

# **DUT's State of the University Address:**

## **2025**

***Upending DUT:***

**Strategic advances and momentary setbacks**

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7 April 2025

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This State of the University Address (SOUA): 2025 was originally scheduled for delivery on 6 March 2025. For various reasons including the ones provided below, I decided that, instead, it must be shared online.

I am aware that some members of our community may be unhappy with this decision. However, it would have been irresponsible had we gone ahead amid sporadic violent protests which had already resulted in injuries to some staff members and students. Let me pause and express our sincerest apologies to our injured staff members and students. I must also extend our profuse apologies to all DUT stakeholders, internal and external, for these sporadic disruptions. If this may bring any comfort, these were led by rogue non-students whose pastime in their 'unemployable-ness' is causing disruptions at tertiary institutions. I will return to this point in section 2 below.

As I have always said in the past, the purpose of SOUA is mainly two-fold. It promotes *transparency* regarding DUT's plans<sup>1</sup> for the current year. It also deepens *accountability* on institutional performance against plans committed to in the previous year. While the speech itself is based on the EAPP, I encourage that it must still be read in conjunction with all key documents. These include Budget: 2025 and our Annual Report: 2024 which will be submitted to the Department of Higher Education and Training by 30 June 2025 and, subsequently, posted on our website. The broader context will help to enhance deeper understanding of the speech, especially because some general and specific references and nuances are not necessarily contained in the EAPP.

Before I provide some feedback on our performance in 2024 and present some highlights or our plans for 2025, I wish to start with some brief reflections on the climate for higher education in the country, just to situate our space and contributions as a university. Needless to remind you, the formulation of ENVISION2030 was predicated on a thorough environmental scan. We have always been alive to the impact of external dynamics. To better prepare ourselves for agility, in April 2020, for example, the Executive Management Committee (EMC) took a decision to conduct a scenario-planning exercise to arm ourselves for future disruptions that would unavoidably happen because of the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) environment the world operates in.

## 2. The National Context and the sub-Culture behind Student Protests

In mid-December 2017, former President Zuma unexpectedly announced the introduction of fee-free higher education, a few weeks after our Council had just approved DUT's budget. We cautioned then that there would be major negative ramifications of that rather haphazard decision.

On the one hand, that decision was a welcome move given the perennial challenges of access to higher education which had always largely affected students from poor households. Thus, access would be expanded albeit in a controlled manner. Universities are bound by annual enrolment targets agreed with DHET and are penalised for under- and over-enrolment. Consequentially, universities and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) must plan in accordance with the approved targets.

On the other hand, in its haphazardness, the announcement led to some opportunistic behaviour on the part of some of our young people. It spawned heightened expectations that universities should ignore several admission requirements just because higher education was then 'free'. There remain expectations that universities must cater for the entire welfare needs of students, including finding accommodation for every single student funded by NSFAS. These expectations are being exploited by rogue elements in society to legitimise annual student protests across the post-school sector, which often forces institutions to suspend academic activity for weeks. Despite engagements between managements and duly elected SRCs to confront whatever challenges, the only agenda amongst these rogue elements remains disruption and not a quest for solutions.

The loss of teaching and learning time has a major impact on the minimum notional hours students must complete to meet the set educational outcomes. Annually, departments are forced to devise catch-up plans before assessments could happen. Academics often find it difficult to assess students on aspects of work that had not been presented as planned. Whatever catch-up efforts could achieve, it would be foolhardy to dismiss suggestions that with so much

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<sup>1</sup> Annually, Council approves an Annual Performance Plan (APP), in accordance with DHET's prescripts, and our own Extended Annual Performance Plan (EAPP), which is predicated on ENVISION2030's master plan, subsumes many elements in the APP.

less time to do everything, the quality of teaching and learning would have been compromised, sometimes beyond repair. Neither can we, as a result, dismiss talk of not just unemployed graduates, but unemployable ones. With this sub-culture becoming institutionalised nationally, there is a real risk that some of our students may fall short of becoming ideal ‘*adaptive graduates*’ DUT wants to produce by design.

Granted, we have localised challenges. For example, it is true that we have serious network and Wi-Fi challenges at the university. But we have been providing updates on what is being done. The sad truth is that the amount of work that needs to be done in certain areas will not be resolved within the shortest possible time. Does that warrant destruction of property, acts of intimidation and violence meted out to staff and students and the university infrastructure? There is no justification for these ugly and repulsive behaviours that soil the very essence of our *Living Values Framework* (LVF) and compromise the quality of the education we provide.

