



DUT's State of the University Address 2026

An Upended DUT moving towards its Transformed Phase

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I. Introduction

Chancellor, Chairperson of Council, Mr Wiseman Madinane; Members of Council; Members of all our statutory structures; Members of Management; our staff and students; our Quad-Helix partners - consisting of government and its agencies, business/industry and other organs of society - I extend my warm greetings to you all.

We stand at a critical moment in our ENVISION2030 journey. As we enter 2026 - the final year of our *Upended Phase* - we reflect on a period marked by significant tests of our collective resolve, character and fortitude. At the same time, we look ahead to the culmination of the current phase, as we prepare to transition into a *Transformed DUT* by 2030.

This State of the University Address (SOUA), coinciding with our 21st anniversary, holds particular significance. It also marks a decade since I assumed the role of Vice-Chancellor & Principal of the Durban University of Technology (DUT). It is, therefore, a moment not only of reporting on the state of DUT, but of reflections and musings - personal, institutional and both.

SOUA provides an opportunity for us to take stock of where DUT stands, celebrate our achievements, face our challenges honestly and chart a clear path forward for the university and everyone it serves. Our progress has always been guided by four strategic 'Perspectives' that inform every decision and action we take, keeping us squarely focused on '*contributing towards improving the lives and livelihoods of the broader society*'. These are *Stewardship, Systems and Processes, Sustainability and Society*. These Perspectives act as our scaffolding, ensuring that every move is intentional, integrated and aligned with our vision of a fully *Different, Upended and Transformed DUT*.

Over the years, I have been privileged to witness a lot happen at and to DUT, to myself and to many other members of the DUT community, hence this reflective posture. As I have said many times before, paraphrasing Pascal Finette, '*people are the source*', of both progress and retrogression. I have been privileged to see people and structures they occupy perform these diametrically opposed roles, sometimes leading to disastrous consequences.

I.1. Tests of resolve, character and fortitude

When I took office in 2016, DUT was still in its formative years, barely twelve years into its existence after the merger in 2002 and becoming a university of technology in 2004. As I reflect on that journey, I do so mindful that this is not simply my reflection, but a collective one: a reflection on how far DUT has come, how it has matured and how it has positioned itself for the future.

Like all UoTs twenty-one years ago, DUT was still shaping its identity. As a young university born out of a merger of two institutions that were not universities, we were defining who we were, who we served and what kind of university we intended to become. Those early years were marked by both promise and uncertainty and by important conversations about standards, purpose and direction.

On my assumption of the role, the university found itself ushering in a new era. It would have been easier to preserve what already existed but leadership demands more than maintaining the *status quo*. With a warning not to upset the apple cart of those individuals and structures that were in power – not necessarily in authority - it would have been easy to just assimilate the institutional culture and practices and safeguard my family's livelihood.

Over the period, I have been privileged to witness ENVISION2030 develop organically and make DUT *Different* and now *Upending*. That was progress. Equally, I have been privileged to see DUT being subjected to retrogressive and even destructive attempts. I have been privileged to read so much written about DUT in the media that has been far from the truth. I have been privileged to find myself subjected to two forensic investigations, one in 2020/21 and the second in 2023/24, and learning a lot from them. With these experiences, I always find it intriguing when some claim unfairness, heavy-handedness and victimisation just because investigations into their work are being done. We all must face the music when the situation demands. What must acquit us in such circumstances is not our moaning, but virtue and probity, facts and evidence.

Throughout this period and despite the tests of resolve, character, fortitude and probity I refer to, our focus remained steadfast and strategic: protecting the integrity of the university and safeguarding its future. Our staff – those I call ‘*the right people, in the right seats, performing their right roles right*’ - continued to teach with commitment. Our students also continued to pursue their ambitions, with a student leadership corps that has grown substantively in leaps and bounds. Our leadership – *the right people...* - has remained focused on moving the university forward in character and fortitude. If we mark 21 years of DUT today, it is not because the journey has been easy but because the university has shown the fortitude required on this journey of excellence.

In an *Iminingo* issue at the beginning of the year, I indicated that DUT’s 21st Anniversary celebrations would coincide with the State of the University Address (SOUA). However, at the time, I had not yet been apprised of the associated costs, which were estimated to exceed R1 million. When this became clear, it coincided with a period of significant strain at the university, particularly, as many of our students were facing serious financial challenges.

Under such circumstances, it would have been unconscionable to proceed with a celebration of that magnitude. I, therefore, took the decision to redirect these funds towards supporting student access for those in need. This, in essence, is how I have chosen to commemorate 21 years of DUT’s existence. While this remains a once-off intervention, and while the university cannot sustainably assume the dual role of both provider and purchaser of its own academic programmes, we must remain responsive to the socio-economic realities confronting our students. In the spirit of institutional sustainability and responsibility, I call on all of us to prioritise expenditure that delivers meaningful, lasting value and impact over short-term performative gestures and events, and optical aesthetics.

1.2. Self-agency and self-bureaucracy in advancing the university

I cannot help but ask myself whether we are still continuing along the path of asserting our self-agency and self-bureaucracy as a university community. Many years ago, in my inaugural address of 18 March 2017, I shared a reflection drawn from my formative years, shaped by a home in which discipline was not only enforced through constant instruction but also cultivated through expectation, responsibility and accountability. I noted the following:

“I am a product of a disciplinarian school principal father and a disciplinarian school teacher mother. When in his book titled: Good to Great, Jim Collins says if you are disciplined you don’t need bureaucracy and controls, I remember that I experienced that in my childhood. Once, my parents were away during a weekend. On return, my father called me. He asked which household tasks I had accomplished during their absence. I was perplexed because he had not asked me to perform any tasks for the weekend. With a bit of tough love on the buttocks with his cane, he told me that it was my duty to look around and find something to do or fix. He said he didn’t have to tell me about things I am old enough to discover for myself. From then, I became pretty much a self-bureaucracy. I became self-controlled requiring little or no external bureaucracy at all for tasks I had before me”.

Disciplined people require fewer controls and less external bureaucracy. The lesson was simple yet enduring: leadership and maturity are demonstrated not by compliance with instruction but by the ability to recognise what must be done and to act without being prompted. From that experience emerged the ideas of ‘self-agency’ and ‘self-bureaucracy’ - a form of self-help and -regulation grounded in initiative, ethical judgement, responsibility and accountability. A decade into this Vice-Chancellorship, the relevance of that message remains undiminished.

The question before us is whether, as a university, we have internalised these concepts and many others that have come along over the last 10 years, particularly. Have we developed a culture where responsibility precedes regulation, where initiative reduces red tape and where accountability is self-imposed rather than externally enforced? As we are moving into a *Transformed Phase*, are these tenets becoming second nature? This reflection is not nostalgic. It is evaluative. It challenges us to assess whether our systems enable excellence or compensate for its absence; whether we are, collectively, the disciplined *Creative. Distinctive. Impactful* university we aspire to be by 2030 and beyond.

As we conclude the current *Upended Phase*, deliberately anchored on *Transformed Academia*, it is time to assess how far we have come in fulfilling the goals we outlined in this regard in 2024. At that time, I reminded us all that the central purpose of any university is academia. Everything we do must ultimately strengthen teaching, learning, innovation and

research, and engagement because that is the core of our institutional existence. *Transformed Academia* is what I call the bedrock of our institutional revolution.

I have said on a number of occasions that this is far more than a slogan. It is a fundamental reimagining of our academic systems, ensuring they are fully integrated, agile and purpose-fit for 2030. *Transformed Academia* represents the final and most sophisticated stage of ENVISION2030, where our “physiology” - our internal processes, policies and procedures - operates seamlessly and responds innovatively and intelligently to a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world. It is, therefore, not only about our “anatomy” - the structures and programmes we are all too familiar with.

At the most fundamental, indivisible and indissoluble level in our hearts, minds and souls, it is about reshaping our DNA to be a university that is truly ‘people-centred and engaged’, truly ‘innovative and entrepreneurial’. It is about creating a dynamic interface between lecture rooms and/or laboratories on the one hand and the society we serve in all its stratifications, on the other hand. Above all, it is about each of us exercising ‘self-agency’ and ‘self-bureaucracy’ to ensure that DUT does not just survive but is organically propelled to greatness into the decades ahead.

