

UNIVERSITY OF THE  
WITWATERSRAND,  
JOHANNESBURG



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# Wits 2033

## A Strategic Framework



# Wits 2033: the leading edge of the Global South

## Wits 2033

The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Johannesburg has for the past century stood proudly in the heart of South Africa's, and the continent's, most dynamic city. As the University enters its next century, it will expand its role as a leader that shapes society – both locally and globally.

From our early beginnings as a mining school, to becoming a fully-fledged university in 1922, our driving force has always been the pursuit of knowledge and innovation. Wits was born from the need at the time to provide our city – and the country – with an institution that would provide outstanding professional training and research that was needed both to advance industry and to develop the emerging city and region.

From its inception, Wits has led change in society. Through its leaders, academics, students, and alumni it has been a pioneer for change in industry, an agitator for change in the higher education system, a catalyst for change in society, and a thought leader for change in public policy. Leading change is what defines Wits and will do so into the future.

Our academics, research leaders and students, from fields as diverse as evolutionary sciences and clinical medicine, to nuclear sciences, engineering, and the humanities, have pioneered technologies and solutions that have not only advanced their disciplines, but have transformed lives and societies. We count four Nobel Laureates and the largest number of CEOs of publicly listed companies in Africa amongst our alumni. Our graduates were some of the leading political figures in the fight against apartheid and have continued this proud tradition of fighting for social justice in the democratic era. The community we have created continues to define who we are and what we do.

Wits will be the 'leading edge' as the foremost research-intensive university in the Global South bridging the world's divides using our location in Johannesburg to act as an interlocutor between the Global South and North, and being driven by our motto, *Scientia et Labore*, to achieve this. Our goal is to lead in:

- Growing the next generation of change-makers and global scholars;
- Innovating and pioneering knowledge;
- Using our knowledge and influence to advance society by tackling climate change and inequality, and promoting social justice and public health from the Global South;
- Strengthening democracy and governance in South Africa; and
- Transforming the global university landscape, taking our continental partners on this journey with us.

## Situational Analysis

The world is in a state of flux, in part brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not the first time that such disruptions have occurred, nor will it be the last. However, the challenges and changes brought on by such disruptions, both in how we live and work are here to stay and importantly, provide an opportunity to reimagine how we position Wits for the future.

### The Global Context

Our world is defined by an expansion of knowledge and interconnectivity at all levels. These developments have brought about remarkable progress in areas such as health, technology, and education that have improved the quality of life for many. On the other hand, these advances have also brought about serious existing and new global challenges such as increasing inequality in an already unequal world, climate change, depletion of the earth's resources, irreversible damage to the biosphere and emerging public health threats. The academy has a major role to play in addressing these by finding innovative, multidisciplinary, and multinational solutions.

These challenges will impact Africa harshly. Since the continent is set to become the centre of the Global South due to its rapidly expanding population, both the challenges *and* the opportunities for finding solutions must emanate from this region. This requires harnessing and strengthening Africa's potential through development of its knowledge systems and academic leadership. To achieve this, Wits must play a major role on the continent by being the leading academic hub that connects the Global South and Global North in the quest for an equitable global university landscape. In this regard, our partnerships across Africa will be vital.

The technological changes and innovation of the past years have had a transformational impact on how we live, work, and learn. We must now think about the future skills and knowledge systems that are needed to manage these changes. Technological acceleration, for example, has meant that the higher education sector has become a marketplace where students can pick and choose from a far wider selection of courses and degree programmes across the globe than before, but this has also exacerbated the pre-existing divides in the sector, mostly in terms of access to online learning. The global knowledge system itself has become more interconnected due to technology and continuously opens possibilities for new and faster modes of sharing knowledge and building partnerships. By harnessing these technological changes, it will allow Wits wider possibilities on the continent and across the globe. It is also important to use these technologies to cross borders and bring the global knowledge project closer for our students, researchers, and academic leadership.

### The Local Context

In locating South Africa within this global context, we need to examine our own challenges and opportunities.

Nearly three decades since democracy South Africa remains a divided society marred by deepening inequality and a state apparatus which is in perpetual decline. The impact of this is felt across the whole higher education sector, but with Wits' location in the inner city, many of the problems are felt more profoundly within our institution. The decline of the state is a concern for Wits on two levels. The first is financial, due to decreasing teaching and research subsidies from the state. The second is that as a public institution and a research-intensive university we have a role to play in society – indeed, a duty – to harness our intellectual capital to ensure that we strengthen our democracy and governance in South Africa. Furthermore, it is also our responsibility to develop the next generation of ethical leaders who can contribute to society and grow the economy. If this is not achieved, we will have failed in our broader and fundamental responsibility to society.

Wits' location is an immense advantage in that it is in the economic heartland of Africa. However our historic location in Braamfontein has brought about significant challenges. As the economic hub of South Africa has moved north from Johannesburg's city centre, the downtown area has converted into a primarily residential node for lower income residents with the consequent urban management challenges of overcrowding, crime and grime. Braamfontein, our immediate neighbourhood, is increasingly a suburb of student accommodation with its attendant service sector of retail and social amenities. However, as the song goes, 'we built this city' from its origins as a mining town and the city is part our DNA. Wits continues to face and contribute to addressing these challenges in many ways. We are the leading actor in the City Improvement District that provides urban management solutions to Braamfontein. Wits RHI, our internationally recognised research institute focussing on HIV, sexual and reproductive health and vaccine preventable diseases is based in Hillbrow. The Tshimologong Precinct our digital innovation ecosystem and which includes the IBM Research Centre, is based in Braamfontein. The University initiated the Smart City Task Team with the City of Johannesburg to bring the research capacity we have into the service of the City. In these, and many other ways, the University contributes to the growth and sustainability of our neighbourhood, the City and all sectors of our society. In doing so we are addressing the issues of democracy and governance, inequality, social justice, and the sustainability of our city. All are key elements in Wits' pursuit to lead change within the local context.

## Our Purpose, Vision, and Values

### Purpose

Our purpose is to make a positive impact on society through:

- creating and advancing global knowledge; and
- fostering graduates to be leaders with integrity.

### Vision

By driving innovation throughout the University, embracing the diversity of our people, disciplines and ideas, Wits will be a place where our students and staff thrive.

We will strive to empower our graduates to be socially-responsive and adaptive to an ever-changing world.

We will build on Wits' 100 years of academic scholarship and research excellence, and use our abundance of knowledge, talent, and innovation to find solutions to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Our locale will enable us to lead from the Global South, to serve as a hub of knowledge on the continent to advance inclusive and sustainable futures for all.

We will be at the leading edge of innovation and academic excellence in the Global South.

### Values

Excellence underpins all that we do.

Our people are at the centre of what makes Wits great. We are collegial, open-minded, and respectful, and we are accountable and always act with integrity. We foster a welcoming environment and embrace the diversity of our backgrounds.

Innovation is what drives us forward. We enable a space to create, collaborate, and engage in robust and informed debate, across disciplines and boundaries.

We are committed to using our knowledge for the advancement of our community, city, country, continent, and the globe.

## Strategic Framework

At the core of Wits 2033 is the advancement of a people-centric university with an ethos of excellence and innovation across all spheres of the university. To align our vision and values with our strategy, Wits will, in the next ten years, focus on four areas:

- advancing a shared identity;
- pursuing academic excellence;
- achieving social impact; and
- ensuring its sustainability.

Academic excellence remains Wits' primary focus.

Innovation in today's world is fostered by breaking down disciplinary silos. The University must cultivate multi-disciplinarity in finding solutions to the major challenges which confront humanity and our planet. And in order to ensure the University's success, it must adopt similar multi-disciplinary approaches in its organisation and management structures and processes.

Our strategy recognises that the University's values (excellence, innovation, collaboration, impact and people-centredness) are cross-cutting and that being at the leading edge can only be achieved by embracing these values in all we do.

The Wits 2033 Strategic Framework provides a high-level direction for the University from which an implementation plan will be devised. Each of the following themes has a set of commitments which the University undertakes to achieve by 2033.

