The interdict was introduced to allow for the continuation of lectures without interruptions and to ensure the rights of all staff and students are protected.

## Plans to address impact of loadshedding

The University is exploring various scenarios to address the negative impact that the ongoing, and increased loadshedding is having on the academic project.

With blackouts expected to continue throughout the country for at least the next two years, the multi-stakeholder Energy Task Team has been hard at work in seeking a long-term sustainable solution for the institution.

Loadshedding has disrupted lectures work processes, caused equipment to break, offered criminals easier access to the institution, impacted on staff and student wellness, and is financially hurting the university.

The new “seamless electricity” proposals will seek to provide campuses with 100 percent generator coverage during loadshedding, ensure that there are no power interruptions as is presently the case and will enable the solar farm to continue to supply power during outages.

**“The new ‘seamless electricity’ proposals will seek to provide campuses with 100 percent generator coverage during loadshedding.”**





For the first time in three years the annual Vice-Chancellor's Welcoming Ceremony (right) was hosted in person with more than 2 300 new students and their families in attendance, as well as a similar online presence. The individual faculty welcome events were successfully hosted online in the build-up to the 4 February event in the Indoor Sport Centre.



## Switch-over water interventions in place

**N**elson Mandela University's ability to switch over to borehole water in preparation for Day Zero is now in place for Ocean Sciences, North and Second Avenue campuses.

Given the dire state of the water crisis with less than 8% of usable water still

available and daily water outages becoming the norm, it is critical that the University continues its efforts to become less reliant on the municipality for the supply of its utilities.

In addition, the University will have emergency interventions in place to meet

the needs of staff and students during those days when the water pressure is low or not available.

A dedicated webpage with all matters relating to the water crisis is available to assist staff and students in navigating this challenge.



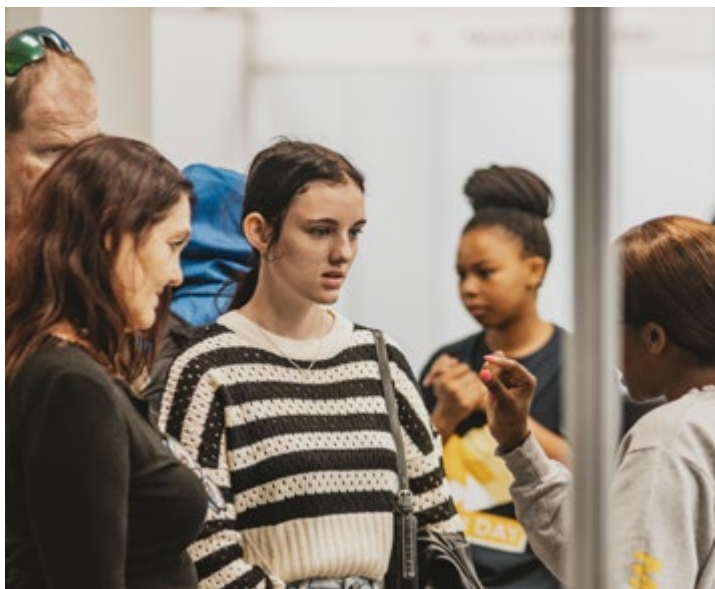
# Successful in-person Open Days

The first in-person Open Days since the global pandemic began in March 2020 attracted close to 8 000 prospective students and their families.

The new time slots – March, instead of May – for both the University's Gqeberha and George event were also praised by visitors who travelled from as far as Mthatha, East London and Graaff-Reinet to get a better understanding of all that Nelson Mandela University offers prospective students.

Open Day at Missionvale Campus on 10 and 11 March saw more than 5000 learners, teachers and family members visit the faculty and other stalls to engage with staff. Many also took advantage of the parent information session, at which Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor Dr Muki Moeng spoke.

The Open Day event at George on 17 and 18 March was equally well received.





Artist's impressions of the new Science Centre with its Digital Dome alongside University Way on Ocean Sciences Campus.