To advance our academic mission, we must, therefore, cultivate an ethos and culture where ‘the right people are in the right seats, performing their right roles right’ take initiative without being prodded. This means moving beyond outdated teaching and learning methodologies and content that do not serve our students nor society. It means offering curricula that produce ‘Adaptive Graduates’ who are endowed with ‘the acumen to initiate, influence, respond or react to changes in the world’. The ones who are *Creative. Distinctive. Impactful.*

2. Stewardship

The *Stewardship* Perspective is the first of ENVISION2030’s ‘enabling and effecting’ Perspectives and is grounded on three interlinked strategic objectives, namely *Lived Values*, *Institutional Culture* and *Creativity*.

In its essence and depth, this Perspective is the engine of all that DUT can achieve. It is our wellspring of creativity, ethos and culture. It is about that which, I repeat, must be indivisible and indissoluble in the hearts, minds and souls of DUT’s people. In ‘performing our right roles right’ as true stewards of our university, we demonstrate the shared values and principles that guide how we lead, work, relate to one another and to others. Institutional culture is, in this context, seen as the everyday expression of these values and principles in action, reinforcing our shared understanding and conviction that *Lived Values* and *Institutional Culture* are not separate concepts, but deeply interconnected drivers of personal and institutional behaviour. Therefore, the extent to which we shall proudly consider ourselves true stewards of the university is the extent to which these *Lived Values* become second nature.

2.1. Lived Values

At the core of our Stewardship Perspective lies DUT’s DNA predicated on our values and principles, which, in turn, are embedded in our *Living Values Framework* (LVF). If ENVISION2030 is our direction, then the LVF is the compass ensuring we arrive there with integrity. Who we say we are must be reflected in how we act - every day, at every level.

One honest reality is that in a viable ecosystem, systems could easily be redesigned and infrastructure could easily be upgraded. People, however, as the source of everything remain the most complex part of that ecosystem. There are individuals who seem determined to take us backwards; those whose energy appears permanently directed at exploiting DUT and its resources rather than advancing the academic mission and the public mandate we have. As Václav Havel once wrote in a book titled *The Power of the Powerless*:

“If the main pillar of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth.”

This insight resonates deeply with our experience at DUT. For too long, as mentioned earlier, our university has been the target of unfounded allegations, misinformation and deliberate misrepresentation. Attempts by some to exploit

the university for personal gain rather than advance its academic mission have abounded. By committing to our *Living Values Framework* (LVF), we confront these lies directly. Living the truth is not just a moral imperative; it is the foundation upon which DUT will transform, ensuring that our university serves its students, staff and the rest of society faithfully. Systems endure only when individuals take responsibility for their conduct. Institutional change begins with personal integrity.

I referred earlier to our many tests of resolve, character, fortitude and probity. Indeed, internecine skirmishes and real battles have sometimes consumed the energy that should have been directed towards institutional advancement and academic excellence. The last bout of these battles took place between 2023 and 2025. Narratives circulated both externally and within our own walls. Many were complete canards based on unfounded mischaracterisations of the university and conduct of some of the members of management. Yes, some members of management have had to face the wrath of our disciplinary processes when it became clear their values and principles had not been consonant with our LVF. We have always acted without fear or favour in such cases.

As mentioned just above, over the last 3 years or so there were undeniable tensions between some members of Council and Management, which culminated in litigation toward the end of 2024 concerning my alleged suspension. This was not Council as contemplated by the Higher Education Act, but rogue elements within it that purported to remove the chair of Council. In their foolhardy ways, they thought they had opened the way to my removal, that of the Registrar and some of the members of management. Some of our own executive/senior staff lay treacherously in waiting to take over and do the bidding of these rogue elements.

It is trite to mention that both the Labour Court and the High Court ruled in favour of Management and some Council members who supported it. It should be worth noting that when many adults in Council appeared confused during this period, it was the then SRC President, Mr Solomzi Zoleka, who became the superior voice of reason, young as he is. This just shows how DUT's SRC has matured. Following these judgments and the Code of Conduct processes that ensued to deal with many violations during this period, several Council members, including Ministerial appointees, resigned one after the other in 2025. These events formed part of what I described previously as the 'black swan events' of this *Upended Phase*.

Our engagements with labour - particularly with Tenusa - have not been without difficulty. At the centre of this has been Management's decision, grounded in sound legal and governance principles, to review and renegotiate the Recognition Agreements that were originally concluded nearly two decades ago, between 2005 and 2007 and had remained unchanged since then. In September 2025, a formal notice was issued to initiate engagement. Regrettably, there was limited progress from the unions and in the absence of meaningful traction, the existing agreements lapsed. Unions were formally given until 31 December 2025 to sign the agreement.

As communicated on 20 January 2026, the university remained committed to constructive engagement and to finalising new Recognition Agreements that are legally sound and in the best interests of both staff and the university. To this end, a CCMA-facilitated meeting with all three unions led to broad agreement on the Terms of Reference. Characteristically, Tenusa declined to sign, requesting assurances that the process would not affect matters already before the CCMA; assurances the university could not provide. As a result, DUT, together with Nteu and Nehawu, have proceeded with parts of this process. A revised Recognition Agreement is expected by the end of the second quarter. In the absence of these agreements, following approval by the Executive Committee of Council of a 4% across-the-board increase, effective 1 January 2026, the 2026 salary increment was implemented without negotiation with unions.

Despite all the challenges we face internally, many are watching DUT with keen interest. Our values and principles journey gained international recognition when DUT became a signatory to the Magna Charta Universitatum (MCU), spearheaded by the University of Bologna, Italy. In collaboration with the Magna Charta Observatory, which hosts the MCU, we hosted an international webinar on 27 August 2025 showcasing our dialogue-based co-development of the LVF. We did not import a value system. We built one organically and collectively that many universities around the world are beginning to appreciate.

2.2. Institutional Culture

I always argue that *Institutional Culture* is, for us, indivisible from our values and principles. It is their lived expression. If our values and principles are not visible in our daily conduct, in our decision-making, in our leadership style and in our levels of accountability, then they are merely words on paper. *Lived Values* and *Institutional Culture* are, quite simply, two sides of the same coin.

In 2025 we were deliberate about confronting aspects of our old culture that were not serving our strategic ambitions. '*Shared responsibility and accountability*' requires shared honesty, integrity and accountability. Where behaviours hindered progress, we confronted those who exhibited them, regardless of seniority. Where there was incompetence or institutional sabotage, we acted decisively. Where systems enabled mediocrity or avoidance of accountability, we intervened.

We undertook a comprehensive review of Policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to ensure alignment with ENVISION2030 and our LVF. Our policies must reflect who we say we are. Recognising that culture is not shaped by documents alone, I convened Faculty Town Halls in May 2025 and Support Services Town Halls in July 2025. These were not ceremonial engagements. They were candid conversations meant to support processes around *Transformed Academia*. We addressed difficult matters including academic precarity, delayed payments to staff, Wi-Fi and internet instability.

It is disappointing, though, that hardly any of the frameworks shared to resolve these matters have been implemented. We remain with undeserved academic precarity, short-term contracts even in fields where we allocated additional funds for new permanent posts in 2025. Network and Wi-Fi instability continues despite millions of rand allocated to improve these. We remain with a lack of seniority in several academic departments, the bedrock of academia. The list remains long even though so many have been appointed, earning huge salaries.

One of the interventions designed to empower academic departments, is a Leadership Development Programme for Heads of Departments. It was introduced in 2022 and continues to ensure that leadership at DUT at that fundamental academic level is strategic, ethical and forward-looking. These positions are not merely administrative, but require astute and strategic academic leadership.

You will recall that one of my incessant calls over the years has been about online voting and holding two-year terms to ensure stability. As noted earlier, I am happy that we have stabilised student leadership, somewhat, through the introduction of these measures, the latter measure being a first in South Africa. The result has been greater continuity, maturity and more constructive rather than performative engagement, all to the benefit of our student body.

