

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG



WITS LEARNING AND TEACHING PLAN

2020-2024



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CHAPTER



1 INTRODUCTION

The world in the 21st century is characterised by rapid, often unpredictable, change, nations, people and economies that are inextricably intertwined, and global crises, notably climate change and the concentration of wealth in the hands of very few, that could permanently alter the future of humanity. In this highly uncertain and troubled world, universities have an important role to play in helping graduates make a meaningful contribution to society and to live fulfilling lives.

In South Africa, with its history of structural oppression of the majority of its people, universities have a vital role to play in developing the highly skilled and knowledgeable professionals needed for social and economic development, and in improving the quality of life and opportunities for students, their families and their communities. The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) has been reimagining its role, not just as an institution of higher learning, but as an institution within a broader society that has a developmental agenda. While its core mandate remains to educate students to the highest academic standards, it also needs to play a key role in shaping the skills and expertise that drive growth and development in order to reduce poverty, inequality and unemployment. But the current global context, including rapid technological changes and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, mean that economic development is now a much more complex process than in the past, and therefore poses new challenges. South Africa has both the potential and the obligation, because of its current inequality ranking, to become a global leader in the drive to create a more equitable world. This will require the development of highly sophisticated human capabilities. As a leading African research-intensive university, Wits is well placed to contribute to meeting this need.

Wits has a long tradition of promoting critical and creative thinking, social justice and innovation through interactions with its world class academics, and sustained engagement with civil society, business and industry, as well as extensive international collaborations. Wits therefore has an important role to play in providing students with opportunities to learn at the frontiers of knowledge, and to hone their critical thinking faculties and moral consciousness in order to meaningfully engage with knowledge that can be used for the betterment of society and the world.

The new Learning and Teaching Plan has seven focus areas, which have been chosen in order to promote Wits' alignment with current global trends in higher education while responding proactively to the imperatives of the South African higher education context. The plan will help focus the whole Wits community, students and staff, on high quality educational provision that leads to meaningful learning and the development of attributes that will enable Wits graduates to lead lives that are personally rewarding and beneficial to society and the world.

This five-year plan for learning and teaching has been produced within the global and national contexts of 2019. While it is possible to extrapolate how these contexts are likely to change over the next five years, it is impossible to be certain. For this reason, this plan should be viewed as a rolling plan, in order to allow for unforeseen changes.

1.1 Where we have come from, where we are heading

Wits has demonstrated that, as a research-intensive university, it is able to both sustain high level academic programmes and research activity and address the need for equity of access. In 2019, two thirds of the students were African, 84% were categorised as Black and 43% of the first year entering students were the first in their families to attend university. In the next planning period, Wits will continue to promote equity of access, including for students from schools located in areas that fall into the lower socio-economic status classification (lower quintiles).

In line with its mission and taking cognisance of its constraints and opportunities, over the next five years Wits plans to slightly reduce the number of undergraduate students who are studying full-time in contact mode. Careful analysis of the existing physical infrastructure at Wits has shown that the maximum number of undergraduate and postgraduate students that the university can adequately accommodate in full-time, contact mode is 36 000. However, a number of initiatives are underway to increase the likelihood of success for those students, which will increase the number of students who complete their degrees. These include the development of the Wits Institutional Framework for Student Success, enhanced capacity to use data analytics to promote student success and an increased focus on the development of academics in their role as university teachers.

As with universities across the world, Wits cannot assume that nearly all of its students can study full-time and be physically present on campus every day. On the contrary, diverse life circumstances mean that many students have to study part-time or by distance. The escalating costs of both higher education and of living in South Africa mean that many students must work part-time or full-time, and therefore require flexible study options. Therefore, in order to provide access to students who are not able to study full-time in contact mode, Wits is expanding the number of modes of instruction it can offer. Wits has a centre for part-time study, Wits Plus, which offers courses on campus outside of normal working hours, and the number of programmes it offers is steadily increasing. Wits is also developing programmes and courses that will be offered fully online, providing access to students who are not able to come to campus at all, as well as courses that make use of blended learning, in which teaching occurs both online and face-to-face.

Wits has world class academics who work at the cutting edge of their fields and have extensive interactions with both local and international partners. That makes Wits well placed to offer not only excellent undergraduate education but also excellent

postgraduate education. Wits' location in Johannesburg, the economic heart of South Africa and the major transportation link to the rest of Africa and the world, means that it can offer unique and wide-ranging opportunities for postgraduate study to not only its own graduates but also to students from the rest of South Africa, the African continent and further afield. Wits therefore plans to increase its enrolment of postgraduate students over the next five years. In doing so, it will make an important contribution to developing the skills needed for innovation, problem-solving and critical social engagement in South Africa and beyond. Because Wits has so many high-level researchers – staff and collaborators – it can provide a critical mass of people in a number of fields working at the frontiers of knowledge.

1.2 The Wits graduate

For the almost 100 years of its existence, Wits graduates have been recognised as distinctive. What makes a Wits graduate distinctive? A Wits graduate:

- Has exceptional ability to adapt and be flexible to changing demands for growth and development in the personal, academic, social, economic and professional realms, coupled with well-rounded, practical experience;
- Is acquainted with basic principles of research (at undergraduate level) and insight into how to create new knowledge, in line with transformative principles and world class forms of inquiry and scientific research, in order to impact decision-making in their specific field of study (at postgraduate level);
- Is a critical analyst and problem solver with the ability to form individual and informed opinions, determine and interpret economic trends, and determine and interpret political and demographic inclinations to affect change as a thought leader;
- Is reflective, empathetic, sophisticated, socially responsible and responsive to societal needs and contextual factors;
- Is a global leader and entrepreneur who believes in innovation as a vehicle for transformation;
- Is contextually aware and sensitive to diversity;
- Is globally conscious and applies that knowledge in context;
- Is an active agent for change;
- Does their work with thoughtful, meticulous planning and diligent execution.