## New Science Centre a destination for all

**T**he new Science Centre with its iconic dome on Ocean Sciences Campus is an asset from which the entire University and the public at large will benefit.

The Digital Dome, which is set for completion in July, will serve the institution's seven faculties and the wider Gqeberha community with its multipurpose and immersive capabilities.

"In the era of open science advancement, Nelson Mandela University would like to use this science to serve as an advocate for equitable access to science education and strive to create welcoming and inclusive environments for all visitors. The time is now!" said Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Innovation and Internationalisation Dr Thandi Mgwebi.

The new building, funded by the Department of Higher Education's (DHET) Infrastructure Efficiency Grant, has been described as a "one-of-a-kind" building that offers capabilities far beyond that of a planetarium.

According to Infrastructure Planning head, the digital dome will offer an immersive experience

The Digital Dome will offer an immersive experience as three-dimensional images will be projected onto the dome and completely surround the viewer."

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"It will be a bit like the IMAX theatre – but bigger and all around you," enthuses Gouws, referring to the 15-metre high-resolution images.

The two-storey, 150-seater dome comes with extensive open-plan exhibition space, a 100-seater interactive teaching laboratory with moveable desks, another 60-seater digital space, a boardroom and office space. The facility will also become home to University Shop and a coffee shop that will open out onto a large forecourt looking over University Way.

The projectors and equipment are coming from Munich, Germany, while the screen is being shipped to the country from America.

"This facility is for the wider community, especially teachers and schoolchildren, to learn about any range of things. The Digital Dome is a facility from which we can all benefit," says Gouws.





## New student residences



**N**elson Mandela University has added another 772 beds to its on-campus student accommodation offering with the opening of six new residence blocks on North Campus.

This brings the on-campus bed count in Gqeberha and George to almost 6000 in addition to the increasing number of accredited off-campus beds, now nearing the 16 000-mark.

The new residences on North Campus follow fast on the heels of the 800 beds completed in two phases in September 2021 and in March 2022.

They have been built using the same novel Peri Uno building method for speeding up construction of much-needed student accommodation at Mandela University.

The institution was the first to use this method, in which the walls and slabs are cast in concrete in one continuous pour into the pre-erected Peri Uno formwork system.

Students in the new residences live in separate pods, each of which contains four bedrooms, an open area with a kitchenette, two toilets and two showers. Each pod will have its own entrance and will be connected to the next three-storey pod by a walkway.

The new facilities are connected to borehole water for toilet usage. Infrastructure is in place, however, to allow for the switch from municipal to borehole water.

An additional two residence blocks that will bring the bed numbers up to 1 000 for the entire project, will be completed later this year.

# Mandela's international partnerships are growing

**Nelson Mandela University continues to actively promote international partnerships, with numerous visits in the first quarter of 2023.**

South Africa's Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education recommends strategic focus on Africa, BRICS and the Global South and there has been a substantive increase in the number of partnerships fostered on the African continent through the Africa Expansion Programme.

Work is ongoing to finalise a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which would allow collaboration in indigenous knowledge systems among five African universities, namely: Great Zimbabwe University (Zimbabwe), National University of Lesotho (Lesotho), University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), Walter Sisulu University (South Africa).

The University is working on signing MoUs with Ba Isago University (Botswana) and Ghana Institute of Journalism (Ghana).

## Asian and European partnerships

Asian partnerships have also been on an upward trajectory. In early January, Woxsen University in India invited Nelson Mandela University to a workshop on the Metaverse, seen as the next evolutionary iteration of the internet. Our English department has been invited to participate in a Global English Language and Literature conference at Karpagam Academy of Higher Education, also in India.

In February, a delegation to the United Kingdom (UK) met existing and potential partners. Hosting institutions included the University of Sussex, School of Oriental and African Studies University of London (SOAS), UK Research and Innovation, Universities UK, University of Southampton, University of Roehampton, University College London, City University of London and the South African High Commission in London.