In 2026, our work shifts from disruption to deep embedding. We will embed and institutionalise many tenets of ENVISION2030 that speak to institutional culture. We will deliberately break silos and pursue many projects that require collaboration. Like '*self-agency*' and '*self-bureaucracy*', '*shared responsibility and accountability*' must become instinctive and second nature, not contrived and performative.

Alignment without implementation is meaningless. We will actively monitor policy compliance. Misalignments and deviations will be corrected. We will strengthen our internal control environment through enhanced SOPs to guard against, for example, fiscal dumping and the perception of the university as '*a concentrated and exploitable resource*' as Prof Jonathan Jansen's book titled *Corrupted: a study of chronic dysfunction in South African universities* suggests. As indicated above, such conduct is not only sacrilegious, given our context of privation for the majority of our students, it is downright criminal. Ethical leadership will not be optional. It will be presumed and expected.

We are also addressing satisfaction gaps within our institution. By the end of 2026, we aim to reduce divergence in staff satisfaction - across campuses and across race, gender and generation. Students appear to lead the way in that their level of satisfaction is more appealing than that among staff. Equity in experience is as important as equity in opportunity. Our aspiration is clear: at least 75 - 80% of staff should affirm that DUT is a place where actions align

consistently with our stated values and principles. Of course, there will remain staff caught in a time warp. It is a no-brainer that those will remain dissatisfied and may as well do well for themselves to look for comfort elsewhere.

2.3. Creativity

Creativity, for us, is not an abstract concept. It is the engine of innovation, entrepreneurship and institutional renewal for our staff and our students, in partnership with members of the Quad-Helix.

Creativity has also been evident in how we run our university. The Autumn Graduation ceremonies in 2025 were executed with dignity, decorum and precision, a reminder that operational excellence is itself a form of institutional ingenuity. Our *Adaptive Management Learning Session*, held on 30 October 2025, allowed us to reflect honestly on our 2030 targets and recalibrate where necessary. We are learning as we build.

We have also strengthened academic integration by participating in *Embedding Entrepreneurship into the Curriculum Initiative*, while extending entrepreneurial training to 30 adopted schools - shaping not only DUT graduates, but future innovators beyond our campuses. This commitment is most visible in our *Transformed Academia* initiative. Here, 51 active projects grounded in *Project-Based Learning* and *Design Thinking* are being tracked not only for academic success, but for their tangible contribution to society.

Our students are increasingly engaging with the world, gaining exposure through global innovation platforms in Thailand, Finland, and the United States. At the same time, our curriculum continues to evolve, rooted in a constructivist philosophy that places creativity, inquiry and application at its core. Our research, too, is advancing toward real-world impact. Projects such as *SmartQx*, now nearing commercialisation, alongside innovations like the *Banana Fibre Sanitary Pad* and *Bio-Brick* initiatives, demonstrate how our work responds directly to societal needs. This momentum has been recognised. We are proud recipients of the *NRF Focused Research Advancement Award* for two consecutive years, alongside multiple accolades for excellence in communication and stakeholder engagement.

As we look ahead, our responsibility is clear. We must move beyond isolated moments of brilliance and cultivate a culture of creativity that is embedded, sustained, and shared across DUT. We cannot allow operational bottlenecks to define our pace. Instead, we will confront them with a problem-solving mindset - turning constraints into opportunities for innovation. This requires a shift in how we work.

We will continue to strengthen interdisciplinary research, rethink how policy is developed through inclusive co-creation and explore meaningful incentives that encourage creativity and entrepreneurship across our community. In all of this, our ambition is clear: to build a university where creativity is not exceptional but expected; where innovation is not occasional, but continuous; and where our collective efforts translate into meaningful impact for society. By the end of 2026, for example, we aim to see 35% of our publications reflecting interdisciplinary collaboration and evidence of divergent thinking in research. We intend to maintain a 75-80% perceived support level for innovative thinking across research, teaching, learning and operations. And, we aim for a similar satisfaction rate regarding DUT's entrepreneurial ethos. We are not merely *Upending* old systems. We are building a university with people who '*think different*' as Steve Jobs would have, and act boldly.

3. Systems and Processes

The *Systems and Processes* Perspective serves as a critical backbone of the university and stands as the second of our two core '*enabling and effecting*' Perspectives. Its purpose is to lay the foundation for a performing, learning, resilient and durable organisation. By optimising our systems and making them viable, we create conditions for our people to perform at their very best and for our university to yield societal impact. This work is structured around three strategic objectives, namely *Innovative Curricula and Research*, the *Digital Environment* and *State-of-the-Art Infrastructure*.

3.1. Innovative Curricula and Research

As we continue strengthening *Systems and Processes*, it is important to remind ourselves of the central role played by this strategic objective termed *Innovative Curricula and Research*. This objective sits at the heart of our academic project. It challenges us to design curricula that do more than transfer knowledge. Systems must also stimulate

creativity, encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, and generate practical solutions for the real-world challenges our society faces.

This strategic objective is closely connected to our academic transformation blueprint we call *Transformed Academia*. We are intentionally rethinking our academic sub-systems to ensure they are relevant and purpose-fit for 2030. At the centre of this blueprint is the *DUT Philosophy of Education (Phi-Ed)*, which guides our shift away from rote learning toward active, engaged and solution-driven education. Through this approach, we are shaping graduates who do not simply recall information, but who can think critically and respond meaningfully to the demands of a changing world.

As noted above, I must also admit that there has been lethargy in the process of aligning our academic project to the tenets of *Transformed Academia*. There remain members of the DUT community who resist change and transformation. We must not allow the university to dawdle in inertia.

In 2026, we have intentionally allocated resources to ensure that the tenets of *Transformed Academia* are realised. An overreliance on expedient solutions has, in some instances, undermined institutional processes and weakened accountability. A quintessential example is the appointment of questionable academics in senior critical positions. In not so long a past, DUT had 'lecturers' with only diploma qualifications and not even master's degrees. Academic standards were inconsistent and some of these 'lecturers' were providing postgraduate supervision while still needing it themselves. Recognising that true excellence demands expertise, in 2020 we re-ignited a process dating back to 2008 designed to ensure that every lecturer would hold at least a master's degree. Today, DUT proudly stands as a university of highly qualified academics, advancing not just in name but in the quality of education we deliver and the future we are shaping.

The work we began has allowed us to take a bold step forward in reshaping our academic project. In 2025, we moved deliberately to align our curriculum and research with our unique *DUT Philosophy of Education*, our *Phi-Ed*. But let me be clear: *Phi-Ed* is not a slogan. It is not a document that sits on a shelf. It is a statement of who we are becoming. Thanks to the inertia I referred to earlier, implementation should have started in 2024. My Town Hall meetings in May 2025 should have been a trigger for more work to be initiated in 2025.

This year marks a deliberate gearshift. We are moving from alignment to full institutional integration. Across every faculty, in every programme and at every level of leadership, *Phi-Ed* is becoming embedded; in how we teach, how we research, how we lead and how we serve. This transformation is not cosmetic. It is strategic. It is structural. It is programmatic. It is cultural. It is intentional. At its heart is a simple ambition: to graduate individuals who have 'the acumen to initiate, influence or respond and react to rapid changes in the world' we call *Adaptive Graduates*.

As pointed out earlier, *Project-Based Learning and Design Thinking* are no longer the *ad hoc* experiments they were in 2020 when we introduced them. They are central to how we engage students. These approaches confront real-world problems directly and demand practical, collaborative solutions. By the end of last year, we tracked more than 50 such projects across our faculties. This is measurable, impactful and rooted in relevance. Our curriculum now consciously embraces multiple perspectives - global, continental and local - while deepening research literacy and strengthening intellectual engagement for buttressing practical outcomes. We are not only teaching or facilitating learning, we are cultivating thinkers who will not just think, but do, too.

None of this is possible without our academic staff. They are the engine of this transformation. Through sustained professional development - including partnerships with many universities across the globe, our academics are sharpening their practice and leading innovation and entrepreneurship in their disciplines. As noted earlier, our Heads of Department, the nerve centres of our faculties, are being empowered to drive this shift with clarity and confidence.

Crucially, *Phi-Ed* is now also anchored in our governance and planning frameworks. The *Learning and Teaching Framework*, approved in late 2025, gives practical expression to ENVISION2030 and embeds DUT's *Phi-Ed* in our institutional life. It shapes how we support students. It shapes how we develop staff. It shapes how we measure success.

Our 2026 integrated plan ensures that this is not rhetorical. It is both strategic and operational. Curriculum transformation, professional learning and collaborative communities are now active across all faculties. We are not tinkering at the margins. We are repositioning the university for the future. And, we are doing so with purpose.

Our focus in 2026 is to embed and institutionalise this creative momentum. We will promote and recognise solutions-focused practices across teaching, learning, research and operations. We will continue to embed our *Phi-Ed* in the full staff and student life cycle, ensuring that innovation, adaptiveness, divergent and entrepreneurial thinking are not peripheral, but foundational.

Research and innovation at DUT continue to show steady and encouraging progress, reflecting the deliberate investments and the strategic focus we have placed on strengthening our academic project. Nationally, our work has been recognised through consecutive *Focused Research Advancement Awards* from the *National Research Foundation* including recognition of doctoral excellence for some individual academics. Official reports of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) clearly show that DUT sits among leading universities in South Africa in research outputs while remaining the top university of technology in this category.

In 2025, DUT was awarded seven (7) DSTI-NRF SARCHI Chairs, with a further six (6) provisionally awarded subject to conditions currently being addressed in ongoing engagements with the NRF. In addition, we host one Chair supported by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), together with two legacy NRF SARCHI Chairs that remain active. Council also approved a set of nine (9) *Disruptive Projects* aimed at revolutionising DUT's academia. As Americans would say, 'you ain't seen nothing yet' about DUT. Alongside these developments, the number of NRF-rated researchers at DUT has grown from 55 in 2024 to 79 in 2025, a 44% increase in just one year, despite some resignations in this category. Together, these milestones signal a research and innovation environment that is steadily maturing in depth, scale and national relevance.

3.2. Digital Environment

As just an anecdote, one of our former staff members, who left DUT for three years and recently returned, could hardly recognise the systems we now use across the university. That, in itself, speaks volumes about the intentional pace of change at DUT. We are not simply upgrading systems in limited fields; we are fundamentally reimagining our digital environment, adopting integrated systems that empower our people to perform at their very best and support a modern, agile university.

In previous SOUAs, I reported on the rollout of our *Enterprise Resource Planning* (ERP) system. Phase 2, covering Finance, Procurement and Human Capital, was successfully completed in 2025, leaving Phase 3, the new Student Information System (SIS), which proved to be more complex. I am pleased to report that the SIS achieved full go-live in January 2026. While there were, as expected, some teething challenges, the system has delivered on its mandate, providing a platform to improve student administration and institutional efficiency.

While progress has been made, the university continues to experience persistent connectivity challenges, as noted earlier. These remain a concern. However, concerted efforts are underway to address and resolve these challenges. In parallel, we have undertaken the first major network infrastructure upgrade since our 2002 merger, addressing long-standing network and Wi-Fi issues. Stabilisation efforts are ongoing, with a target of above 98% reliability. I have also received encouraging feedback from the Midlands campuses regarding improved connectivity. Cybersecurity has been strengthened with institution-wide deployment of endpoint detection and response (EDR) software, while outdated communication systems have been replaced with Operator Connect Telephony. Additionally, research management has been modernised through the Converis system, streamlining ethical clearance processes and publication tracking.

Over the next phase of implementation, we will intensify *Business Process Automation* across all ERP modules and critical sub-systems so that our workflows become more agile, efficient and responsive to institutional needs. At the same time, we are working toward deeper system integration, with a clear target that by the end of 2026 at least 35% of the 39 identified IT systems will be fully integrated into the core ERP environment. To strengthen reliability and security, the university will finalise its hybrid multi-cloud storage strategy, ensuring both resilience and scalability as we continue our cloud migration journey. Ultimately, these investments are about people and productivity. We

are, therefore, aiming to achieve at least a 60% staff satisfaction rate with our digitally enabled work environment, while significantly reducing downtime caused by technical disruptions so that our academic and administrative work can proceed without interruption. DUT must be a university of technology in name and in deed.

At DUT, the conversation around the adoption of Generative AI is growing in a practical and thoughtful way. Rather than treating AI as a trend, the focus is on how it can genuinely support teaching, learning, research and administration. Staff is beginning to explore how AI tools can assist with data analysis, improve student support and enhance curriculum delivery, while still maintaining academic integrity and critical thinking. There is also an understanding that adoption must be gradual and guided, with clear discussions about ethics, access and skills development for both lecturers and students.

3.3. State-of-the-Art Infrastructure

Earlier this year, one of our executives sent me a picture of Cane Growers Hall at the ML Sultan campus. Like anyone seeing a pristine, polished image these days, my first reaction was: “Wait, is this not AI-generated?” The reply came back: “No, it is real - it is from our first-year orientation programme.” Sometimes we do such remarkable work that even we have trouble believing it is real. It is a gentle reminder that the incredible transformation around us is not just imagination, it is the result of real investment and effort.

This anecdote makes the point about our journey as we ensure we have *state-of-the-art infrastructure*. We should not be surprised, though, when some among us who remain caught in a time warp of an old and dilapidated DUT, fail to see the ‘D’ in DUT as meaning *Different* and continue to moan.

Perhaps the most visible demonstration of our commitment to *Holistic Student Support* (HSS) is the steady modernisation of our campuses. Across our campuses, students are learning in technology-enabled lecture halls, conducting research with modern equipment in modern laboratories, and living in upgraded residences that affirm their dignity. These are not simply construction projects. They are strategic investments in excellence, innovation and the long-term sustainability of our university.

That said, we cannot speak about building without addressing those who seek to destroy. In February 2026, a small group of criminals went around destroying property under the guise of fighting for legitimate student issues. These acts of vandalism and hooliganism by a small minority are unacceptable. They undermine our collective progress and divert scarce resources away from the very students we are trying to support. We cannot normalise the destruction of what we are working so hard to create. We know the majority of our people resent all this. But if they remain silent, do not report and out these perpetrators, we will not be able to stop them in their dastardly sabotage of our academic project. With your help, firm and decisive action has been taken and more will be taken.

As we continue *Upending*, the physical manifestation of our ambition is undeniable. Our campuses - particularly Steve Biko, Ritson and Indumiso - have been transformed into vibrant, active construction sites. This is a visible testament to the full-scale implementation of our *Long-Term Spatial Plan 2020–2040*. More is coming.

Our progress on major infrastructure projects has continued at a steady and encouraging pace across the university. Under Project DUT481, which consists of six building sub-projects, by late 2025, overall completion had reached 35%. With the Ritson campus parkade completed, we have unlocked approximately 400 additional parking bays to better serve our university community. As of 2026, we are considering whether it is not opportune to add two more parking levels, which are actually part of the original plan.

Progress on Project DUT355 has required resilience and decisive intervention. Following the termination of a contractor who essentially started this project in 2020 and could not finish it within the targeted period and costs, compounded by regulatory delays involving the Department of Employment and Labour, the university took steps to regain internal control of the project. Construction resumed in November 2025, and we remain firmly committed to ensuring completion by the end of June 2026.

Equally important has been our investment in modern living and learning spaces across DUT. We are revitalising core academic spaces, strengthening postgraduate and research infrastructure and investing in specialised facilities aligned with digital innovation, emerging technologies and industry partnership. As examples, our academic “nerve centre” has been upgraded with smart screens and short-throw projection technology within the Faculty of Health Sciences, while smart classrooms have been developed in the Department of Town and Regional Planning to enhance interactive teaching. In addition, specialised high-technology environments are now operational, including the renovated Radiography Clinic and the Smart Robotics Lab established in partnership with MerSETA, strengthening our capacity for advanced learning, innovation and applied research.

A safe and accessible university is not optional. It is the foundation upon which academic success and institutional excellence are built. Safety and accessibility are being strengthened through upgraded security technologies and biometric controls under our renewed Protection Services leadership, ensuring that everyone will feel safe and secure in our learning and living environments.

Regarding student accommodation, in 2018 we took the courageous step of launching our Public-Private Partnership initiative involving over 10 000 student beds. A proposal in this regard was submitted to the then Minister of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in December 2022. After almost three years, in October 2025, DHET in partnership with Treasury essentially suggested we apply for a R4.5 billion additional Budget for Infrastructure (BFI) facility in spite of about R3.5 billion that had already been committed by four developers and their bankers. Evidently, our understanding of arithmetic is just not good enough to decipher the logic behind this. For us, long term institutional integrity and financial sustainability are inviolable. However, despite all these challenges, we refuse to give up exploring ways of providing better quality accommodation for our students. As such, we are revisiting plans to ensure that provision of more quality student beds happens in a financially sustainable way.

Taken together, these projects - whether underway or in advanced planning - signal a university deliberately and confidently positioning itself for the future.

I must also report that while large-scale projects inevitably face external delays, it is internal misconduct and corruptible collusion with external parties that truly strike at the core of our institutional integrity, culture and ethos. Regardless of position and seniority, several suspensions and exits have been effected and more recently during the last quarter. A forensic investigation has been initiated across Real Estate, with particular attention to the Project Management Office and Facilities and Maintenance. Should preliminary findings warrant it, the scope may extend to Finance, especially given concerns about potential collusion between officials in REM and Finance.

4. Sustainability

Sustainability is one of two ‘*influencing and impacting*’ Perspectives. It is anchored in three interconnected strategic objectives, namely *Distinctive Education*, *Financial Sustainability* and *Green Ecosystems*. Together, these strategic objectives drive DUT’s mission to create a transformative, compelling, future-oriented learning and living environment while ensuring long-term institutional viability and environmental responsibility.

4.1. Distinctive Education

This objective is the most misunderstood especially in relation to ‘*Innovative Curricula and Research*’. *Distinctive Education* is simply defined as ‘*creating a compelling and future oriented learning and living environment*’. It is about everything we must be in place to make the environment within which we provide our education compelling and conducive to learning, living and working.

We cannot speak of *Distinctive Education* without foregrounding co-curricular development. Our pursuit of academic excellence is grounded in the principle of placing ‘*the right people in the right seats, performing their right roles right*’, as noted earlier. We recognise that sustaining our upward trajectory requires a highly qualified, productive and continuously developing academic cohort. To support this development agenda, we have invested in postgraduate supervision incentives to enhance research throughput and postgraduate success. We have also introduced the *Let’s Chat Online* (LCO) series, a structured professional development platform aimed at mentoring early-career academics.

Our commitment to student success begins well before entry into the lecture hall. Through the *Access for Success* framework, we have developed four new diagnostic tests for access and placement, enabling the early identification of student learning profiles and the delivery of targeted, proactive support. This is further strengthened by the *Student Support Lifecycle Framework*, which ensures a coordinated and holistic system of academic and developmental support. As a result, we continue to sustain an 81% sense of belonging among students, reflecting the impact of an integrated and caring institutional approach.

Over the past cycle, the university has advanced several high-impact initiatives to position DUT as a compelling space for a holistic education. The annual *First Year Orientation Week (O-Week)*, now in its 6th year, continues to serve as a critical induction platform for first-time entering students (FTENs), ensuring that their entry into the university environment is welcoming and purposeful. Through *RAG (Remember and Give)* activations, championed by the Student Representative Council in partnership with our Living Values Champions, over R2 million was raised to support defunded students. As noted, above, over R1 million was added to this fund instead of spending this amount on a dinner in celebration of our 21st anniversary.

This is not compliance. It is compassion in action. In strengthening our *Holistic Student Support (HSS)* programmes, the university developed and shared the *Student Support Lifecycle Framework* across institutional success forums. This has been complemented by the expansion of HSS programmes and the growth of structured student-led engagements that give students an active voice in their academic and social journeys.

Extra-curricular flagship programmes remain central to the student experience. These include the *Residence League (Res League)*, the *Student Leadership Week*, the annual *Student Services Awards*, and the *Quarterly Lekgotla Dialogues*, which continue to create meaningful engagement between students and staff on institutional matters. Sport and social integration also remain important in building a strong institutional social compact. The university hosted the *Vice-Chancellor's Cup* and *Faculty Annual Sports Days*, while institutional participation in the Comrades Marathon reflected both commitment and resilience, with 25 staff and students competing in 2025 and achieving an 88% completion rate.

As noted above, stability in student leadership has been strengthened through the implementation of two-year terms, the adoption of online voting and the setting of a higher academic performance threshold. These improvements have not only helped us to maintain stability in student governance, but they have also deepened intellectual engagement and leadership in our student leaders. Further, there is much improved academic continuity and performance, with the 2025 cohort including former student leaders progressing into master's degree studies supported by the *Hlomisa Skills Academy*.

Institutional leadership and stability have further been reinforced through the filling of strategic leadership positions, including the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, Executive Dean: Faculty of Arts and Design, CFO and CIO.

Performance indicators for *Distinctive Education* show encouraging progress in institutional brand and reputation and in the extent of identification of our students with DUT. As noted earlier, data on student experience remain strong and are much better than similar categories of data for staff. Our students lead the way, it seems.

In 2025, 78% of students rated their overall educational experience as excellent or good, while 82% of graduates indicated that they would choose DUT again given the opportunity. Brand preference remains equally strong, with 85% of applicants identifying DUT as their first-choice university. In support of life-long learning, participation in continuing education programmes currently stands at 11% of total enrolment, while approximately 58% - 59% of students are engaged in practical work aligned to their fields of study, thus supporting the university's commitment to glocal citizenship.

For 2026, we will be demonstrating and institutionalising the transformative and compelling living and learning environment that defines *Distinctive Education* in a variety of ways. Amongst the priorities will be strengthening articulation pathways and expanding lifelong learning opportunities, positioning DUT more deliberately as a hub for

continuous learning. Student experience targets for 2026 include increasing the participation rate for continuing education to 15% and ensuring that 20% of DUT graduates return for further study. To sustain the institutional brand momentum, the university aims to maintain the 85% first-choice application rate while improving overall student satisfaction with the educational experience to between 80% and 85%. Through these efforts, *Distinctive Education* will continue to anchor a uniquely DUT experience; ensuring that academic excellence is matched by a holistic and transformative student journey.

Organisational performance is part of ensuring that the university achieves its purpose and makes learning and living compelling. We have made significant progress in strengthening our performance management system. Some of you know the effort it took to get to where we are today since 2008 when Council first approved the system. I wish to reiterate a message I shared in 2025 in my closing *Iminingo* issue regarding performance management bonuses: I said, “*Cheating and corruption have become part of the national pastime, if not culture. It would thus not be inconceivable that some may have cheated their way through to receiving bonuses.*” In SOUA: 2025, I referred to competence without integrity, emphasising that competence and ethics are not to be balanced, but that each must be achieved in equal measure. No level of skill or behaviour can justify behaviour that violates our values and principles.

This year, we must address instances of individuals, whose competence or integrity may be questionable, have misused the performance management system for personal gain while presenting themselves as embodying DUT’s values and principles, and standards of excellence. I have requested the Acting DVC: People and Operations to strengthen our systems to ensure that our performance management processes recognise genuine excellence. Any practices that undermine our values and principles are inconsistent with who we are and who we aspire to be as a university. We will implement stringent measures to ensure that performance bonuses are awarded to deserving members of DUT. We call on you to alert us when some cheat this system.

DUT has continued to strengthen its human capital, focusing on stabilising services, attracting and retaining talent. The *Integrated Talent Management Strategy* is nearing completion, providing a roadmap for leadership development, accountability and performance improvement. In 2026, executive and senior management performance contracts will include vacancy reduction targets and equity targets. An institutional review and restructuring exercise are underway to align fully with ENVISION2030. Recruitment is guided by the *Living Values Framework* (LVF) through which we will appoint not only for competence, but for character. We introduced a 360-degree behavioural evaluation tool to provide multisource feedback on alignment with the LVF. Workplace Ethics workshops and structured team-building sessions were rolled out across faculties and support units.

Let me deal with matters of institutional qualitative transformation, particularly equity and excellence. We are shaping a workforce reflective of national and regional demographics while investing in leadership development and staff growth. Transformation is not exclusion. It is alignment with equity, fairness and the law. It is also about ensuring that our environment is replete with role models of all races and origin, who inspire our students to excel.

In my introduction, I stated that this is also a year of reflection for me. Going again back to my inaugural address of 18 March 2017, I stated the following:

“Having spent many years as a country focusing on quantitative transformation, sometimes called equity, it is time we change gear to focus on qualitative transformation. Our development as a people and as a country depends on that type of transformation. Counting matric pass rates is not qualitative transformation. Counting the number of BEE deals and their quanta is not qualitative transformation. Counting the number of African staff employed at DUT is not qualitative transformation. But, ensuring that BEE deals build the economy or our academics producing high quality research and innovations than ever produced at DUT, is”.

As part of pursuing qualitative transformation, we must ensure that equity and excellence remain two sides of the same coin at DUT. For this reason, one of our SOPs for recruitment and appointments makes it clear that we cannot argue that there are no black/African people to be appointed. Neither could we argue that we appoint others in their place because we are pursuing excellence; as if there is no excellence in black/African people. There

are many black/African people, representing our notion of equity, who exude excellence simultaneously. This is what qualitative transformation should be about.

I must hasten to indicate that unfounded allegations of ethnic exclusion continue unabated. However, data tell a different story. Indian staff remain over-represented at DUT at 21.5%, nearly three times their provincial Economically Active Population (EAP) of 8.1%, while the proportion of staff identifying as black/African is at about 50% of what their EAP ratio suggests. Transformation remains a constitutional and moral imperative. Thus, unfounded allegations will not deter us from levelling the playing field at DUT and providing an environment that inspires our students. Notwithstanding, levelling the playing field does not suggest any category of our people including foreign nationals is no longer wanted at DUT. Rankings also rely on some level of representation of these categories among our staff.

At DUT, we cannot ignore the persistent disparities in the admission of students from different racial and socio-economic backgrounds into certain programmes. Despite clear guidance in the *White Paper on Post-School Education and Training* and our own institutional admission rules, some faculties and academic programmes continue to reflect under-representation of historically disadvantaged groups. These disparities are not merely a legacy of the past; they are a present-day challenge that demands urgent and deliberate action. As a university committed to transformation and social justice, we must move beyond policy intentions and ensure that our admissions frameworks are actively implemented, consistently monitored and transparently applied.

Some of these challenges become most visible during our graduation ceremonies. When we observe who walks across the stage in certain programmes, the patterns of exclusion and uneven representation are difficult to ignore. Graduation should be a celebration of qualitative transformation; yet at times, it reflects the inequities our systems were meant to correct. Graduation should also serve not only as a moment of celebration, but as a mirror; one that forces us to interrogate the choices, criteria and institutional practices that shaped these outcomes. I, therefore, call on all faculties to take immediate, measurable steps to review selection criteria, strengthen access and support for under-represented students.

We must ensure that DUT truly reflects the diversity and aspirations of the South African society we serve. Our mandate is clear: transformation cannot remain aspirational. It must be qualitatively and quantitatively evident in our lecture halls, confirmed in our admissions data and unequivocally evident on our graduation stages.

4.2. Financial Sustainability

As Robbins and Judge observe in a book titled *Organizational Behaviour: "Most conflicts in organizations are battles for resources, influence, and recognition - and when ambition outweighs integrity, reputations become collateral damage."* Jonathan Jansen's book I quoted earlier also supports this position.

At DUT, this insight is particularly relevant. Our resources are limited. The way we manage them directly impacts the stability and growth of our university. Some of what I often refer to as "*pathologies*" we confront, amplified through media narratives, are driven by flagitious internal and external actors who see the university as a "*concentrated and exploitable resource*." We cannot surrender this precious university to extraction. DUT is not a trough to gorge from. It is, and is about, a public good that must be protected. Yes, indeed, as some argue, these resources do not belong to management and Council. They belong to the people of this country. And, precisely for this reason, we must be honest, transparent and accountable custodians. Those who could afford to be negligent and spendthrift with their own personal resources, let them be. But not with resources that belong to our nation. Enough!

Our financial position remains a critical foundation for the work we do as a university. While financial reporting often centres on figures and compliance, I believe it must also reflect how responsibly we are building a sustainable and efficient university for the future. Financial sustainability is not only about balancing income and expenditure, but about strengthening a business model that supports knowledge production, student success and institutional progress. I am encouraged by the stability reflected in our financial performance. Through prudent management of resources and continued financial discipline, DUT remains on a steady path. Our finances continue to serve as the lifeblood of

institutional stability, enabling us to direct resources where it matters most while safeguarding DUT's long-term sustainability.

Our commitment to sound governance and accountability is reflected in the unqualified external audit opinions we have consistently received, despite complex infrastructure and digital projects we are pursuing. To safeguard our academic project, we continue to enforce the salary mandate that keeps personnel costs at a maximum of 62% of recurrent income. While we experienced challenges earlier in the year relating to payroll management and procurement lethargy, targeted turnaround strategies have since been implemented to ensure both efficiency and effectiveness in how every rand is spent.

On 6 November 2025, an executive order was issued to address a critical challenge that threatens both the strategic and financial integrity of our university. This order targets the growing practice of "fiscal dumping", where DUT people rush to spend remaining budgets at the end of the financial year, often on activities or items that are disconnected from DUT's strategic priorities and, in some cases, on non-essential or leisure-related expenditure.

At its core, this behaviour reflects a damaging view of the university as "a concentrated and exploitable resource" at our disposal and leisure just because we happen to be here now and at the expense of future generations who must find DUT standing and thriving. To address this, the order introduced new SOPs designed to strengthen internal controls and ensure that every allocation aligns with our core mission. The order also places a clear responsibility on our executive, senior managers and managers in general to cultivate and sustain an ethical leadership, management and administrative ethos and culture across DUT. By embedding accountability, honesty and integrity into every level of decision-making, we ensure that the university's resources are invested where it matters most, supporting teaching, learning, research and innovation. Eliminating these counterproductive organisational sub-cultures is essential not only towards protecting our financial sustainability but also to safeguarding DUT's institutional integrity.

We remain mindful, however, that the financial environment continues to present real risks. A significant concern relates to NSFAS payment delays, currently standing at 32% of 2025 billing, which is contributing to increasing levels of student debt. Our internal system of disbursements must be well-capacitated and agile so as to avoid unnecessary protests.

As we look ahead to 2026, we will streamline, stabilise and capitalise on our resources. We aim to grow third-stream income, supported by the revitalised *DUT Foundation* and scalable innovation initiatives. One of our high impact *Disruptive Projects* is on third-stream income during the time there is so acute fiscal constraint our government faces. Our intention is to move beyond initiating fiscal and financial discipline and instead institutionalising progressive funding initiatives into the daily rhythm of the university, ensuring that the "pennies" I talk about in the *Transformed Academia* document, required to fulfill our promise to society are secured, protected and strategically deployed.

4.3. Green Ecosystems

The *Green Ecosystems* strategic objective places environmental sustainability at the centre of how we operate, learn, teach, innovate, research, live and engage with society. What was once driven through isolated initiatives is now being consolidated into a structured, framework-driven institutional priority.

The university has made progress in moving from intention to systemic implementation. In late 2025, the Executive Management Committee (EMC) approved a *Green Ecosystems Framework*, aligning institutional practices with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the principles of a circular economy. This framework now provides a coordinated structure for sustainability initiatives across academic, operational and community platforms. In this respect, energy management has also taken a significant step forward. An institutional *Energy Management Plan* was initiated in 2025, laying the groundwork for a range of energy-saving projects, including a turnkey 1-Megawatt initiative designed to reduce long-term energy costs and environmental impact.

In strengthening environmental accountability, the university introduced carbon footprint reporting, beginning with monitoring institutional vehicle fleet emissions. At the same time, operational efficiencies were enhanced through the

integration of the Printing Department into ICTS, supporting a targeted approach to reducing paper usage and improving energy efficiency.

Sustainability is increasingly visible within the academic project space. Through *Project-Based Learning (PBL)* and *Design Thinking (DT)* referred to earlier, environmental responsibility is being embedded into the curriculum. For example, a student-led project in the Midlands includes wetland restoration work, textile waste recycling innovations and digital documentation of recycling technologies, demonstrating how academic learning is being connected to real-world environmental challenges.

The *Institute for Electro-Energy and Transport Research (IEETR)* completed the installation of a 237 kW Solar Photovoltaic (PV) System, contributing directly to reducing the university's carbon footprint while strengthening internal research and innovation capacity in renewable energy. Waste management has also been strengthened through the launch of a pilot Reverse Vending Machine project, as a flagship recycling intervention.

Through the student-led *Green Campus Initiative (GCI)*, sustainability has been connected to food security via the *One-Residence-One-Garden* programme, encouraging practical participation in sustainable living across residences. Across our campuses, 35 productive gardens - with 19 located in the Midlands and 16 in Durban - are actively supporting food security initiatives while strengthening student and community participation in sustainable practices. In partnership with the provincial government, the university launched an *Adopt-A-School Entrepreneurship Programme* in some of our rural areas, integrating gardening projects and digital centres to support both sustainability education and local economic development.

Research leadership in sustainability continues to grow. The *DUT Business School* hosted the *Climate Change and Economic Management Conference* in early 2025, bringing together more than 50 global research contributions focused on environmental and economic sustainability.

In line with operational efficiency commitments for 2026, the university is working toward measurable reductions in resource consumption, including a 10% reduction in wastewater and sewage usage, a 15% reduction in bulk water consumption, and a 10% reduction in electricity usage. At the same time, the university aims to sustain between 30 and 35 environmental sustainability projects annually, with a clear target that 60% of these projects demonstrate direct practical application, ensuring that sustainability remains both academically grounded and operationally impactful.

In 2026, we will work towards deepening implementation and ensuring that green practices are embedded across all institutional sub-systems. Priority will be given to fully leveraging the *Green Ecosystems Framework*, identifying new opportunities for impact across teaching-learning, research-innovation, engagement and infrastructure. Waste minimisation will remain a key operational objective, with stronger emphasis on prevention, recycling, and reuse across all campuses. The university will continue to advance the adoption of innovative technologies and clean energy solutions to strengthen environmental sustainability outcomes. Equally, operational efficiency will remain central to our efforts, with continued focus on responsible management of electricity, bulk water and wastewater across all university facilities. Through these actions, DUT is steadily building an ethos and a culture in which sustainability is not an add-on, but a defining institutional practice that shapes both our academic mission, our institutional integrity and our societal contribution.

5. Society

Society is the Perspective that helps to demonstrate our influence and impact in the broader society. It is the second of DUT's 'influencing and impacting' Perspectives, encompassing three strategic objectives, namely *Engaged University*, *Innovation and Entrepreneurship* and *Adaptive Graduates*. Together, these objectives reflect DUT's commitment to societal impact locally, regionally and internationally.

In 2021, as part of my effort to elaborate on ENVISION2030, I shared a series of video messages. In those engagements, I reflected, among other things, on our responsibility to society and I stated the following:

“Arguably, of the four perspectives, Society is the most aspirational. While the others may represent the archer's arrows, this perspective embodies the archer's aim. By achieving the nine strategic objectives that underpin the other three

perspectives and realising the remaining three that constitute the perspective, Society, it is hoped that we will have demonstrably manifested our commitment to impact the lives and livelihoods of our people, both internal and external, locally and globally. And that in so doing, the collective impact of our accomplishments will reverberate across the various components of society.”

5.1. Engaged University

Many statements and plans emanating from ENVISION2030 suggest that DUT must position itself as a centre of intellectual and thought leadership, and a trusted problem solver by our Quad-Helix partners locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Through our persistent creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship and through our commitment to finding solutions to society’s challenges, we are starting to earn recognition within and beyond our borders.

In the field of internal engagement for the common good, we have seen meaningful progress in the conduct and overall disposition of our SRC, as noted earlier. This has not happened by chance. It reflects deliberate institutional work to embed our values and principles into the everyday life of the university. We must be clear: the ethos and culture of a university are reflected in the behaviour of its community. Conduct that falls short of our standards does not only affect individuals; it diminishes DUT’s standing and reputation.

There was a time when DUT was more associated with frequent protests than with progress. We were, at one point, regarded as the epicentre of disruption within the sector. Instability became expected. Disruption seemed inevitable. But, despite intermittent disruptions often influenced by external elements, this is no longer our story. Today, we are steadily building an ethos and a culture grounded in responsibility, engagement and mutual respect. We have not silenced student voices. We have strengthened the channels through which they are heard. And in doing so, we are redefining what it means to be an engaged, values-driven university.

I have emphasised the importance of shifting our focus away from blame and regression and towards constructive action. I have called on young people to direct their energy, with clarity and determination, towards lifting our socio-economic reality out of stagnation, if not deterioration. I have argued that prosperity would not be secured by dwelling on who caused our challenges, but by recognising those who took responsibility for rebuilding and renewal. This should be the legacy of our young people. Today, I am encouraged to say that DUT students are doing exactly this, focusing on building a bright future.

For the year ahead, we will institutionalise our ethos and culture of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship to deliver scalable solutions to our Quad-Helix partners. We will move from merely validating our ‘Adaptive Graduate’ claim to implementing rigorous frameworks that track graduate resilience and adaptiveness. By leveraging these strategic partnerships, we will continue to ‘transform our societies and their economies’, ensuring our research and innovation lead to the practical application of knowledge that ‘contributes towards improving the lives and livelihoods of our broader society’.

In July 2025, we strengthened our ‘glocal’ footprint through the inaugural *Continental Student Leadership Summit (CSLS)*, bringing together student leaders from South Africa, Ghana and Kenya for research-driven discussions on ethical leadership, innovation and Africa’s role on the global stage. By popular demand, a repeat summit like this one will take place in July 2026. Under the theme “*Empowering Tomorrow: Leadership, Innovation and Unity Across Borders,*” the 2025 summit tackled pressing issues such as AI-informed policy-making and climate resilience, reinforcing DUT’s growing ‘glocal’ presence. The event concluded with the launch of the *Pan-African Student Leadership Forum (PSLF)*, creating a lasting platform for youth-led, cross-border collaboration and the promotion of institutional integrity.

We deepened our school outreach. Thirty adopted schools participated in *Entrepreneurship-for-kids* and *Agri-preneurship* programmes. As reported earlier, we launched digital centres and rolled out an *Entrepreneurship Programme* in some rural schools because innovation must start early.

Our growing international and regional ranking positions further affirm that DUT's academic influence is expanding in both reach and impact. According to the *Webometrics Ranking of World Universities*, DUT is ranked 11th in South Africa and holds the top position among universities of technology.

5.2. Innovation and Entrepreneurship

To understand the work we do at DUT, it is important to first appreciate the context in which we operate. According to a *Business Tech* report of 18 February 2026, Statistics South Africa's latest figures show the official unemployment rate at 31.4%. The picture differs sharply across the provinces.

At an unemployment rate sitting at 47.1%, which is close to half of its economically active population, KwaZulu-Natal faces particular challenges, trailed only by the Eastern Cape and North West, where unemployment is even higher. These figures are a stark reminder that South Africa's jobs crisis is far from resolved and there is still much work to be done to create meaningful job opportunities for our people. Thus, the strategic objective of *Innovation and Entrepreneurship* is not a peripheral ambition at DUT; it is central to how we understand our role in society.

Since ENVISION2030 was introduced in 2020, we have been embedding creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship as integral parts of our culture and educational philosophy. As noted above, this has spread into some selected schools even in the rural hinterland of KZN.

Through our *Innobiz Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation* and the *Centre for Social Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator (CSERI)*, we strengthened the pipeline. Innobiz conducted entrepreneurship orientations for 179 first-year students and ran activation campaigns for a further 65. CSERI admitted 30 SMMEs into full incubation and another 30 into pre-incubation for the 2025–2026 cycle. Between September and October 2025 alone, 478 students were trained and exposed to entrepreneurship. Twenty-six studentpreneurs received structured mentoring. The 2025 *Business Incubation Programme* received 273 applications. CSERI received over 120 applications for its latest cycle. We set a target of 272 impactful innovations for 2025. We also advanced collaborative innovation, launching a *Smart Robotics Lab* in partnership with MerSETA and the Moses Kotane Research Institute, thus strengthening STEM education and AI-driven industry development.