These pressures notwithstanding, we still have a duty of ‘*shared responsibility and accountability*’ in implementing ENVISION2030 and making DUT greater than it is already becoming. It is for this reason that over the years, we have often emphasised that we would be failing humanity were we to moan incessantly about the size, weight and frequency of the problems we encounter. When we innovated a strategy with a 10-year horizon, we were not oblivious to the opportunities and challenges immanent in a VUCA environment. It is for this reason that we adopted our *Annual Adaptive Management Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework*, with constituent mechanisms such as bi-monthly ‘*On-the-business*’ sessions where Management gets out of the busy spaces just have a helicopter view **on** the business of DUT rather than being **in** the business, and the annual October adaptive management workshop. These adaptive management sessions sensitise us to trends, events and forces that impact implementation. It is for this reason we have proactive capacity, we believe, to timeously adjust our tactics without compromising the ultimate ideal of ENVISION2030.

### 3. STEWARDSHIP

As you should know by now, *Stewardship* is the first of our two ‘*enabling and effecting*’ Perspectives. It comprises three interconnected Strategic Objectives (SOs), namely *Lived Values*, *Institutional Culture* and *Creativity*. This is the foundational Perspective of ENVISION2030. It places DUT’s DNA, its people, their values and principles, agency and behaviour at the centre of DUT’s core business. To borrow from a mechanical analogy, our people are like sparks in the engine. While all other parts of a car are important, an engine would not run and enable the car to move without the spark responding to the ignition. Similarly, all our plans, systems and resources would be futile without <sup>2</sup>“DUT people who radiate strong values and are highly principled in the conduct of their rightful roles and responsibilities.” As we often say, people are the source of everything, progressive and retrogressive, too.

*Lived Values* and *Institutional Culture* are two sides of the same coin. Undergirded by *Creativity*, this coin makes DUT uniquely progressive in an area most organisational strategies ignore albeit in a South Africa in dire need of lived values and principles. Below, we provide a consolidated synopsis of what is in store for us in 2025, without stratifying based on each of these SOs.

This year marks the second of the *Upended Phase* of ENVISION2030. With under six years to get to 2030, it behoves us to assess how we became *Different* before and between 2020 and 2023, which was the first phase, and the extent to which DUT is truly *Upending* during this second phase, covering the years 2024 to 2026. Numerous past reports and speeches provide evidence of a *Different* and *Upending* DUT, pushing hard to be fully *Transformed* in the final phase, covering the years 2027 to 2030. Just recently, during our *First Year Students’ Orientation Week*, I shared with them and their parents/guardians the tale of being *Different* and *Upending*, which has seen an increasing number of our students participating actively and successfully in co- and extra-curricular activities that support their growth and development. Even though we still witness sporadic violent protests on our campuses as I acknowledged in the earlier section, the behaviour and sub-culture is not as institutionalised, virulent and pervasive as it had been some years ago. Of course, living in a South Africa that has nationalised the sub-culture of violent protest, it is difficult for DUT to be a protest- and violence-free oasis.

A few years ago, one would have easily mistaken DUT for another dreary government department given how

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<sup>2</sup> State of the University Address, 2020.

permeative incidents of dilapidation and corruption were in our operations - support services and elsewhere. Who would forget the big scandal where some staff members connived with insurance companies to falsify spousal deaths? Who would forget how some staff members used to make our students on learnership programmes pay some monies into their personal accounts on lies that the University expected them to make some contribution towards equipment? Who would forget senior managers whose sons had companies operating as middle-men for DUT business or actually running companies on campus. The tale of becoming *Different* and *Upended* I refer to had always been values- and principles-based. It culminated in the adoption of ENVISION2030, which calls for our values and principles to be lived and thus give rise to a new institutional culture. In 2024, EMC approved our *LVF Implementation Plan* with the purpose to consolidate the strides and accelerate the reality of our *Lived Values* taking root across the university.

For 2025, we are intentional in integrating the 360° feedback when new Performance Agreements will be evaluated. This has always been a gap. While much progress has been made since the start of the implementation of ENVISION2030, setbacks have also emerged. For instance, it is a matter of public record that Council and Management had a tumultuous 2024, which did not only end in the courts of law, but essentially challenged the very integrity of our LVF. Relations between Management and Unions also regressed, resulting in many anomalies we had conquered, for example, salary negotiations being concluded before the January salary cycle. With respect to the latter, it was eventually concluded on or about 7 March, thanks to Nehawu and Nteu who made this possible. By 20 March, backpay was paid out to staff.

Our EAPP2025 prioritises the deepening of co-creation between and amongst various stakeholders as the salary negotiations process showed. Inevitably, we all have a duty to work on resuscitating healthy relations between and amongst a variety of our stakeholders. To revive our unique *social compact*, which saw us grow and succeed in various endeavours in the last few years, activities this year include interventions on cooperative governance amongst stakeholders, the 360° feedback loop as noted just above and ‘*values circles*’ which will help to keep track of our staff compliance at all levels and with our LVF.