Wits students are being prepared to undertake a number of important roles in the workplace and in society, such as

- Diligent, committed, responsible and responsive employees
- Managers
- Leaders in their fields, in business and in society

- Researchers
- Analysts
- Advocates for social justice and change
- Entrepreneurs
- Innovators
- Teachers, mentors and role models

Wits graduates' knowledge, skills and values enable them to secure a meaningful place in the employment landscape and in society, both today and tomorrow. Through the Wits student experience, both the formal curriculum and co-curricular activities, Wits seeks to engender the following attributes in all of its students:

- Awareness of the imperative for development to be environmentally sustainable,
- Concern for social justice and the dignity of all people,
- Ability to engage critically with diverse perspectives and sources of information,
- Commitment to high ethical standards,
- Recognition of the importance of humaneness and compassion in addressing social and technical issues,
- Capacity for creative expression and innovation
- Thirst for knowledge

The development of these broad graduate attributes is in addition to specialist knowledge and skills that Wits graduates acquire through their formal academic programmes.

1.3 Our vision for student learning and university teaching at Wits in the next five years

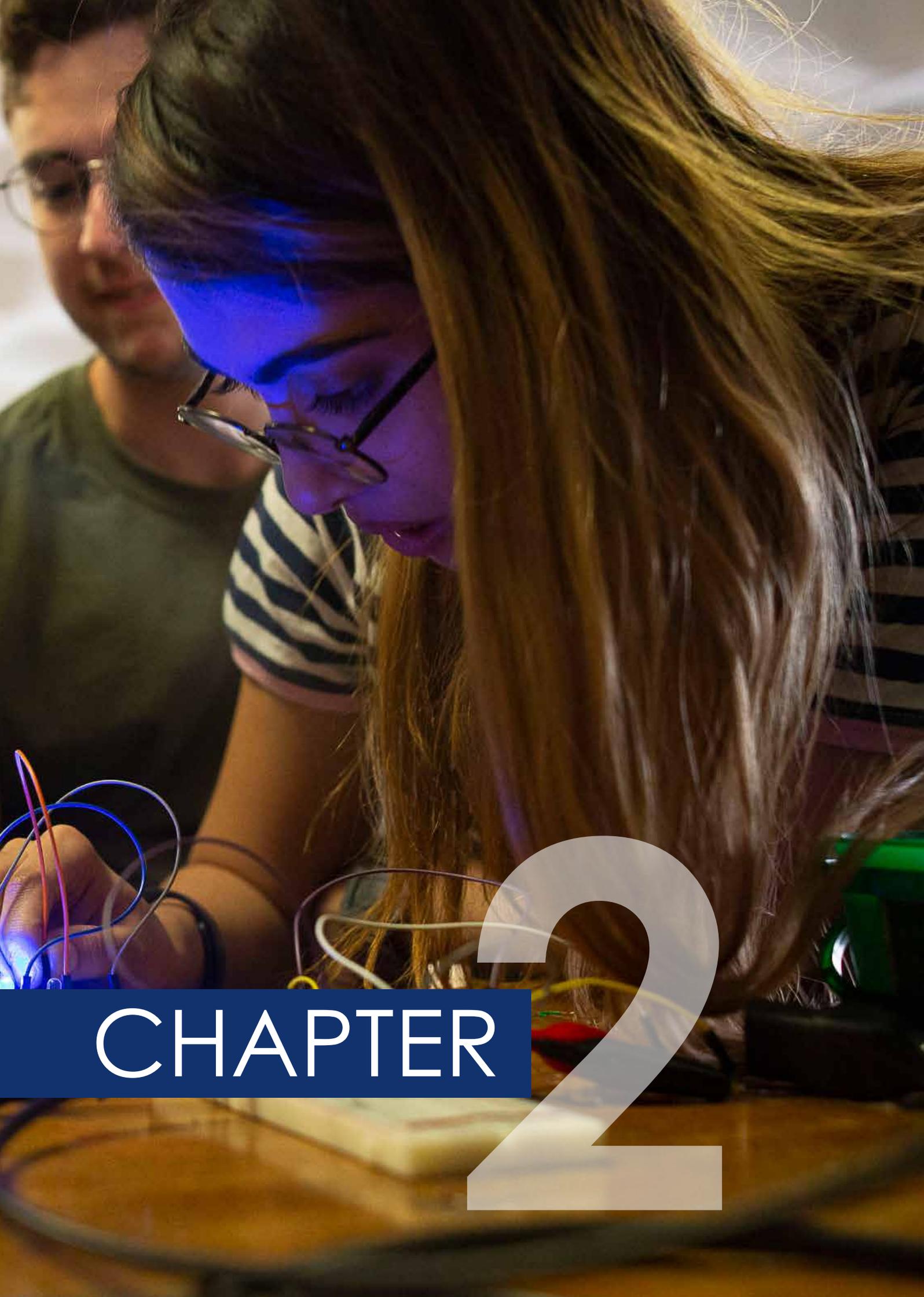
Wits University is committed to providing:

- World-class, research-led teaching,
- Holistic support for student learning,
- Internationally competitive and locally relevant curricula that are responsive to contemporary issues and the profile of our students,
- Diverse assessment that is aligned to, and promotes achievement of, learning outcomes,
- Flexibility in the mode and timing of learning opportunities, and
- Physical spaces and resources that are conducive to learning and befitting of a world-class institution,

in order to enable our students to graduate with attributes that will help them successfully

navigate the 21st century world and workplace, for the benefit of society and their own personal fulfilment. In carrying out teaching activities that foster student learning, Wits strives to adhere to the following values and guiding principles:

- University teaching and student learning are conducted in an environment that is mutually respectful of everyone involved, students and staff.
- Curricula are constantly renewed and updated in order to align with the learning characteristics of students, developments in relevant academic fields and the bearing the curricula may have on students' employability.
- Teaching practices are informed by scholarship on how to effectively promote learning for the specific students enrolled in a particular course or programme.
- Regular feedback is provided to students to enhance their learning and enable them and academic and support staff to monitor their progress and provide appropriate support where needed.
- Assessment tasks are appropriately designed to align with the learning outcomes of courses.
- The teaching and learning ecosystem is structured to help students develop the capacity over time to become independent, self-directed and life-long learners.
- Learning opportunities that are officially recognised by Wits are available to students in a variety of formats of varying duration and at various moments in their learning journeys.
- The whole university is viewed as an environment for learning. Suitable physical spaces are configured and resourced as far as possible to increase their effectiveness as learning spaces, both within and outside of scheduled class times.
- Teaching is recognised, rewarded and continually enhanced through academic staff and academic support staff participation in continuous professional learning.



CHAPTER

2

2 THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE WITS LEARNING AND TEACHING PLAN 2020-2024

In the first semester of 2019, a task team was appointed to produce a draft plan, comprising representatives of each faculty, the Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development, Student Affairs, Facilities, Information and Communication Technology, the Research Office, Postgraduate Office, Wits Plus and the SRC, and chaired by the Senior Director: Academic Affairs. The draft plan was informed by: Wits Vision 2022, the 2015-2019 Learning and Teaching Plan, issues raised at Senate and its sub-committees on Teaching and Learning and Academic Planning and Development, Wits' Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy, Wits' participation as a grant recipient in the Kresge Foundation funded Siyaphumelela (We Succeed) project from 2015 to 2019 on data analytics and student success, projects funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) through the Teaching Development Grant and later the University Capacity Development Grant, Wits Enrolment Plan for 2020-2025, and the DHET's *National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers*.

In the Wits Learning and Teaching Plan 2020-2024 seven focus areas have been identified. They provide continuity with the priority areas of the 2015-2019 Learning and Teaching Plan, while foregrounding opportunities for Wits to align with international trends in higher education and address key areas for growth at institutional and national levels. Activities associated with two of focus areas will be guided by frameworks that have been developed concurrently with this plan, namely, the *Wits Framework for Continuous Professional Learning for Academics as University Teachers* and the *Wits Institutional Framework for Student Success*.

The seven focus areas are:

- 1. Increasing flexible and life-long learning opportunities** aligns to international trends to make higher education accessible to students who cannot study full-time on campus. It also aligns to Wits' enrolment plan for 2020-2025, in which more students will have the opportunity to study part-time or online. It incorporates blended learning, which was a priority area in the previous Learning and Teaching Plan and was part of Wits' Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy. It also includes life-long learning opportunities through short courses tailored for a wide range of potential students.
- 2. Enhancing academics as university teachers** aligns closely with the DHET's national initiatives to support and strengthen academics in their role as university teachers, particularly through the implementation of the *National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers* and the University Capacity

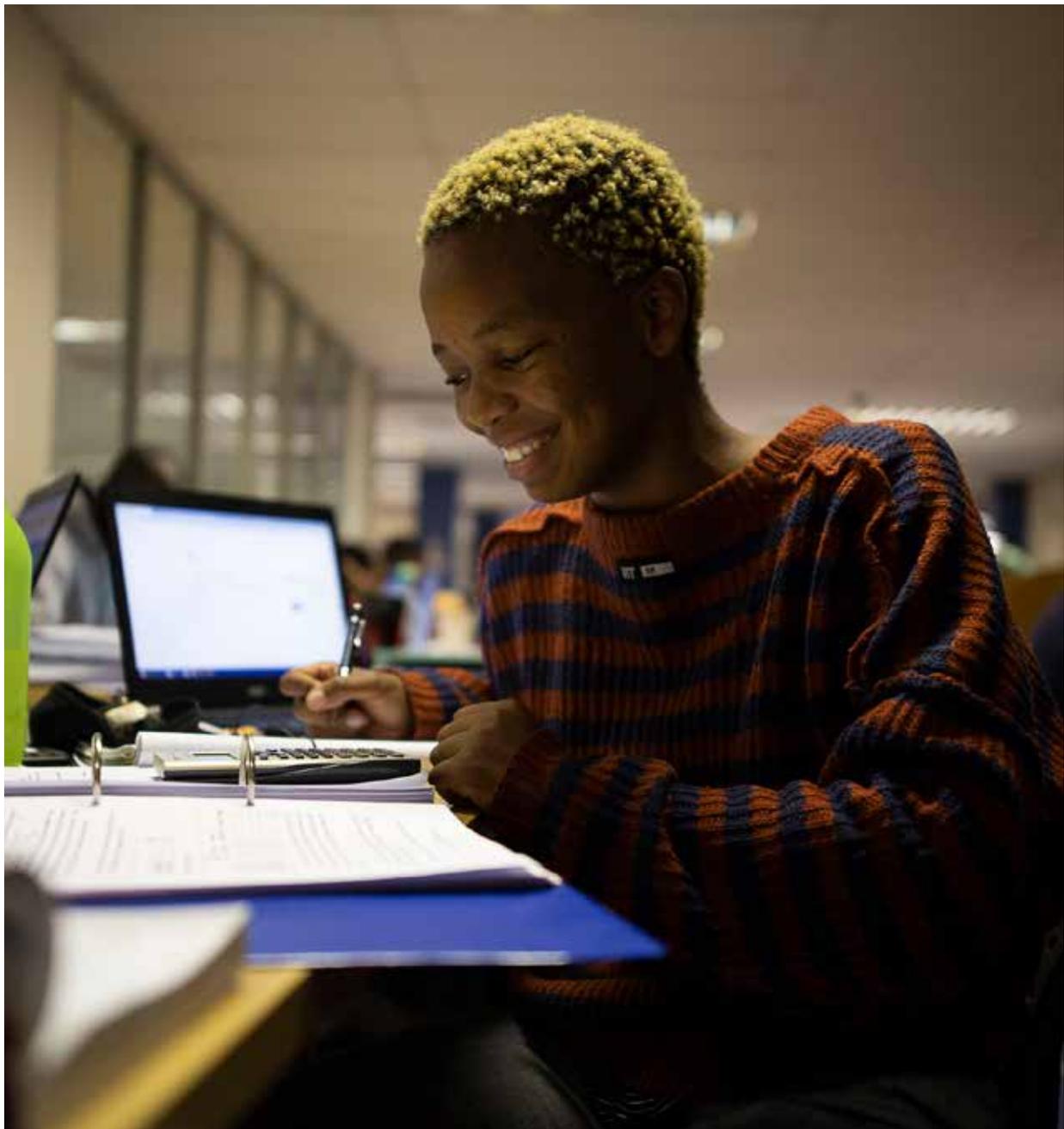
Development Grant. It links to two of the priority areas from the previous Learning and Teaching Plan, namely, Professional Development Focusing on Teaching, and Curriculum Renewal and Improved Teaching. Implementation of this focus area will be guided by the *Wits Framework for Continuous Professional Learning for Academics as University Teachers*, which is being developed concurrently with this Learning and Teaching Plan.

