Professor Zeblon Zenzele Vilakazi is a world-class scholar who is recognised for his scientific work in physics and nuclear research and development, and his leadership in developing higher education in Africa.

An inspiring leader, Professor Vilakazi is at the helm of developing cutting edge science and technology. He serves as the Chair of South Africa’s National Quantum Computing Committee which seeks to develop a framework for quantum computing and quantum technology driven research and innovation. He also worked effortlessly to ensure that Wits and other African universities have access to the IBM quantum computing network.

Professor Vilakazi was instrumental in establishing South Africa’s first experimental high-energy physics research group and participation at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) focusing on the development of the High-level Trigger at the Large Hadron Collider project. He also served as a visiting scientist at the French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) in Saclay, France.

Professor Vilakazi joined the University of the Witwatersrand as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Postgraduate Affairs in 2014. He created an enabling environment for research to flourish. Under his leadership research output increased significantly and the number of postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows grew substantially, thereby realising the University’s vision of becoming a leading African research-intensive, postgraduate university.

The former Group Executive for Research and Development at the Nuclear Energy Corporation of South Africa, Professor Vilakazi also served as the Director of iThemba Labs. He holds an Honorary Professorship in the Department of Physics at the University of Cape Town.

A committed Wits alumnus, Professor Vilakazi obtained his PhD in 1988. His research interests include heavy-ion collisions at ultra-relativistic energies and computational physics in relation to GRID computing. He has a sterling publication record with more than 300 refereed articles in nuclear and high energy physics.

Professor Vilakazi embodies Wits’ values through his quest for academic and research excellence, social justice and the advancement of the public good. A Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences; a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader; a member of the Programme Advisory Committee for Nuclear Physics at the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Russia; a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s Standing Advisory Committee on Nuclear Applications; a member of the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics Working Group for Nuclear Physics; and a National Research Foundation board member; Professor Vilakazi is respected for his intellectual endeavours, his appreciation of the arts, and his commitment to knowledge creation and development.

In recognition of his illustrious intellectual endeavours, his distinguished academic achievements, his exceptional leadership, and his commitment to advancing the academy, it is with great honour that Professor Zeblon Zenzele Vilakazi is installed as the 16th Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand.