



TRANSFORMATION UPDATE

INTRODUCTION

The University of the Witwatersrand (aka Wits University) adopted an [accelerated transformation programme](#) in 2015 which outlined eight priority areas. The programme was [reviewed](#) intermittently throughout the implementation phase and some structural adjustments were made in recent years. This included the re-establishment and training of transformation committees at the school, faculty and divisional levels and the determination of their respective mandates.

This report provides a summary of progress made in the eight priority areas.

EIGHT PRIORITY AREAS

1. DIVERSIFYING THE ACADEMY

The University has paid careful attention to the employment, development and retention of staff, and the empowerment of black and female academics in particular, over the last two decades. Several projects have centred on the development of the next generation of academics with the aim of securing a new generation of talent both for Wits and the higher education sector. The overall goal has been to develop a talent pipeline that is robust enough to sustain the University's mandate to deliver on academic and research excellence, and transformation.

Several initiatives, including the New Generation of Academics Programme and the VC's Equity Fund have been in place for several years, funded both from the University's own funds, state subsidy and donor or third stream funds. These include programmes that are managed via the University's central transformation, human resources and research offices, as well as those that are diffused at the faculty and school levels.

The Diversifying the Academy endeavour is a major strand of the University's current transformation programme. In 2016/17, a budget of R45 million was dedicated to making new appointments and allocating grants to enable African and Coloured academics to apply for promotion to the professoriate. An additional R9 million was committed to this programme in 2018/19. Two committees were established to oversee the implementation of this project - the first was responsible for making appointments and allocating grants to enable African and Coloured staff to apply for promotion to the professoriate, whilst the second, the Transformation Steering Committee, was responsible for monitoring progress and advising on policy and programmatic action. To date, 36 appointments have

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been made and 54 enabling grants worth R7.3 million have been awarded to academics across all five faculties. Eleven academics have been promoted through the enabling grant plan across all faculties.

Anecdotal feedback suggests that this programme has been successful, but the University has just been awarded a grant to formally review this component of the transformation programme over a 12 month period. This review will enable Wits and other universities to better understand the barriers and enablers of success and will aid in planning for the next stage of transformation and the staff development process.

2. INSOURCING

The University has [successfully insourced 1 576 employees](#) and is working towards the harmonisation of salaries, benefits and the conditions of service of these employees. An ongoing programme to upgrade the qualification levels of insourced employees, including those on the University's learnership programme was introduced by the Human Resources Development Unit, with funding from the ETDP-SETA. Sixty two out of 73 employees have since graduated at the NQF levels 2 and 3. Supervisors and employees have also been exposed to the employee relations policy and other University rules, policies, and procedures.

3. INSTITUTIONAL NAMING

A new naming policy has been adopted and a revitalised Institutional Naming Committee with extended representation from a range of stakeholders has been active in renaming Wits' places and spaces. In response to several calls to name or rename Wits' buildings, spaces and places, several names were changed. Emphasis was placed on calling for submissions to name or rename after symbolic events and/or evocative descriptions of a particular place, after women who have played key roles in academia and after women who were involved in the struggle for gender equality. There is a still a need for naming or renaming in the two latter categories.

Since 2016, the following buildings, placed and spaces have been renamed:

Old Name	New Name
Senate House	Solomon Mahlangu House
Central Block	Robert Sobukwe Block



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Room 336, Richard Ward Building	Peter King Mineral Laboratory
Alan Rothberg Lecture Theatre	Khanya Lecture Theatre
Physical Education	Impilo
1 Trematon Place	Afrika House
Mathematical Sciences Building	T.W. Kambule Mathematical Sciences Building
The wall on the 12 th Floor of University Corner (Journalism)	//Kabbo
A boardroom on the 12 th Floor of University Corner (Journalism)	Percy Qoboza Boardroom
The wall on the 9 th Floor of University Corner (Wits Radio Academy)	Capital Radio 604
A boardroom in the Journalism Department in University Corner	Christina Scott
A boardroom in the Journalism Department in University Corner	Bessie Head
Road alongside Alumni House	Alumni Lane
Student Union Building	Thembaletu (Our Hope)
Student Union Seminar Room	Tommy Motswai Seminar Room
NWE17	Tshepo which means "Hope" in Sesotho-Setswana
NWE33	Curiosity
NWE36	Imbizo which means "Gathering-Questioning-Summon" in IsiZulu-Xhosa-Sesotho
NWE40	Tumbulwa which means "Discovery" in Tshivenda