## **Wits' Identity**

The Wits identity defines and shapes all that we do: the types of students and staff we attract and develop; the research that is important to us; our culture on campus; who we partner with; and how we are perceived by the external world.

### **People and Culture**

Wits exists because of our people, and we must ensure that we build a university community that thrives in order to ensure our sustainability and success. There will be a strong focus on developing the Wits ethos that is shared across students, staff, and alumni.

We commit to:

- A diverse, inclusive, people-centred university;
- A culture of agility, and innovative and entrepreneurial thinking;
- Nurturing and cultivating talent across all spheres of the University; and
- An environment which allows all our people to thrive.

### **Brand and Reputation**

Wits has a proud history of academic scholarship and research excellence. It has been both about birthing brilliance and leading change for societal good. We will use this history to define and reinvigorate our brand and reputation both in the national context but also globally.

We commit to:

- Leveraging our history of being an innovator for advancement across all disciplines; and
- Promoting Wits' achievements to enhance our reputation both locally and globally.

### **Place and Partnerships**

Wits can lay claim to being centrally-located in both dynamic urban and rural settings. Located in Johannesburg and with the Wits Rural Campus in the Bushbuckridge region, we are ideally placed to explore both urban and rural settings and how they are increasingly starting to converge – not just in South Africa but across the Global South. We need to leverage this context and embrace it as part of our identity.

Outside of our immediate physical place and space, there is a need to consider our role and identity in the broader global knowledge system in Africa, the Global South, and the world.

We commit to:

- Leveraging our location to build partnerships that are based on shared goals, values and achieving societal impact;
- Partnering with other universities to strengthen the academic project on the continent and in the Global South; and

- Using our campuses and academic resources to work with and in local communities, particularly to address climate sustainability, inequality, public health, and social justice.

### **Student Experience**

Wits graduates have gone on to become leaders in their fields not only because of the world-class education that Wits provides but also because of the cosmopolitan experience one has at Wits. However, the changing South African landscape has meant that the needs of our students have also changed. We therefore must provide an expanded, holistic student experience that ensures their time at Wits means that every future graduate is empowered to become a leader in society.

We commit to:

- Exposing our students to a cosmopolitan student life and experience that fosters a sense of belonging and the development of lifelong networks and friendships;
- Offering our students a wide range of student development experiences and challenging intellectual engagements that enables them to become active citizens and leaders in all sectors of a diverse society;
- Promoting an environment of care and holistic wellness; and
- Encouraging an appreciation for the arts, culture, and sport.



## Academic Excellence

The academic project is at the core of the University. Wits is known for excellence in both teaching and learning, and research. The shift for Wits 2033 is not in what we do, but in how we do it by placing our people at the centre, enabling a space for collaboration across disciplines, and encouraging innovative ways of approaching our curriculum and knowledge production.

The Wits 2033 Strategic Framework is informed by the University's Teaching and Learning Plan 2020 – 2024 which identifies seven focus areas: increasing flexible and life-long learning opportunities; enhancing academics as university teachers; strengthening institutional capacity for curriculum development and renewal; diversifying assessment methods; expanding postgraduate education; expanding innovative formal and informal learning spaces; and using data analytics to promote student success.

## Student Success

Providing the best teaching and learning environment for our students to succeed is crucial for academic excellence. The Wits Institutional Framework for Student Success already provides a framework for the University to address this. We emphatically restate our commitment to the student success framework and that we will also strengthen and integrate research into student success.

We commit to:

- Using evidenced-based data, science, and research to identify barriers to student success;
- Investing in initiatives that support more of our students to complete their degrees in the minimum expected time; and
- Providing opportunities for continuous professional development to our academic and academic support staff so that they provide excellent teaching and learning opportunities for our students.

## Graduates of the Future

What was required to produce global leaders ten years ago is not necessarily the same as what is required to *nurture* global leaders today or in the future. The academic experience that we provide at Wits must equip our graduates with the ability to think independently and critically based on reason and logic. We also need to be agile in our response to evolving pedagogies and disciplines and have a seamless approach to lifelong learning.

We commit to:

- Nurturing critical thought, robust reasoning and debate based on factual foundations;
- Instilling in our graduates a sense of social responsibility;
- Providing our students with a multidisciplinary, flexible academic environment; and
- Expanding our academic offering to provide other forms of bespoke teaching and training that allow for lifelong learning opportunities.

### **Advancing the Pursuit of Fundamental Knowledge**

The university is the site of the production, generation, and translation of knowledge. Wits must advance the pursuit of fundamental thought and reason as this is what will change the world.

We commit to:

- Creating an environment that allows for the pursuit of knowledge that will have a profound impact on the world and the potential for Nobel Prize-winning work; and
- Translating fundamental knowledge into technological innovation that will spawn companies to change the world.

### **Knowledge Generation for Societal Advancement**

Wits needs to leverage the opportunities with which our specific context provides us to address the big questions and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but at a global level. Building on the solid foundation of its historical contributions such as was done in the field of HIV and more recently Wits' role in addressing the pandemic, Wits has illustrated that it has the expertise and, in some cases, contextual advantage which will allow for a new model of interdisciplinary research work to be conducted. The research areas that require specific focus, in the context of the challenges that impact the society we operate in, include:

- Social justice and addressing inequality;
- Climate sustainability;
- Advancing inclusive public health;
- Technologies for societal advancement; and
- The future of the economy and work.

We commit to:

- Leveraging our research and using innovative thinking to tackle future global challenges using the Global South perspective;
- Developing multidisciplinary research teams that address global challenges; and
- Pursuing research endeavours that involve national, continental, and international collaborations aligned with our strategic goals.

### **Building a Pipeline**

Africa needs to produce its own scholars who understand and can leverage the local context to contribute and participate meaningfully in the global academy. In that regard, postgraduate study is a fundamental aspect of the research-intensive university as it both contributes knowledge to the global academy and produces the next generation of leaders – for society, industry, and the academy. Wits recognises this need to build the academy of the future for South Africa, the continent, and the world.

We commit to:

- Developing a culture of research and innovation in both our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes;
- Investing in becoming the leading postdoctoral hub on the continent;
- Motivating and investing in people to be research active and innovative; and
- Expanding research leadership opportunities for both professional and academic staff.

### **Innovation and Academic Entrepreneurship**

The knowledge we produce within our University is capable of influencing what happens in society if it is channelled appropriately. We must ensure the translation of that knowledge into practice by building the capacity and capability of our academics and researchers to take their research beyond the academy, whether it be through policy intervention or commercialisation.

We commit to:

- Encouraging academics to use innovative and extraordinary ways to create and fund impactful research endeavours;
- Ensuring that our knowledge economy translates into novel and purposeful solutions; and
- Creating the opportunities and processes to transform research findings into commercial opportunities.

## Social Impact

Throughout Wits' history, we have harnessed our knowledge for social good and have been the University at the forefront of addressing the challenges faced by South Africa. Wits must continue to be a catalyst for change and play an active role in our society, particularly in addressing climate change, inequality, public health, and social justice.

### Active Citizenship and Advocacy

Wits is a microcosm of the society we live in. Our University is situated in a society characterised by wide and frequently unjust divisions and many of the world's greatest humanitarian and existential challenges exist right on our doorstep. Our diverse campuses can act as an incubator for change in our community by using our knowledge and expertise to experiment, innovate, and debate the solutions to current and future big challenges including climate change, inequality, public health, and social justice. This requires promoting active citizenship, leadership, and public engagement amongst our staff and students.

We commit to:

- Teaching and research for the good of society and sustainability;
- Promoting civic engagement by students and staff;
- Using our knowledge and expertise to advocate for a just and sustainable society for all; and
- Driving critical thought, reason, and open debate in all discourse and public engagement.

### Strengthening Democracy and Governance in South Africa

Wits' leadership and academics can play a vital role in strengthening democracy and governance in South Africa through public thought leadership but also by playing an active role in contributing to policy development.

We commit to:

- Using our intellectual and human capital to make a purposeful impact on evidence-based policy decision-making; and
- Leading assertively from a position of values-based integrity with government and civil society stakeholders.

### Climate Change and Inequality

Climate change and inequality are two pressing crises facing society today, and they have implications for the global economy, for South Africa and for our University. There is increasing evidence that the joint crises of climate sustainability and inequality are mutually reinforcing and require a coordinated response. In the South African context, dealing with climate change and inequality while ensuring our energy security is particularly complex and requires integrated solutions. South Africa, and Wits in particular, has the opportunity to lead in this respect and offer new insights in managing this transition that would not only serve as a basis for a sustainable and equitable transition in the country, but also as an exemplar for other developing countries.

We commit to:

- Developing a multifaceted approach to deal with climate change and inequality that goes beyond teaching and research and includes integration into national and international policy networks, social activism, and the internal management of the transition within the University.

## **Wits' Sustainability**

Entering Wits' next century, it is important to set the University on a sustainable path. The higher education landscape has changed rapidly in recent years and so we need to be ready to adapt and embrace change to be ahead of the curve.

The fiscal environment will be one of our greatest challenges over the next years. This will also increase the competition for resources amongst universities both locally and globally. Wits must take a holistic approach to our sustainability that includes integration of all our operations (financial, systems, academic project, and campus environment).

### **Reimagining Work and Institutional Life**

The technological acceleration and innovations of recent years has resulted in a shift in how we live, work, and learn. We must harness this to reimagine work and institutional life as a public, contact university. As these changes have opened up more opportunities for public engagement, we must also consider how this can be leveraged to preserve the space of the university as a public, intellectually-engaging, and diverse space.

We commit to:

- Using innovation to reimagine how we work in the interests of improving sustainability, efficiency, and access; and
- Enhancing access for multiple publics to the university precincts both through real-world and virtual platforms.

### **Financial Strength**

There is a sustained phase of economic decline both globally and locally. Wits' dependence on state funding is substantial and our research funding is significantly reliant on income from foreign donors and funding partners. Our cost structure will continue to be under pressure in part because of our location but also because of the shortage of quality academic resources. It is necessary for us to find sustainable solutions to our current financial challenges.

We commit to:

- Expanding and diversifying our income streams;
- Growing the University's financial reserves; and
- Maximising cost-effective resource utilisation.

### **Modernising Systems and Operations**

Wits is a large organisation with complex systems and operations. We are also the custodian of valuable infrastructure and treasures, which we recognise are the foundation of the academic project itself.

Wits has recently undergone a significant modernisation of our IT processes which must be used to its maximum benefit. Recent restructuring at the University will require further enhancements that ensure all our functions are delivered in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

We commit to:

- Digitalisation of our University processes;
- Ensuring cost-effective and efficient operations; and
- Optimising our University through the continuous development of our people, systems, and operations.

### **Campus of the Future**

We must create a campus environment that is environmentally safe, physically accessible, and green.

We commit to:

- Leveraging our knowledge and human capital to design a leading model for energy, water, and waste efficiency on our campuses that will serve as an example for our surrounds; and
- Improving access and security on and around our campus.

## Wits in 2033

By 2033, we will have achieved the following:

- Our students, staff, and alumni feel a sense of belonging to an institution of which they are proud.
- Our students, staff, and alumni reflect the diversity of our country and continent.
- The professional, operational, and academic services of the University are fully integrated to produce academic excellence.
- Our curricula meet the changing needs of our society and the world with our students benefitting from our expanded learning spaces and opportunities.
- Our academic staff development programmes are institutionalised and globally recognised for promoting effective teaching practice and student success.
- Our students, staff, and alumni will be well-placed to be leaders in society and capable of thinking critically and independently.
- Wits will continue its mission of pursuing cutting-edge research at the frontiers of human knowledge.
- Wits is the leading university in the Global South, fully engaged in transforming the global higher education landscape by establishing equitable, strategic partnerships based on shared values.
- Wits' academics are leading voices on issues relating to the advancement of knowledge in South Africa, on the continent, and globally, and our research is having an impact on developments in the public and private sectors.
- We will have developed a culture of collaboration and innovation across all spheres of the University.
- Wits will be financially sustainable while striving for carbon neutrality on campus, its environs and beyond.
- Wits is a thriving university.