We will move more determinedly from this year to implement our LVF, but henceforth, with a more detailed plan in place as alluded to above. I hope that, amongst others, it will engender a sense of pride as we rebut lies, deceit and slander which have been peddled about DUT’s so-called ‘new management’ in the past few years, particularly last year. This is one of the biggest priorities for 2025. We have a duty to communicate and publicise our successes, which we have in abundance nationally and internationally. In the true spirit of ‘*shared responsibility and accountability*’, this is our collective responsibility as all DUT people.

This year, we have taken a decision to apply to become a signatory to the Magna Charta Universitatum (MCU), hosted by the University of Bologna, Italy. Our much-enhanced LVF was crafted using the MCU’s *Living Values Methodology*, more particularly, using an example the Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland, provides. Having collectively identified our values and principles during our townhall consultations, we employed this methodology and took a cue from the example, innovating on these further to produce a unique DUT LVF. Membership of MCU will allow us to share our LVF among many similarly inspired universities around the world, while we also learn from them.

I am certain we will harness our collective *Creativity* to find lasting solutions in creating a new *Institutional Culture* through our *Lived Values*. The imperatives of DUT’s *Transformed* Phase must transcend egos. Needless to remind ourselves, I have maintained that all of us are transient and not indispensable at DUT. We have only been given an opportunity to make a contribution towards serving the nation and not degenerate it. We must not betray the future of those yet to enrol including those yet unborn who must have a right to dream about studying at this university and find DUT that is *Different*, *Upended* and *Transformed*. Surely, DUT is bigger than all of us. Ultimately, higher education, more so one funded by the taxpayer, is not just a private, but a public good.

#### 4. SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

*Systems and processes*, collectively, are the second of our ‘*enabling and affecting*’ Perspectives. While these comprise three SOs, namely, *Innovative Curricula and Research*, *Digital Environment* and *State-of-the-Art Infrastructure*, there are

numerous other systems that make organisations tick. *Systems and processes*, thus, bring order, structure and discipline. Without these, there is a strong likelihood that any organisation would degenerate into chaos and degeneration. In this section, I briefly discuss these three SOs and others which are elementary in ushering in and sustaining an *Upending* and ultimately *Transformed* DUT fit to serve its people, ‘*transform societies and their economies*’ and thereby ‘*contribute towards improving lives and livelihoods of the broader society*’. Unlike in the previous Perspective, and this one being our focus during the *Upending* Phase, I deal with each SO separately, rather.

### **Innovative curricula and research**

In my SOUA2024, I went to great lengths detailing the concept of *Transformed Academia*, and how it responds primarily to the imperative of ‘*innovative curricula and research*’ and secondarily to ‘*distinctive education*’ and ‘*adaptive graduates*’, amongst others. By definition, ‘*innovative curricula and research*’ means ‘*curricula that stimulate creativity and innovation to generate new knowledge and solutions*’. This transcends not only what has been called ‘*decolonised curricula*’, but what we referred to as *Curriculum Renewal* back in 2019 when we had to comply with the HEQSF. Relevant to this is the ongoing task we continue to perform regarding the relevance, viability, efficacy and quality of our offerings.

There is a case for DUT to be creative and innovative in its programme offerings, which amongst others, must include the introduction of the *right* new offerings, which take into consideration our context and our VUCA environment. For instance, the latest media <sup>3</sup>release by Statistics South Africa on 18 February 2025 reveals that our national unemployment rate is still at a high of 31.9%. The expanded unemployment rate remains at 41%. What is even more worrying but not surprising is that the number of discouraged work seekers grew by 111 000 in the last quarter of 2024 despite a minimal drop in unemployment. We read about companies closing their doors. In many of the shopping spaces we go to, we see how machines/apps have replaced people. Over the last 15-10 years, no one would have thought that a doctor, an engineer or an accounting graduate would be unemployed. As society develops and transforms, some skills fade into the periphery, if not oblivion. Unless our curricula respond to the reality of our VUCA environment, all we are doing is to produce young people who will only be idling at home, unemployed and perhaps unemployable. Soon, they will organise, mobilise and rise against the nation they would claim, legitimately, is failing them.

SOUA2024 fully explains the concept of *Transformed Academia* and DUT’s *Philosophy of Education (Phi-Ed)*, the latter only being a subset of the former. What must pre-occupy us, henceforth, as we *Upend* and begin to *Transform* DUT is the implementation of *Transformed Academia*. I was pleasantly surprised on 2 April 2025 when I received an email from a fledgling student club called *Transformed Academia Club of Tutors (TACT)*. DUT students want to see us implement *Transformed Academia* and not take 16 months - calculating from when a discussion document with this name was produced in December 2023 - theorising about these concepts.

*Transformed Academia* has numerous practical implications for our academic transformation process. Let me list just a few initiatives we will embark on in 2025. *Phi-Ed*, a subset thereof as I explain above, is not just a compliance exercise as curriculum renewal was in the years preceding 2019, as mentioned just above. It is a creativity-, innovation- and entrepreneurship-aligned *constructivist philosophy* for which we use *Design Thinking (DT)* and *Project Based Learning (PBL)* methodologies to enact. To those who have short memories, the process of identifying these two methodologies involved a survey run by the then Deputy Vice-Chancellors prior to 2022 when the *Phi-Ed* statement was finally crafted. After about 21 years since our merger, the old and archaic nature and structure of our faculties and their constituent departments have to be reviewed and appropriately resourced. If we are to be a leading university worth its name and not just an education and training institute, we cannot have departments with questionable academic seniority. Movement on implementing these aspects of *Transformed Academia* has, unfortunately, been excruciatingly slow. As a result, on 11 April 2025, I will accentuate the implementation process by helping to identify implementation principles and criteria, and more, which will help us to move forward systemically and systematically. Faculties, after townhall meetings I will lead, will use such principles and criteria to respond to what *Transformed Academia* must entail practically.

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<sup>3</sup> Media release accessed on Statistics South Africa website on 4 March 2025.



## Digital Environment

*Digital Environment* is about ‘adopting integrated digital systems and processes that enable our people to deliver optimally’. Our Phase 3 ERP implementation - the rest of the PeopleSoft Student Information System after the admissions module went live in March 2024 - is in a critical state due to delays caused by several changes in Project Management, Quality Assurance Management, Data Migration and Change Management. Further challenges were due to network disruptions and operational constraints of key DUT staff members. As noted above, we have also had upheavals in our governance and management sub-system, which led to lethargy, if not a state of paralysis and insidious ‘go-slows’ and sabotage. We will be unwaveringly gung-ho against this. Unfortunately, and because of these, the rest of Phase 3 ERP implementation failed to go-live in January 2025. An alternative plan using the old Integrated Tertiary system (ITS) was developed to safeguard business continuity while aiming to complete Phase 3 as soon as possible and taking costs into consideration.

In July 2024, a new IT service management system was launched, significantly improving the traceability of IT services. This year, this system is set to be rolled out to other departments like Procurement, Finance and Student Administration, with integration into the DUT App for automated communication. The system also addresses a critical gap in ICT governance, especially, knowledge management. A variation to consolidate the DUT App's development with the website upgrade was approved, aiming for seamless integration and improved user experience, generating excitement among stakeholders. Phase 2 components of the ERP system, which have been in place since January 2024, were exposed to apparent cybersecurity breaches in September, and as a result cybersecurity measures are being implemented to manage this critical risk. Cybersecurity audits and penetration testing processes have already been initiated, alongside the revival of Security Operation Centre and Network Access Control contracts, that had lain dormant in 2023.

As 2025 starts, Phase 1 of upgrading our ICT infrastructure entails two major network assessment projects to address persistent Wi-Fi and network challenges experienced across the university. These dual assessments are necessary to identify both systemic infrastructure issues and localised performance bottlenecks comprehensively, which have hampered connectivity. As a short-term intervention, mobile data devices are being distributed to affected staff to ensure minimal disruption to operations. In parallel, Phase 2 of the network upgrade has commenced, marking the first major overhaul of the institution's network infrastructure since the 2002 merger. This critical phase is aimed at significantly improving network stability and reliability. The university is committed to ensuring noticeable improvements in 2025 as part of this strategic investment in digital infrastructure.

In 2025, significant strides will be made to transform research management at DUT through the full implementation of the Converis-Clarivate system. Historically, manual processes have led to persistent delays, particularly in research ethics clearance. Converis-Clarivate, acquired via the Technical Higher Education Network: South Africa (Thensa) Consortium, is being deployed as a cost-effective and robust platform tailored to the needs of universities of technology. Its Ethical Review module is expected to streamline ethics applications and approvals by digitising workflows, enabling transparent tracking, and reducing processing times. Beyond ethics, the system's integrated modules for Pre- and Post-Award Management, Publication Management, IP tracking, and Graduate Student Management will ensure that research operations across DUT are more efficient, compliant and strategically aligned, marking a pivotal shift in how research is supported and governed institutionally.

To conclude this sub-section, ICTS has partnered with Procurement and Assets to catalogue all software assets and hardware assets, aiming to improve contract management, licensing, integration, and cybersecurity. This process will address longstanding gaps in software asset management.

## State-of-the-art infrastructure

Our Long-Term Spatial Plan 2020-2040 continues to be our reference point for ongoing rollout of new infrastructure projects and maintenance of existing buildings and amenities across our campuses. By now, we had hoped that the project we call DUT355, which includes a student centre and multi-purpose halls on Steve Biko Campus and the extension of lecture halls at Indumiso Campus would have been completed and handed over. We experienced inordinate delays in completing these projects due to various reasons, not least the mafia-infestation and general unscrupulousness in the infrastructure industry.

Despite serious cash-flow and sub-contractor problems for the contractor, DUT355 is finally nearing completion. Unfortunately, we have had to terminate the contractor and start to manage the process of completion of DUT355 ourselves, which should be done by June 2025. While DUT355 may have stalled for long, it has given us crucial lessons. As a result, there has been notable progress on Phase I of the DUT481 project, particularly with the administration building at Steve Biko Campus. Phase I of this project involves, amongst others, a new building for the Faculty of Health Sciences, an Innovation Hub and parking; the latter being one of academia's historical bugbears. Watch Phase 2 loading!

*State-of-the-art infrastructure* is not just about new buildings, but also about maintaining and/or renovating existing infrastructure. Many old buildings have been renovated and more are being renovated. We must admit, though, that we have not been as effective on the aspect of maintenance of the existing buildings and amenities, much to the frustration of our stakeholders. This results in legitimate complaints regarding aspects of health and safety in some of our spaces. EMC approved a *Maintenance Plan* for 2025 towards the end of last year. We will collectively monitor its implementation and provide support to the unit responsible for this work. Amongst others, the plan targets recess periods for major renovations.

Despite the challenges we have had to grapple with, the truth is that DUT now looks and feels *Different* from what it was when many of us joined, and yet we are not even halfway with the implementation of the 20-year spatial plan. With many of these projects due to be completed between 2025 and 2026, by 2030, we will have succeeded in 'providing contemporary work, living and learning spaces', which is the formal definition of *State-of-the-art Infrastructure*, and what ENVISION2030 enjoins us to do.

The implementation of our Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiative to increase our capacity in student housing by over 9 000 new beds progressed with the finalisation of agreements with various bidders. These agreements, which the Minister expects before granting final approval, will hopefully see us break ground this year after a long wait since December 2022 when we submitted our first proposal to the then Minister.

Protection Services is implementing several projects aimed at improving access control, one of our bugbears in our porous campuses. Even though our Director: Protection Services resigned recently, these projects will be finalised as quickly as possible. As noted above, we must keep at bay non-students hell-bent on denying our real students the quality education they deserve on their road to become '*adaptive graduates*'. It is, thus, important to control who gains access to our campuses, and for what purpose. Phase I of the CCTV Camera installations is currently underway and is scheduled to be completed by May 2025. The upgrading of turnstiles to control access at Steve Biko and ML Sultan campuses is a collaborative effort among Protection Services, ICTS and Real Estate Management which should be completed in the second quarter of 2025. Once the turnstiles are working, student cards will be linked to the system for access control. Real Estate Management is finalising a design for entrance to our Indumiso Campus for approval by the relevant municipality.

From a health and safety perspective, the installation of a fire detection system commenced at the library complex at the Steve Biko Campus, while various fire drills were conducted across various campuses last year. In the next few months, the Executive Management Committee (EMC) will be approving an *Occupational Health and Safety Framework* as part of our efforts aimed at consolidating the institutionalisation of health and safety, building on the policy we approved a few years back.

We are beginning to make visible progress in our fleet management sub-system in response to a call we made a few years ago to effect economies of scale in this area. Since centralisation of the vehicle-booking system, we have drastically reduced accounts blockages which were once a big challenge. Some of the milestones include standardised branding of all university cars, which helps not only with visibility but has also helped to improve driver behaviour. Driver behavior is further enhanced by monthly vehicle audits and assessments which have resulted in increased accountability and reduction of unwarranted conduct. For 2025, we have increased the relevant capex budget to accommodate replacement of ageing vehicles. We will also consolidate the gains we have made thus far to ensure that this sub-system is efficient.

## 5. SUSTAINABILITY

*Sustainability* is the first of the next two ‘*influencing and impacting*’ Perspectives. Various reports and speeches affirm DUT’s attitude towards sustainability. It straddles the *Triple-E* bottom-line of *Economy*, *Equity* and *Environment*. This Perspective comprises three SOs, namely, *Distinctive Education* (representing *Equity*), *Financial Sustainability* (representing *Economy*) and *Green Ecosystems* (representing *Environment*).

### Distinctive Education

*Distinctive Education* is about ‘*creating a compelling and future-oriented living and learning environment*’ at DUT. Earlier, I quoted the definition of the *State-of-the-art infrastructure*, which is about ‘*providing contemporary work, learning and living spaces*’. The two definitions are instructive; they both contain the twin concepts of ‘*living and learning*’. Perhaps this is what affirms our distinctiveness as DUT. While the idea of a university is invariably about learning, we recognise that learning may be impaired if our environment and our spaces are not liveable. Essentially, we recognize the incontrovertible truth that members of the DUT community spend the greater part of their time at DUT, engaged in DUT activities. This recognition imposes an obligation on all of us to create ‘*a compelling and future-oriented living and learning environment*’ and focus on ‘*providing contemporary work, learning and living spaces*’.