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Humanities Graduate Centre	eNkundleni which means “Arena” in isiZulu
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4. CURRICULUM REFORM

In line with calls to decolonise the curriculum and as part of the University’s regular review of academic programmes, a substantial baseline survey of the University’s curricula was conducted, in line with the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. A comprehensive report was submitted to the Council for Higher Education, which details significant changes to several academic programmes. The report demonstrates that while there has been a remarkable effort to respond to students’ demands for transformation at the faculty level, with many creative initiatives, and much ongoing critical reflection and discussion, there remains the need to create more effective cross-faculty collaboration and coordination to advance University-wide strategies.

In terms of curriculum renewal, the report details extensive ongoing discussions and critical reflections on how to decolonise the curriculum. In general, it demonstrates that there has been a significant promotion of scholarship of teaching and learning in relation to curriculum renewal, and a move towards a distributed leadership model in terms of coordinating initiatives. The introduction of a common first year engineering programme is one of the outstanding examples, which has now been structured to enable students who are not successful in some first semester courses to repeat them during the break or in the second semester, so that the students do not lose an entire year. There has been a complete overhaul of the architecture and built environment programmes and tremendous transformation in programmes based in the humanities and health sciences faculties, including the introduction of a compulsory African language in some programmes.

In terms of initiatives to increase diversity and inclusivity, the report details structural changes through biographical questions and first year surveys; curriculum conversations between staff, students and employers; increased student representation on committees and platforms for curriculum reform; the reassessment of admissions policies; the introduction of flexible degree programmes and the provision for part-time students.

It further demonstrates content change in terms of diversity and inclusivity through programmes addressing retention and barriers to success, including eco-social and psycho-social aspects; the construction of common first year courses and the continued bridging courses for learners and part-time classes for adults. The integration of counselling expertise in course content or in mediations between students and staff; the inclusion of African perspectives and contributions to modern science, as well as

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the incorporation of African languages and cultural narratives into critical thinking courses; and addressing the needs of top learners, is also included.

With regards to curriculum development capacity and quality, the University provides a range of courses for academic staff development via the Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development. Read more about these initiatives in the section titled Into the Future below.

In terms of participation in curriculum design and development, the report demonstrates that there is strong student involvement in curriculum design and awareness to increase student involvement, including on major committees; that students and recent graduates are aiding research into teaching practice, and the information received is fed back into curriculum design; that there is an incorporation of the views of potential employers; industry and professional bodies as well as an adaptation of curricula to market and national needs, for example, like Big Data Analytics to process the large data sets produced by the SKA and the development of new mining technologies like the Wits Sibanye DigiMine that seeks to address new digital developments in mining technology.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic, Professor Andrew Crouch, has outlined a five year teaching and learning strategy, which includes a strong blended learning and digital component and innovative ways of learning. In addition, the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic has also developed a new Teaching and Learning Strategy 2020-2025 which will replace the current Teaching and Learning Strategy 2015-2019. This new strategy will be presented to the next Senate meeting for discussion and approval. The cost of the strategy, the change of pedagogy, increased access, transformation of the curricula and the development of new disciplines to produce graduates for the future are under consideration. The implementation of the new teaching and learning strategy, and its concomitant infrastructure development and ICT requirements are a priority for the University over the next three years.

5. LANGUAGE POLICY

Focused attention on the implementation of the Wits Language Policy began in 2018 with the inception of Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the Language Policy Implementation Plan. Phase 1 focuses on the introduction of a multilingual linguistic landscape and branding; Phase 2 on the development of materials and resources for the teaching of isiZulu, Sesotho and South African Sign Language (SASL); and Phase 3 on the development of the linguistic abilities of staff and students in English, isiZulu, Sesotho and SASL. Signage and branding continue to be rolled out, and teaching materials have been updated and extended with training provided to postgraduate language teaching assistants. These first two phases are now part of standard University

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processes and are thus complete. In terms of phase 3, students' English writing and critical skills are being addressed by faculties according to the needs of students.

Faculties are increasingly adopting discipline-based writing intensive courses, largely owing to the Writing Intensive Programme (funded by the University Capacity Development Plan grant) and managed by Dr Pam Nichols, and are proving effective in improving students' writing skills. Three faculties have made significant progress with regard to instituting an African language requirement: Humanities, Health Sciences and Engineering. Discussions with schools in the Built Environment, and the faculties of Commerce, Law and Management, and Science on how best to achieve African-language proficiency amongst students continue. Various levels of English and African language courses are available to staff.

In 2019, two critical areas of the Language Policy Implementation Plan were initiated: creating multilingual teaching spaces through translanguaging and terminology development within disciplines. The University has thus embarked on Phase 4, which speaks to the development of isiZulu, Sesotho and SASL as Languages of Learning and Teaching (LOLTs) alongside English, earlier than anticipated. Phase 4 is the most complex and long-term aspect of the Plan, and requires careful planning with regular review of its practices, successes and failures. Phases 3 and 4 will be the focus of the 2020 Language Policy Implementation Plan.

The University has also embarked on a strategy to include isiZulu and SeSotho in its signage, stationery, banners and other material and is ensuring that all important documents are translated into the University's official languages. The Language Planning and Development Board also held a very successful Symposium on African Languages and Multilingualism in September 2019.

6. INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

Tremendous efforts have been made to address the University's institutional culture and to change the internal climate, but this aspect of the transformation programme remains a challenge.

The University remains a divided community, where diversity is sometimes not sufficiently appreciated. There are instances where members of minority groups feel silenced and where incidents of discrimination - be it gender-based harm or the marginalisation of people living with disabilities continue to be reported. Racial tensions are also sometimes exploited to divide the community.

This is an area of transformation that requires the reflection, engagement and action of the entire University community. The Transformation and Employment Equity Office designed a comprehensive

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programme comprising of Diversity and Inclusion Training workshops, dialogues, focus group discussions and other interventions, but some serious discrepancies in how we engage with and relate to one another remain. Whilst there is still a long way to go towards addressing the University's institutional culture, faculty and school transformation committees have been established and tailored solutions for faculties have been developed. However, much more effort has to be invested in this component of the transformation programme, from all sectors of the Wits community.

A comprehensive health and wellness plan for the University has also been introduced.

7. PROMOTING A DIVERSE AND COSMOPOLITAN RESIDENCE LIFE EXPERIENCE

The Dean of Student Affairs, supported by the Head of Campus Housing and Residence Life, the Student Development and Leadership Unit and the Transformation and Employment Equity Office has implemented a range of programmes to promote diversity and to explore the experiences of students in residences. One of the major discrepancies that have been detected pertains to the chasm in the experiences of residence and day students, which requires attention. A strategy for day students is thus being constructed.

Given that over 95% of occupants in Wits' residences are Black students, management supports Council's decision to postpone the diversification of the residences in the short-term, until the sector can adequately meet the demand for affordable student accommodation. It is acknowledged that diversity goes beyond race, and includes gender, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, religious and cultural tolerance, etc. To this extend, a number of initiatives are in place to ensure that residents benefit fully from the residence experience. The demand is for approximately 13 000 beds, with the University only offering about 6 200. Private accommodation is available in and around the University's campuses, but is often not affordable to students.