An entrepreneurial ethos across our community remains strong. This is not theoretical entrepreneurship. It is measurable impact. These two centres alone, among other units in this field, continued to yield practical and impactful entrepreneurial solutions, with student-led enterprises generating an estimated R100 million in turnover and creating an estimated 200 jobs.

Our students are not confined to local horizons. They earn national and global recognition. DUT student teams competed at the 2025 *Enactus National Expo*, gaining recognition for projects such as *ThinkWaste Africa* and *MYCO-FEEDS*. Five students represented DUT at the *Global Innovation University Alliance (GISU) Competition* finals, held in South Africa. Eight students participated in the *Global Entrepreneurship Camp* in Thailand. Thirty-eight attended the *Innoflash Workshop* with JAMK University in Finland. Fifty students completed a *Virtual Incubation Programme* based in the United States. These were not just wanton trips. They were platforms for a mindset shift and they involved global benchmarking, too.

In 2026, our focus shifts to consolidation and scaling up. We will institutionalise our innovation and entrepreneurial ethos and culture to deliver scalable solutions to our Quad-Helix partners. We will integrate entrepreneurship formally into the curriculum - introducing certificates, diplomas and degrees designed to produce entrepreneurs intentionally and by design, not incidentally by default. Boot camps will no longer be the primary mechanism. Structured qualifications will be. We will position DUT as an R&D centre for SMMEs, supporting local enterprises to grow, innovate and compete with multinational companies.

For 2026, we have committed to 30-40 impactful projects addressing real societal problems with direct, practical and impactful applications. Innovation and entrepreneurship are not a slogan but a discipline, a mindset, an ethos and a culture at DUT. And, they are a stepping stone through which DUT will continue, as suggested earlier, to '*transform societies and their economies*' in an inclusive, competitive and future-ready manner.

We have seen tangible evidence that the ethos and culture of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship are taking root. These are not symbolic exchanges; they are platforms that stretch thinking, expand networks and position DUT students as global innovators. Going back again to my 18 March 2017 inaugural address, I shared this dream:

“My little dream, more probable at a university of technology, is that in a few years, if out of the about 27 000 students [the student enrolment we had in 2017] we currently enrol, we could graduate just 0.05% (only 14 graduates) of them per year as tried and tested entrepreneurs, by design and not by default, DUT would begin to transform fundamentally the economy of our cities and our region.”

Given the information provided above, we have surpassed this target. And, through our structured qualifications soon to be introduced, we will unleash DUT’s *Adaptive Graduates*, innovators and entrepreneurs into the local, regional and national economy.

5.3. Adaptive Graduates

The strategic objective we call *Adaptive Graduates* is clear. It is designed to develop graduates equipped with ‘the acumen to initiate, influence or to respond and react to changes in the world’ effectively. It is about producing ‘future-ready’ graduates who do not merely enter the existing world of work but have the capacity to create new worlds of work. An *Adaptive Graduate* is not defined by a qualification alone. It is defined by a unique ethos that includes attitude, mindset, capability and courage.

Importantly, in 2024 and 2025, we began developing and refining validation frameworks to test and verify our claim that DUT produces *Adaptive Graduates*. If we say it, we must be able to measure it. The data we now have confirm progress. Under the category of *Influential Graduates*, we identified 49 influential or game-changing DUT *Adaptive Graduates* in 2025, against a target of 15-20. These include graduates recognised in platforms such as the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* and winners of national competitions. On *Graduate Employability*, our 2025 target was for 60% of graduates to be employed within a year of graduation.

In 2026, we will strengthen graduate tracking and engagement. We will build relationships that allow us to showcase their success in ways that are mutually beneficial. We will continue socialising the *Phi-Ed* throughout the full student lifecycle so that innovation and entrepreneurship are normalised and are not exceptions. And, we will promote a lifelong learning attitude. Adaptiveness is not a once-off achievement at graduation. It is a habit of mind that ensures our graduates remain employable, resilient and relevant, and that many more are employment creators, entrepreneurs or leaders.

6. Conclusion

ENVISION2030 is as contemporaneous as it is aspirational. While we still have a long way to go, we have witnessed some transient outputs, outcomes and impacts; some of which are so significant and humongous that some may well think we have reached the last phase.

In the 10 years I have been Vice-Chancellor and Principal at DUT I have seen a lot, as posited in the earlier part of this document. I have been privileged to witness many of these transient outputs, outcomes and impacts. Those who think DUT is not **D**ifferent, **U**pended and **T**ransformed must tell us what stupefies them.

From ‘our right people, occupying the right seats and performing their right roles right’, I have seen a lot. I have been privileged to see hope, resolve and determination rise in leaps and bounds. I have seen how our *Living Values Framework* shapes our institutional ethos and culture, despite much inertia and unrelenting attempts by the old and hackneyed institutional culture to ‘eat our strategy for breakfast’, as Peter Drucker warns us.

I have seen many improvements in our systems and processes, too numerous to mention. I have seen how our collective efforts consolidate into a sustainable innovative and entrepreneurial university that is already leading in so many respects. I have seen many mutually beneficial contributions to the broader society.

I have been privileged to see our students being presented with many choices to develop their creative, innovative and entrepreneurial flair and acumen. I have seen our students being developed intellectually, holistically and socially, too. I have seen them earning not just qualifications but in the process being exposed to opportunities to ‘contribute towards improving the lives and livelihoods of the broader society’, including their own and those of their families.

I have been privileged to see staff being supported, being empowered to grow and soaring high academically and otherwise. I have seen the number of academics with doctoral degrees grow from 22% in 2016 to 37% in 2025. I have seen the number of NRF-rated researchers grow from 24 in 2016 to 76 in 2025, a 317% increase, despite resignations of some in this category. I have seen the number of post-doctoral fellows rise from 25 in 2016 to 124 in 2025, an almost 500% increase. I have seen DUT’s research outputs grow from 209 units in 2017 to 900 units in 2025, a 430% increase. I have seen per capita research outputs grow from 0.32 units to 1.8 units in 2025 per FTE academic, a rate rivalling those at top ranked traditional and comprehensive universities in this country.

I have been privileged to see DUT’s position among South African universities in general and universities of technology in particular improve drastically. I have seen DUT displacing those that had been perched at the top of the pack and claiming the top position of all universities of technology in terms of research outputs. I have seen 3rd stream income rise from R10.4 million in 2016 to R153 million in 2025, a 1471% increase over the years, still far below what we are aiming for.

I have been privileged to see a dilapidated Open House, which looked like it had been about to fall to the ground. I have also seen a sprinkling new Open House. I have seen a dilapidated Cane Grower’s Hall, which our students would use for some mass meetings, being a shadow of what it is today. I have seen the Indumiso campus with buildings looking like those of a high school transforming into a modern university campus.

I have been privileged to see a lot over the past 10 years. But what makes this SOUA special is not just these milestones. It is the people behind them, both students and staff, who are the source of all this and who are spurred on by these milestones to achieve more. They are unwavering in their resolve to make DUT great. The people, both students and staff, who worked hard and smart even when times were hard and things looked impossible. The people who embraced, and contributed to, the ethos and culture of our new DUT buttressed unshakably by our *Living Values Framework*. The leadership that made decisions not for applause, but for a lasting legacy.

The battle for the heart, mind and soul of DUT continues. We will not succumb to sinister sub-cultures that threaten to destroy what we have built and continue to build. The year 2026 must be a year of celebration of courage and fortitude; the courage and fortitude to transform, to raise standards and to demonstrate that DUT can be more than what it was yesterday; that DUT is great and will sustain its greatness.

And, if the last 21 years built the foundation and the last 10 years strengthened the pillars, then the years ahead are about completing a sturdy house; a house that must outlive all of us and in which those coming after us including those yet unborn will live comfortably. This house is a university that does not just exist, but towers above many others. This is the DUT story. It continues to be written.

Colleagues, students, partners, thank you for your dedication, resilience, passion, creativity, innovation and your entrepreneurial ethos and mindset.

As we move into 2026, let us remain *Creative. Distinctive. Impactful* and let us maintain a DUT that is *Different. Upended. Transformed.*