The year 2024 saw increased progressive student engagement platforms geared towards reducing violent student strife and thereby enhancing smooth student governance. The increase in the number of student clubs, societies, and associations led to increased student participation in *Student-led Conversations* and our quarterly *Lekgotla Dialogue Series* on a broad range of topics pertinent to student life and experience, resulting in a gear shift in our institutional culture towards open, constructive and productive engagement. The inaugural *Student Leadership Week* jointly hosted by the SRC and Student Governance supplemented and broadened horizons for the 2024 cohorts of the *VUNA Leadership Academy* and the inaugural *Student Entrepreneurship Programme* (SEP) participants. All the above, including my unmediated engagements with the SRC, helped to propel the 2023/2025 SRC to ply their trade quite differently from most of their predecessors over the years. Collectively, these, amongst others, also contributed towards a commendable reduction of student disciplinary cases involving this cohort of student leadership compared to previous years and thus laying a firm foundation for their successors.

The increased occupancy rates in our university owned and leased residences during 2024 led to increased participation in our annual *Residence League*, which has since become a flagship programme attracting participation in both indoor and outdoor competitive football and netball. As noted above, once we add the 9000+ beds, more of our students will be beneficiaries of this ‘*compelling*’ learning and living environment we are creating. The 2024 *Vice Chancellor’s Cup* hosted by the Midlands campuses provided a competitive atmosphere for our Durban and Midlands based sports teams in various sporting codes with a football match between management and unions as a curtain raiser. Although the attendance was below par, these games continue to foster commendable stakeholder management and relations towards our shared pursuit of a common destiny and social compact. The appointment and induction of Student Residence Advisors drawn largely from our post-graduate cohort of students through our *Student Temporary Employment Programme* (STEP), has created a vibrant student residence life and experience with increased student engagement in various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and thus leaving less room for a sedentary sub-culture at DUT.

In 2025, the Registry, through Student Services, will be launching an inaugural Civic Education programme in partnership with Higher Health. This NQF Level 5 programme is intended to equip participants with additional skills and competencies beyond their formal university programmes and thus set them apart from their peers in resonance to our shared quest to develop *adaptive graduates*.

*Distinctive Education* is also about attraction and retention of the *right people*, in the *right seats*, *performing their right roles right*, more importantly the best academics and key social partners who would want to partner with DUT. For instance, last year we amended our recruitment policy, which introduces serious retention incentives which can only be found in the private sector. Plans are afoot to recruit and finalise appointments in key vacancies in positions such as that of DVC: Teaching and Learning, Executive Deans of the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment and the Faculty of Arts and Design, Chief financial Officer, Chief Information Officer, Campus Director: Midlands, amongst others. Further, we will continue with several appointments at other levels in the context of implementing



the rest of Phase I of our institutional review and the restructure that ensued. We recognise the consternation this necessary change has stirred, but consequences of abandoning it include *Transformed Academia* not being achieved, which will not help to maintain DUT's greatness. Distortions exist that this is a decision of this 'new management', which, ironically, has an average of 5.4 years at DUT as of the end of 2024. Evidently, lies and deceit are rife. Records and minutes of Council meetings are available for anyone interested in understanding the origin and evolution of our institutional review process. Implementation is irreversible.

There are so many vacancies at all levels including those not subject to restructure. This suggests pervasive tardiness, if not insidious 'go-slows' and sabotage in our recruitment processes. We are aware of burgeoning and often nefarious casualisation and precarity in academic appointments. The pervasiveness of this practice has somewhat led to conclusions that this may be the university's position, especially because the practice seems to be on the rise in the broader sector. I wish to categorically state that this is not DUT's position. We are beginning to understand several nefarious reasons why some people are not appointed full-time even when there are established positions. We wish those who are being forced into 21<sup>st</sup> century slavery and extortion to come out and work with management to stop this. Management cannot be talking about improving the quality of teaching and learning on the one hand, and engage in practices that betray the very goal on the other hand. We cannot be saying our institutional review in support services is meant to provide us with resources to employ in academia on the one hand, and frustrate the employment of full-time staff on the other. We cannot be saying we must improve our student-to-staff ratio to 25:1 on the one hand, and worsen it on the other hand.

All hands will be on deck this year to ensure all domains work together to ensure this phenomenon does not lead to reduced levels of quality of the education we provide. With our revised recruitment policy and other innovative initiatives, I am confident that we will be able to attract and retain high talent we so urgently need for DUT to continue to perform at the top level. To stem the tide of poaching of academics by sister universities, we will take proactive steps to retain them. Watch the space!

### **Financial Sustainability**

This Strategic Objective compels us to grow and maintain our resources while we also intentionally invest in our people so that we improve our institutional productive capacity. It is also about prudent financial management practices, which by design, do not allow room for opportunism and corruption. I dare say the latter is partly what has led to me and my management team being referred to as this 'new management'. We earned this not-so-derogatory term for stopping plundering and remaining loyal to our 2020 commitment:

*"In addition, they have digitized systems and processes and a sustainable resource framework that will endure for generations to come. They are not self-serving. They do not exploit DUT for the now."*

As noted earlier above, we are happy to report that we successfully concluded salary negotiations during this quarter, with two Unions out of three signing the offer of 5%. The offer is in line with key 'sustainability principles', which Council determined and approved in March 2017 and have undergone more revisions over the period. The offer is also within the parameters of the salary mandate given to Management to keep the percentage of DUT's salary budget at a maximum of 62% to our operating income.