Acknowledging the context and the demand for affordable student accommodation, a major focus in the residence life portfolio is the creation of a residence culture that is supportive of the University's academic mission. In 2019, the intake of first year students into Wits' residences was increased from 20% to 28%. This is in line with the University's ambition to ensure that first year students are appropriately supported, and that the foundation for future academic success is laid in the early years of study. It is envisaged that the first year student intake in residences will be increased to 50% in the medium term, and that residence life and culture will be reviewed to ensure a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment with academic success and the holistic development of students at the core.

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Private accommodation service providers are also being accredited and will be required to provide additional student facilities and support, rather than just the infrastructure in the future.

8. ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Whilst Wits seeks to become more of a postgraduate institution, it remains committed to increasing access for students. Despite the transformation of the University's demographics, which are in line with national norms, funding and the lack of accommodation remain significant challenges. Wits has made several concessions over the last three years, which has enabled a greater number of students to register. The clearing of historical debt by the state for certain groups of students and the University's waiver of the first fee payment, has continued to allow for increased access. All students are able to ascertain their progression status, regardless of whether they have outstanding debt. All students who owe R15 000 or less and who are eligible to graduate are allowed to graduate, provided that they sign an Acknowledgment of Debt to repay the funds.

The University administers over R1 billion in financial aid, scholarships and bursaries annually. On 16 December 2017, the Presidency announced that free education would be phased in over five years from January 2018. This translates into free education for students who come from homes that have a collective annual household income of R350 000 or below, which applies to about one fifth of Wits' students. For 2019, this dispensation applies to first year and second year students only. About 25 000 of Wits' 38 000 students are on some form of financial aid, scholarship or bursary. The majority of students at Wits fall into the "missing middle" category – those who are too wealthy to qualify for funding from the National Students' Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) but too poor to pay their own way.

Wits has also increased its own funding for students through the introduction of the Wits Hardship Fund in 2019, setting aside more than an additional R13 million to assist students who are experiencing financial hardship by providing funding relief towards registration and accommodation assistance. This Fund is utilised to assist students in the missing middle income category (with a R600 000 and below household income), to contribute the required 50% of historical debt in order to register, and to ensure accommodation assistance. In 2019, 297 students received registration assistance, amounting to R8 million from the Fund. A further 244 students were furnished with accommodation assistance, amounting to R5 million and sponsorship arrangements with a private accommodation service provider. In addition to the Wits Hardship Fund, another concession was made in order to assist students to register. Students who had been re-admitted from an academic perspective and owed less than R100 000, and who had applied to the Wits Hardship Fund, and who were eligible to be funded, but who

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could not be assisted due to limited funds, were assisted to register once they had signed an Acknowledgement of Debt agreement. Approximately 296 students were assisted in this manner.

Numerous student support programmes have been instituted by faculties and the Dean of Student Affairs, including identifying and addressing students at risk and the implementation of at least three programmes to ensure food security for students. The food security programme supports 1 000 Wits students with a daily meal, a food bank is available to students for monthly non-perishables parcels and students are involved in a food garden initiative to grow fresh vegetables in support of the programme. In addition, the University has implemented a comprehensive mental wellness programme for students, including increased staffing capacity via the Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU) and the introduction of a 24-hour Wits Care Line and App, to try to address issues around mental wellness on campus.

Apart from the attempts to lower the financial barriers to access, the University has also extended its part-time offerings through the WitsPlus platform. New part-times programmes like the BA Law and BCom Law have been introduced. Many students have registered for the new part-time BSc Engineering programme and students who wish to transition from a normal degree into the Graduate Entry Medical Programme can now access a bridging programme via WitsPlus.

A further innovation to improve both access and throughput has been the introduction of repeat modules for first years in certain faculties, which can be taken in the second semester of the year as a part-time course to allow students a second chance to complete and pass the year. This has worked particularly well in the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment.

CONCLUSION

Tremendous progress has been made in the majority of areas related to transformation as outlined above. However, several hurdles remain and new challenges develop intermittently. It is for this reason that a revised transformation programme will be conceptualised for implementation from 2020 onwards.