The Vice-Chancellor signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the University of Sussex and the University of Southampton.

As University of Sussex Vice-Chancellor Professor Sasha Roseneil noted on the Mandela University visit, our common values include "creation of a better world and the pursuit of scholarship that is embedded in social justice".

## International visits

During the first week of February 2023, the University hosted a delegation from the University of Utrecht and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). Nelson Mandela University discussed collaboration with the University of Utrecht on sustainable futures. Nelson Mandela University and SLU collaborate on projects which include the HOTSPOT programme, a bilateral research and training exchange programme in ecology.



University of Sussex Vice-Chancellor Professor Sasha Roseneil, left, and Nelson Mandela University Vice-Chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa sign a Memorandum of Understanding.

Other visitors included representatives from the German universities of Wuerzburg and Ostfalia, the Maritime University of Szczecin in Poland, and St Cloud State University in the US.

Nelson Mandela University is also a member of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) which promotes implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development

Goals. In February, Professor Darelle van Greunen and her team represented Mandela University and SDSN South Africa at the G-STIC Rio Conference in Brazil, presenting the South African and Swiss Kazi-Health initiative.

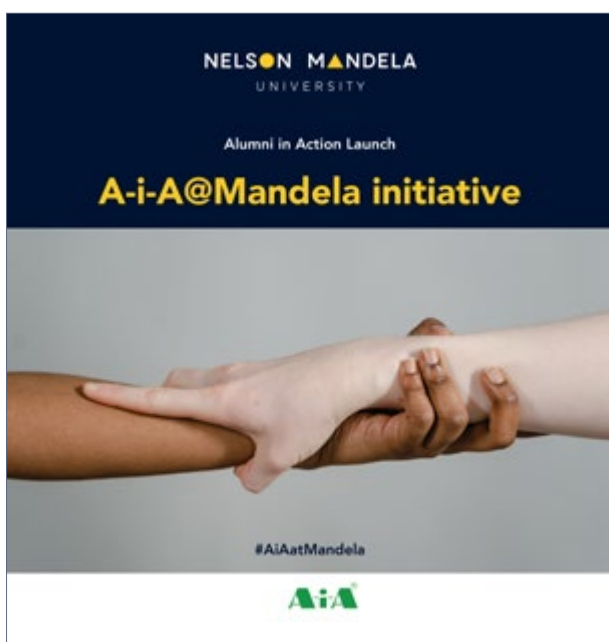
The participation of our staff on global platforms through strategic collaborations profiles the University, its staff and the cutting-edge research being conducted here.

**"Our common values include creation of a better world and the pursuit of scholarship that is embedded in social justice."**



The University received a 22-seater bus from Bestmed Medical Scheme to help provide students with much-needed transport to clinics and hospitals in the province, where they do their training. Faculty of Health Sciences Executive Dean Professor, Zukiswa Zingela, said some 3 500 students across the 11 departments needed to reach external training sites and the new bus would help meet this challenge.

From left: Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at Nelson Mandela University, Professor Zukiswa Zingela, Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching, Dr Muki Moeng, and Bestmed's Executive Manager for Sales and Marketing, Ms Madelein Barkhuizen, at the institution's Missionvale Campus, in Gqeberha.



The University successfully hosted the online launch of Alumni-in-Action at Mandela to enable the provision of counselling and advanced mental health support to student survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). The International Women's Day event further entrenched the institution's GBV advocacy, awareness and support and follows the founding of A-i-A at UCT in August 2021.



Nelson Mandela University hosted the official national launch of the South African Human Rights Commission's (SAHRC) social media charter at the South Campus Auditorium on 14 March, to great fanfare. The launch included a panel discussion of prominent role-players within the social media space, including Ms Abongile Mashele of Google Africa and Mr Fortune Mgwili -Sibanda of TikTok South Africa, in line with the theme of "A Call to Action: Defending Human Rights in the Era of Social Media".