Even though I report on our financial sustainability, overall funding towards the block grant - the main 'blood vessel' of funding for universities - is seeing real reductions in favour of earmarked grants like NSFAS. A recent article<sup>4</sup> by a higher education specialist suggests as follows:

*"The decline in the block grant is mainly due to the introduction of fee-free higher education in 2018, which has resulted in the NSFAS budget increasing in real terms by 6%. This has skewed the budget allocation, with the block grant accounting for 54.6% and NSFAS 45.4% of the total allocation. This imbalance is untenable, and unless there is significant additional funding or student numbers are capped, the NSFAS allocation will be larger than the block grant. The universities are creaking at the seams - more students and fewer academic staff, particularly full-*

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<sup>4</sup> Amed Essop, 12 March 2025

*time staff, resulting in increased staff-to-student ratios; fewer administrative and support staff; and research equipment and infrastructure backlogs. If left unattended, this will adversely impact the quality of teaching and learning, including postgraduate training and research, which is among the best in Africa and has attracted a growing number of doctoral students from the continent.”*

The next few years are certainly going to be difficult. Hard choices will have to be made to safeguard the academic project, which is the only guarantor for DUT’s sustainability. Thus, we all have our work cut out to rebuild DUT’s social compact, which must rise above sectarian interests and prioritise the university’s objective interests, some of which are encapsulated in ENVISION2030.

To embed and institutionalise financial sustainability, DUT uses two key planning initiatives, which help us to manage our finances more prudently, especially under these trying times. For the first time in 2024, we considered and approved the Extended Annual Performance Plan (EAPP<sub>n+1</sub>) for the following year  $n+1$  in June of year  $n$ . This is to ensure that our EAPP<sub>n+1</sub> informs the budget for year  $n+1$ , which Council approves in September of each year  $n$ . In addition, we also introduced a multi-year planning and budgeting system, which our Finance Committee mooted in 2022. This approach is forward-looking not only in terms of plans, but also in how we resource those plans, projects and programmes.

At its 17 April 2024 meeting, EMC approved the *Finance Function Value Proposition* (FFVP), which was developed to improve financial services at the university and ensure maturity thereof. The same was subsequently approved by Council at its November meeting. One of the key drivers in the finance function improvement plan is business partnering. The appointment of finance business partners will assist in improving the budgeting process and unlocking spending so that it is in line with the budget. The 2024 expenditure was largely impacted negatively by change management deficiencies in the implementation of the ERP, the widespread incapacity to spend in line with procurement plans, including insidious ‘go-slows’ and sabotage. Underspensing is a major risk that may impede the realisation of our Strategic Objectives. Going forward, in keeping with the DUT-Way of ‘*shared responsibility and accountability*’, we will be addressing glaring gaps between key performance indicators in our Performance Management System and underspending. The two cannot co-exist. The very existence of this anomaly risks turning our LVF into a mockery. As the university community starts familiarising themselves and using the system, we are starting to see improvements, albeit at a slow pace.

## **Green Ecosystems**

The *Energy Management Framework* was developed and approved, which paved the way for the initiation of the energy master plan during 2024. With this in place, waste separation in all campuses has started, giving rise to numerous projects. The commencement of a pilot project was identified at Riverside campus in partnership with Pandit Deendayal Energy University (PDEU), a university in India that is fully solar-powered, following on DUT’s visit there in July 2023. In addition, we also launched a reverse vending machine to support our recycling efforts. In the last quarter of this year, we will launch a project involving water re-use and ground water harvesting, which will assist the university to re-use large quantities of water currently being drained to waste. This will result in reduced reliance on the municipality and will further reduce our water bill.

This year, we will focus on institution-wide coordination of DUT’s *Green Ecosystem Framework*. This includes embedding sustainability into research themes, innovation hubs, and community engagement projects. Key 2025 activities include launching a *Green Ecosystem Project Portfolio* that will align with circular economy principles, environmental innovation, and climate-resilient community partnerships. We will also be working closely with faculties to initiate ‘green’ research projects, strengthen sustainability criteria in ethics and funding reviews, and build capacity among staff and students through targeted workshops.

Additionally, we are incorporating ‘green’ metrics into institutional monitoring and evaluation sub-systems to track impact and align with SDG targets. Commercialisation of green innovations and solutions through DUT’s technology stations and Innobiz platforms will be fostered. These efforts are tied to our broader strategic intent of positioning DUT as a leader in sustainability-driven knowledge production and application. A detailed ‘green’ project register is being developed for quarterly reporting and alignment with EAPP2025.