- 3. Strengthening institutional capacity for curriculum development and renewal** aligns with Phase 2 of the Council on Higher Education's Quality Enhancement Project and national dialogues on decolonisation of the curriculum. It links to the priority area from the previous Learning and Teaching Plan on Curriculum Renewal and Improved Teaching. It is also crucial for maintaining Wits' reputation as an institution that offers programmes that are up to date, challenging and relevant to societal, economic and global imperatives.
- 4. Diversifying assessment methods** aligns with international trends to move away from a reliance on sit-down, high stakes, end-of-semester examinations and towards a range of types of assessment, which are undertaken at different points in a student's learning journey and capitalise on the affordances of technology. This focus area is important for Wits as there has been a very large increase in the number of examinations in the past few years, which is straining resources and having the undesirable effect of diverting students' attention from continuous learning to passing examinations.
- 5. Expanding postgraduate education** aligns with Wits' 2020-2025 Enrolment Plan, which states that Wits intends to increase the percentage of full-time students who are postgraduates to 45%. It is linked to the priority area on enrolment shape and size from the previous Learning and Teaching Plan. As one of a small number of research intensive universities in South Africa and Africa as a whole, Wits has a responsibility to increase the number of students who are afforded the opportunity to undertake studies at postgraduate level.
- 6. Expanding innovative formal and informal learning spaces** aligns with Wits' Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy and links to the priority area on learning spaces and technology from the previous Learning and Teaching Plan. It also aligns with international trends in higher education in which student learning is encouraged and supported both inside and outside the classroom through innovative space design and use of technology. This includes providing extensive informal spaces for integrating social interactions and peer learning.

7. Using data analytics to promote student success aligns with Wits' participation as a grant-holder in the Kresge Foundation funded Siyaphumelela project from 2015 to 2019, as well as international trends to make data-informed decisions about how to help students succeed. The implementation of this focus area will be guided by the *Wits Institutional Framework for Student Success*, which is being developed concurrently with this plan.

A draft plan was presented to the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee on 24 July 2019. Extensive consultations on the draft plan took place in August and September with a wide range of stakeholders, including Faculties, students, the Senior Management Group and the Senior Executive Team.

The sections that follow elaborate on each of the focus areas.





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CHAPTER

5

3 FOCUS AREAS

3.1 Increasing flexible and life-long learning opportunities

Wits has reached the limit of its physical capacity to enrol more full-time students studying in contact mode. In addition, in line with global trends, we are aware that there is an increasing number of students who, for various reasons, such as having to work full-time or be care givers, cannot study full-time in contact mode. Wits is therefore committed to increasing the number of students who study in other modes. It plans to do this by:

- Increasing the number of part-time, on-campus offerings through Wits Plus,
- Increasing the number of programmes offered online.

Wits Plus offers on-campus programmes to part-time students who attend classes outside of the normal working day. It also offers individual courses that a number of students fail and need to repeat after hours if they are to avoid having to extend their years of study for their degree. In the next planning period, the number of formal programmes that will be offered part-time through Wits Plus will be increased, as will the number of individual courses offered after hours to students who are enrolled full time. The part-time programmes to be offered will be selected because they are in high demand or are of strategic importance to the university or the country; they are targeted at adults who work during the day. The individual courses to be offered will be selected because a substantial number of students will be negatively impacted if they are not given an additional opportunity to pass a key course that would delay their academic progress.

The number of programmes offered in an online mode will also be increased. In order to strengthen the ability of academic staff to develop online courses, Wits will establish a Centre for Educational Technologies (CET). The CET will house a number of academic development and technical professionals who will work alongside academics in the production of high-quality, well-designed online resources. It will also carry out research into innovation in the use of educational technologies to promote effective student learning.

The capacity of academic staff to design and use blended learning effectively – blending face-to-face with online learning activities – will be substantially enhanced, with a concomitant increase in the use of the university's selected learning management system (LMS). In addition, blended learning at programme level will be promoted, in which some courses are offered in contact mode and others are offered either exclusively online or through a choice of either online or contact mode. The latter option would have the added benefit of supporting academic progression for students who cannot attend classes full-time or who fail a course and need to repeat it (the latter as an alternative to attending courses through Wits Plus).

Another approach to flexible learning that Wits has developed over a number of years is to allow students with one qualification to obtain a second qualification in a different discipline in less than the normal required number of years. Examples are the Graduate Entry Medical Programme, which enables selected students who have obtained a Bachelors degree and passed certain science courses to enter the third year of the MBChB degree programme, and opportunities for students who have a BSc with certain subjects to obtain a BSc Engineering degree after an additional two years of study. Such opportunities will be expanded in the next planning period.

One of the important skills needed to succeed in the 21st century work environment is the ability to be a life-long learner. For many years Wits has offered a wide range of short courses that assist individuals and people working for companies, organisations, institutions and government to acquire new or updated knowledge and skills in specific areas of interest. In order to further assist a wide range of adult learners to participate in life-long learning, as well as enabling Wits students to access specialised knowledge and skills outside of their formal curricula, Wits will consolidate all of its short courses into a single administrative structure. This will make it easier to get information about the hundreds of short courses available, and to work with a single entity for all logistical arrangements.



3.2 Enhancing academics as university teachers

The past three decades have seen the massification of higher education globally. This is also true in South Africa. Of necessity, massification has led to greater diversity in the characteristics of students, including in the level of preparation for self-regulated, cognitively demanding academic study. While good teaching has always been valuable, the greater diversity in students, coupled with a schooling system in South Africa that is increasingly focusing on teaching for examination performance to the detriment of the development of higher order thinking or independent learning skills, makes good university teaching essential to academic success for most students. This was recognised by the Department of Higher Education and Training when it released its *National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers* in 2018.

In line with the national framework, Wits has produced its own *Framework for Continuous Professional Learning for Academics as University Teachers*. This Framework will serve as a guide for coordinating many of the activities in the focus area on enhancing academics as university teachers. In this context, “teaching” is broadly defined as *any engagement between staff members and students that is intended to promote student learning*. The Framework foregrounds the need for career-stage, career-long professional learning in order to contribute to life-long growth for academics as professionals in the area of university teaching. The Framework also stresses that in a research-intensive university like Wits, university teaching and research are synergistic activities. Both research and university teaching (if it is promote meaningful student learning) are underpinned by scholarly enquiry, evidence and intellectual rigour, and should be mutually reinforcing activities. Furthermore, research on learning and teaching is valuable, both because it contributes to new knowledge in higher education in general and to specific, discipline-based education, and because it provides insights into how student learning can be enhanced. Therefore, research related to student learning and university teaching will be supported, and opportunities and resources to enable such research to be undertaken and shared in professional forums will be expanded.

Participation in professional learning related to university teaching will be supported and encouraged through workload policies that explicitly provide time for this, as well as human resource processes and policies, such as promotions criteria, that recognise and reward activities associated with enhancing university teachers and teaching. Support will be offered to individual staff in their professional growth, including providing assistance with developing teaching portfolios and reflecting on student and peer feedback related to teaching. The recently approved university policy on course and lecturer evaluation will be implemented as a tool to promote continuous improvement.

While teaching is an explicit component of academic staff's job description, it is recognised that there are many academic support staff who are also involved in various aspects of teaching, according to the broad definition of teaching given above. Therefore both academic and academic support staff will be encouraged to participate in discipline-based professional learning activities, which may be offered through professional bodies or other communities of practice, as well as activities related to specific roles, such as safety in the laboratory. In addition, the Centre for Learning,

Teaching and Development (CLTD) will expand the range and scope of opportunities and support it offers for academic staff and academic support staff to learn and grow in their role as university teachers.

Another avenue for professional growth in university teaching is through formal qualifications. Wits has been offering a Post Graduate Diploma in Education in the field of Higher Education for several years. In the next planning period, Wits will develop a PGDip (Higher Education) that will be offered in both contact and online modes, thereby providing access to a larger number of students at both Wits and other institutions. Academic staff who have an interest in delving more deeply into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) will be encouraged to pursue masters and doctoral qualifications related to teaching and student learning in their disciplines, or to higher education more broadly.



3.3 Strengthening institutional capacity for curriculum development and renewal

Although knowledge of how to design sound curricula is an important component of the work of a university teacher and therefore forms part of professional learning, the processes of curriculum development, quality assurance, external approval and ongoing curriculum renewal extend beyond the work of a single academic. The South African higher education system is highly regulated. For a university to offer any new programme, permission must be obtained from the Department of Higher Education and Training, and then the programme must be accredited by the Council on Higher Education and registered by the South African Qualifications Authority. In some fields, approval from professional bodies also needs to be obtained. Prior to these external processes, proposals for new programmes need to be approved at School, Faculty and University levels. Designing curricula that are both educationally sound and technically correct requires not only disciplinary knowledge but also specialised educational knowledge and skill. Therefore, staff from the CLTD and the Quality and Academic Planning Office (QAPO) will collaborate to strengthen curriculum development capacity across the University. Discipline-based education specialists will also play an important role.

In addition, the QAPO will spearhead initiatives to streamline approval processes, while ensuring rigorous quality assurance of all new academic offerings, be they at programme or course level, as well as initiating processes to ensure that curricula are continuously renewed.

At a conceptual level, curriculum design at Wits needs to be responsive to a number of external factors. This includes the social imperative for curricula to be “decolonised”, moving away from a sole focus on Greco-Roman epistemology and knowledge that is embedded in contexts exclusive to the global north, to more expansive ways of knowing and a broadened view of what is considered important for students to know. Another external factor that needs to be considered in designing curricula is the knowledge, skills and qualities that will be needed for graduates to obtain or to create their own meaningful work, not only upon graduation but also into the future, especially in the light of the increasing role of technology in the 21st century and its effects on the very nature of work. Furthermore, the global community is experiencing unprecedented disruptions on many levels, including socio-cultural, economic, environmental and technological. New ways of thinking are needed in order to design curricula that do not only focus on well-established, discipline-based canonical knowledge but that are forward-looking, curricula that will equip graduates to chart their own course, and to lead others, through the unknown and unpredictable waters of the future global environment.

A growing trend in higher education in the 21st century is the development of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning programmes. The design of such programmes will be supported and encouraged, involving not only Wits staff but also partners from other institutions and sectors who can contribute knowledge and expertise at the cutting edge of emerging areas of study.

The design of curricula should not only involve what students should learn but also how student learning will be facilitated. The increased use of transformative pedagogies, in which students develop greater agency along their learning journey and greater insight into barriers and opportunities for advancing social justice, will be encouraged and supported. The judicious incorporation of the affordances provided by technology into course and programme design will contribute to a multi-faceted and enhanced student learning experience.

Writing Intensive courses, which were introduced during the period covered by the 2015-2019 Learning and Teaching Plan, foster both the development of critical thinking and discipline-based conceptual understanding and the development of academic reading and writing skills. In the next planning period the number of Writing Intensive courses offered in all faculties will be expanded. In addition, curriculum initiatives to integrate the development of other academic literacies, such as information literacy, digital literacy and quantitative literacy, into courses will also be supported.

In addition to the design and sequence of individual courses, another important aspect of curriculum is the structure, particularly the specification of prerequisites and corequisites. It is common for the rules regarding which subjects must be taken together (corequisites) and which courses have to be taken prior to other ones (prerequisites) to remain in place for years after other changes in programmes or context have taken place. In the next planning period a systematic review of this aspect of curriculum structure will be undertaken across the university. In addition to the educational benefits that will result from looking critically at course combinations, sequencing and progression rules, this exercise is likely to improve student success if unnecessary barriers to progression are identified and removed.

Curriculum design at Wits should also aim to explicitly develop attributes that Wits deems to be important for its graduates (c.f. Introduction). Learning outcomes should therefore indicate which of the graduate attributes particular courses and programmes are designed to develop. However, it is important to note that these graduate attributes cannot, in general, be developed through a single course; they are likely to be developed over time through a range of courses and learning experiences. It is possible, however, to expect students to demonstrate certain graduate attributes towards the end of a programme through a capstone course or project. For example, students might be expected to display creativity and innovation in the design of an original artefact, product, technique, method or process. In some cases, it may be possible for the university to offer support to students in developing their innovation further into something that is socially valuable and/or commercially viable.

It is recognised that the design and development of high-quality, relevant, responsive and innovative curriculum is intellectually demanding and time-consuming. Therefore, time and resources will need to be made available to enable such developments to be undertaken.

3.4 Diversifying assessment methods

Assessment is a core component of any educational endeavour as it sits at the nexus of teaching, learning, quality and accountability. Assessment has a number of purposes and can take a number of forms. Assessment carried out before or at the start of a course is diagnostic and can be used to provide information to both students and teachers about students' prior knowledge and skills, and therefore inform the learning activities that follow. Assessment carried out during a course, formative assessment, is useful for both student and teacher learning. For students, carrying out formative assessment tasks requires active engagement in particular aspects of the learning process, while the feedback they receive helps them see how well they are meeting the demands of the assessment tasks and where improvements are needed. For teachers, analysis of student performance on formative assessment tasks provides information on the extent to which they are succeeding in helping students meet the course learning outcomes and where they may need to use a different teaching approach or spend additional time on certain aspects of the course. Assessment carried out at the end of a course or other unit of learning, summative assessment, is used to evaluate the extent to which students have achieved the learning outcomes of the course. Such assessment needs to provide a valid and reliable measure of student learning.

Every academic staff member should be able to design appropriate assessment tasks *for their own learning* (to inform their teaching), *as learning* for their students (to provide feedback to guide students' own learning) and *of learning* (as a means of measuring how well students have achieved stated learning outcomes). However, developing such tasks and activities requires a great deal of skill and some imagination.

In addition, the rise of technology for educational purposes is providing new ways and means of conducting assessments. Furthermore, the changing context of education in the 21st century, with a greater focus on the development of transferrable skills and critical and creative thinking, as opposed to the accumulation of a large body of information, means that what we should be assessing is changing.

Wits University will undertake extensive engagements with academic staff across the university, staff responsible for physical facilities, students and experts from outside the university to explore and implement a wide range of forms of assessment. As indicated above, assessment should be used both as a learning tool, for teaching staff and for students, and as a way of measuring student learning. Furthermore, to the extent that it is feasible, the timing and forms of assessment should be sensitive to the life circumstances of the majority of Wits students, such as the cost and time involved in travelling to and from campus.

As part of this focus area, Schools, course coordinators and academic staff will be supported to ensure alignment between assessment tasks and the stated learning outcomes of a course or programme, as captured in university documentation. Learning outcomes for individual courses that form part of a programme need to contribute to the learning outcomes of the programme. The forms of assessment used in a course need to be appropriate for measuring the learning outcomes of the course and for the level of the course, as measured by where it is placed on the National Qualifications



Framework (NQF). Thus, for example, if one of the learning outcomes of a course is that students will formulate a cogent argument for a viewpoint on the basis of selected evidence, it would be inappropriate to assess it using multiple choice questions. Likewise, the form of assessment used to assess learning outcomes for courses at levels 5, 6 and 7 of the NQF cannot be the same, as the applied competencies associated with each level (and specified in the NQF level descriptors) are different.

One of the desired outcomes of this focus area is to substantially reduce the number of formal examinations that students have to write and staff have to mark. The current heavy reliance on formal, summative, written examinations as the dominant form of assessment has deleterious consequences for staff and students alike. Staff spend countless hours creating, safeguarding and marking the examination papers. Students spend an inordinate amount of time not just writing examinations but also looking for ways to defer their examinations or appeal against exclusion because of examination results, rather than focusing on their learning. In addition, many of the associated administrative processes are cumbersome and very time-consuming. However, as there are some contexts in which summative formal examinations are appropriate, these administrative processes will be reviewed with a view to simplifying and streamlining them where possible.

Devising and implementing varied forms of assessment will require investments of time for professional learning and experimentation, and resources to cover release time for some staff from other duties, marking and possibly technology or other infrastructure or equipment, especially initially. However, it is hoped that some of the enormous portion of the academic year that is devoted to examinations – currently eight weeks (not counting administrative processes outside of designated exam weeks) – will be freed up for more productive educational and scholarly activities.

Sharing of initiatives undertaken to diversify and improve the alignment of assessment with learning outcomes and, more broadly, graduate attributes, will be encouraged through university seminars, workshops and forums, as well as scholarly contributions to conferences and publications.

The use of varied forms of assessment, carefully devised, well-aligned to learning outcomes and teaching approaches, and appropriately implemented, will contribute to enhanced, continuous, sustained student learning and engagement, and enable both staff and students to focus on the learning process, rather than focusing primarily on a final, summative examination.

3.5 Expanding postgraduate education

In its enrolment plan for 2020-2025, Wits University plans to expand the percentage of postgraduate students to 45% from its current 38%. This shift will have numerous implications for student learning and university teaching, as the learning and demographic characteristics and needs of postgraduate students are different from those of undergraduate students.

Postgraduate teaching takes a number of forms, where teaching, as mentioned above, is broadly defined as any engagement between staff members and students that is intended to promote student learning. At postgraduate level, some of the teaching is structured into formal courses with scheduled contact sessions, particularly for Honours degrees, Post Graduate Diplomas and some Masters degree programmes. In common with academic staff who teach undergraduate courses, staff who teach formal courses at postgraduate level will be encouraged to participate in professional learning activities to increase their ability to promote student learning at a level appropriate to the qualification. In addition, they need specialist knowledge of how to effectively promote learning among students who are more mature academically and in life experience than undergraduate students.

Students who are carrying out research need guidance. Such supervision of postgraduate students falls within the broad umbrella of “teaching” in that it is an engagement between a staff member and a student intended to promote student learning. In the past, students tended to receive guidance and feedback on their research exclusively, or nearly exclusively, from a single academic staff member appointed as their supervisor. However, this model will not work in future with the planned increase in postgraduate student numbers. Therefore, new models of guiding students who are conducting research will be developed and implemented that allow for more interaction among groups of students and academic staff.

CLTD, in collaboration with the Research Office, will expand its current offerings for staff on research supervision to include professional learning opportunities on how to promote effective learning of postgraduate students taking structured courses as well as those who are conducting research.

An expanded suite of learning opportunities for groups of postgraduate students will be offered by Faculties and the Research Office on a range of relevant topics, such as research ethics and proposal writing. Faculties and Student Affairs will also ensure that structures are in place to help postgraduate students access support to address physical, logistical and psycho-social needs.

In order to provide postgraduate students with the opportunity to begin to develop teaching competence, the University will introduce a teaching assistant (TA) scheme, in common with many universities overseas. In this scheme, full-time masters and doctoral students will work for a limited number of hours per week in a teaching role for at least one year for a fixed monthly stipend. Examples of such work include tutoring a small group of students, interacting with students taking online courses, assisting in the laboratory, or marking assignments. The Wits Framework for Continuous Professional Learning for Academics as University Teachers identifies the need for students who perform a

teaching role to receive initial training in university teaching, as well as oversight and mentoring as they carry out this role.

Administrative processes associated with postgraduate education will be reviewed and improved to ensure that, among other things, student progress and academic support are monitored and, where necessary, appropriate interventions are put in place to increase the likelihood that students will successfully complete their programmes of study within a reasonable length of time.

3.6 Expanding innovative formal and informal learning spaces

In the past two years, Wits University has made a significant financial investment in increasing Wi-Fi coverage across the institution. This opens the way for turning many existing interior and exterior areas into informal learning spaces. Such learning spaces are important for a number of reasons. First, the majority of Wits students do not live on campus. Therefore, they need places to study in between classes. Second, peer learning, which research has shown is an important contributor to promoting effective learning and reducing social isolation, requires spaces where students can sit and work together. Third, as Wits increases the use of blended and other forms of flexible learning, students need informal spaces to learn outside of designated teaching venues. Fourth, the current generation of students is inclined to move fluidly between work and relaxation, social interactions and discussions with peers related to their studies, so informal spaces are needed that can accommodate such fluidity.

An analysis will be conducted of which existing spaces are well-suited to become informal learning spaces, and, where appropriate, suitable fittings and furnishings will be installed to make the spaces comfortable, safe, functional and appealing to students.

Currently Wits has a specially designed, innovative learning space called an e-zone, located on the Education Campus. This space has a variety of seating options and technology that enables students and academics to explore and use multiple teaching and learning opportunities. Additional e-zones will be created.

A large, multi-purpose learning space will be opened on the ground floor of the Wartenweiller library on the main campus. Two “smart”, technology-enabled classrooms will also become available for teaching and learning.

Ongoing exploration and analysis will be conducted to create additional physical spaces that promote innovative approaches to student learning and university teaching.

3.7 Using data analytics to promote student success

Wits has excellent data science, data engineering and information processing skills and experience among the staff in the Business Intelligence Systems (BIS) unit, as well as strong institutional research skills in the Analytics and Institutional Research Unit (AIRU), which forms part of BIS. There is also substantial expertise in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) department. Wits also benefited from being a grant recipient and partner in the Kresge Foundation funded Siyaphumelela project from 2015 to 2019, which focused on strengthening the use of data to promote student success. Given this considerable capacity and its new approach to holistic, integrated student support described in the *Wits Institutional Framework for Student Success*, Wits is well placed to use data analytics as a cornerstone of its institutional efforts to promote student success.