## 6. SOCIETY

*Society* is the second of the last two ‘*influencing and impacting*’ Perspectives. The impact we consciously seek to make in society is represented through three constituent Strategic Objectives that make up the *Society* Perspective, namely, *Engaged University*, *Innovation and Entrepreneurship* and *Adaptive Graduates*. Combined, they answer the key question: for what purpose, our *raison d’être*, does DUT exist? This university does not exist for its own sake. It exists because there are multiple, novel and perennial problems we need to resolve by generating creative and innovative sustainable solutions across political, economic, social, technological and environmental aspects of our society. The earlier sections, particularly under ‘*Innovative Research and Curricula*’ and ‘*Distinctive Education*’ radiate some light on our philosophical approach in our dogged quest to ‘*transform societies and their economies*’ and thus ‘*contribute towards improving lives and livelihoods*’ of the broader society.

In advancing the *Upended* Phase of ENVISION2030, this year will see us intensifying our efforts to position DUT as an *engaged and socially responsive university*. Strategic partnerships with our Quad-Helix partners, involving government, industry, and civil society, with ourselves, will be deepened, with a focus on co-creating innovative solutions to societal challenges. Through these collaborations, DUT aims to enhance the visibility and relevance of its *Transformed Academia*.

The DUT DNA embedded in ‘*creativity*’ and ‘*innovation and entrepreneurship*’ are what DUT is now well-known for remains a core priority. In 2025, we will expand DUT’s innovation ecosystem, including scaling up activities at technology stations, innovation hubs, and entrepreneurship centres. Notably, the *Centre for Social Entrepreneurship and Rapid Incubation* (CSERI) has already launched its call for the 2025–2026 incubator cohort, targeting 50 small and medium enterprises (SMEs). At the same time, 52 SMEs from the 2024/2025 cohort are graduating this year, underscoring the momentum of DUT’s contribution to enterprise development. We will also strengthen support for commercialisation, licensing, and integration of innovation in academic programmes. These actions are aimed at positioning DUT as a national and regional leader in innovation-led development.

In support of ‘*adaptive graduates*’, the year 2025 will see the implementation of a range of targeted initiatives to enhance postgraduate development and build a strong pipeline of emerging researchers. This includes structured mentorship programmes, research capacity-building workshops, and access to experiential and work-integrated learning opportunities. In addition, while we could never guarantee anyone’s employment, we will expand student employability initiatives through strategic collaborations. International exposure will be further enhanced through renewed global partnerships, such as with Suranaree University of Technology (SUT), enabling DUT students to engage, for example, in Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) placements at companies like Western Digital in Thailand.

These interventions are reinforced by DUT’s continued leadership in higher education excellence. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the *Times Higher Education (THE) Rankings*, DUT remains the top-ranked University of Technology in South Africa. In the 2024 *THE Sub-Saharan Africa Rankings*, which assessed 122 universities from 22 countries in Africa with respectable university systems, DUT was ranked 11<sup>th</sup> on the continent and 5<sup>th</sup> in South Africa – a position it held in 2020 when we were first ranked. This consistent performance reflects the institution’s ongoing commitment to our *Transformed Academia*, which encapsulated several of our strategic objectives.

In the country, we are happy to witness an increasing number of our academics who are considered for important policy spaces and those who are participating in crucial public discussions on matters that concern the well-being of our nation. Once every six months, Management produces an *Engagement Report* we submit to Council. This report tracks not only the activities, projects or programmes we are involved in, it also helps all of us to have a sense of real or transient impacts we are making in our commitment to ‘*transform our societies and their economies*’ and, thus ultimately, ‘*contributing towards improving lives and livelihoods*’.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Our LVF moves us away from the old and hackneyed thinking that technical capacity and ability alone is the important driver for successful organisations. Values and principles and character have become more important, too, at DUT. There is no denying the importance of this new requirement for us at DUT. Values and principles and character are the cornerstone for performing organisations that achieve soaring outcomes.

Should we be striving for balance between competence and ethics? The retired Judge of the Constitutional Court, Justice Albie Sachs, offers some advice:

*“You can’t. Competence and ethics are not to be balanced. The worst combination is a competent crook. No amount of competence can justify unethical behaviour”.*

One of the imperatives we must not tire to pursue is to design and implement systems to bring order, structure and discipline, which must apply between and amongst individuals and structures. The mere existence of these tensions does not imply that we need to give up on the *social compact* we need to make DUT greater than what it already is. Further, it does not mean we must overlook misconduct in preference for ‘ephemeral’ unity we see other organisations pursuing in a vacuum, and competence not predicated on values and principles, and character.

Our values and principles must entrench open, robust and honest conversations about the real state of our university primarily our DNA and our LVF and, in addition, the rest of our Perspectives and strategic objectives in ENVISION2030. This, unfortunately for some, is the only road to greatness.

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