BIS has already created dashboards that enable faculty administrators and academics to monitor pass rates in courses, and therefore to identify courses that have high failure rates or large numbers of failures. The latter is important, because it is possible that a course might have, for example, 1000 students and an 80% pass rate, but that means that 200 students have failed. If there are 10 such courses then 2000 students will have failed. Deans and Heads of Schools will appoint Faculty and School-based data “captains” who will be responsible for monitoring pass rates and numbers in all courses. Action plans will be devised to increase the number of students who pass courses with low pass rates or pass numbers. This may involve, for example, expanding academic support and development initiatives, providing more formative assessment, or introducing voluntary summer or winter schools (as is already done for certain courses in some faculties). In addition, expanded access to dashboards will be made available to other interested role players, such as lecturers, course coordinators and support staff.

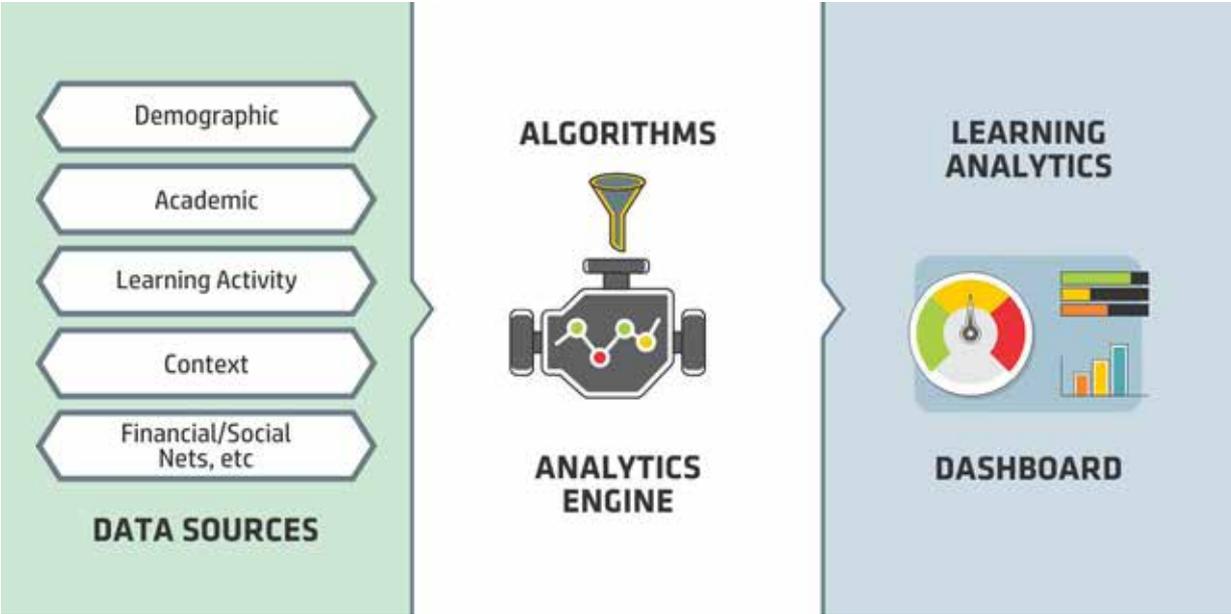
Course pass rates and throughput rates will be monitored over time at School, Faculty and University levels. Data analytics will be used to identify key impediments to progression and graduation at programme level, which can then be addressed at various levels in the university.

The BIS unit, in consultation with Faculty student advisers, Assistant Deans: Teaching and Learning, ICT and Student Affairs, plans to develop several new tools using data analytics to support student success. One such tool is a persistence model. Using machine learning, artificial intelligence and advanced modelling techniques, data scientists and engineers will develop a persistence model to predict which students are most likely to persist from year to year and, conversely, which students are likely to need various forms of support. Support can then be made available proactively.

A second tool that will be developed is an online Student Success System, which will enable support staff to monitor students' academic performance together with which forms of support they access, and thereby help guide the appropriate allocation of resources to various forms of support.

Qualitative and quantitative institutional research will be carried out to identify factors that may help or hinder student success, both for the student body as a whole and

for identified groups of students. Results of this research will feed into the systems approach described in the *Wits Institutional Student Success Framework*, and guide the identification, provision and ongoing integration of various forms of student support.





4 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE WITS LEARNING AND TEACHING PLAN 2020-2024

The *Wits Learning and Teaching Plan 2020-2024* is the guiding document for identifying and prioritising activities and allocating resources for enhancing student learning and university teaching at Wits during this period. Requests for external funding, such as from the DHET, will align with the Plan in order to increase the effectiveness of interventions through ensuring coherence among activities designed to support and strengthen learning and teaching.

The Learning and Teaching Plan will be accompanied by a detailed implementation plan, developed in consultation with stakeholders. The implementation plan will specify objectives for each focus area, together with activities planned for each year. It should be noted that the implementation of specific activities may need to be modified as circumstances could change over the 5-year period. The implementation plan will also indicate the data that will need to be collected for monitoring purposes.

Overall responsibility for the implementation of the plan will lie with the DVC: Academic. Monitoring of specific aspects of the implementation will be done at the level of Schools, Faculties and other relevant university structures, including CLTD and BIS. Oversight for integrated monitoring of the implementation of the plan will be the responsibility of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee.

5 CONCLUSION

The *Wits Learning and Teaching Plan 2020-2024* is both aspirational and practical. The vision for learning and teaching and the attributes we would like Wits graduates to develop, discussed in the Introduction, are aspirational. The selection of the seven specific focus areas is practical. These are areas in which it will be possible to plan, implement and monitor specific activities that will bring us closer to matching our reality to our aspirations, as well as ensuring that Wits aligns itself with global higher education trends and national needs.

This plan is one of several high-level guiding documents for the institution over the next few years. It cannot and should not deal with all aspects of the life of the university and its stakeholders.

Many other activities that are part of the normal business of the university and that are not explicitly stated in this document will continue, some of which may be enhanced as a direct or indirect effect of concerted efforts to bring about innovations and improvements in the focus areas.





