



UNIVERSITY OF THE  
WITWATERSRAND,  
JOHANNESBURG

## **PLAN FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING IN 2024**



## PREAMBLE

In the Introduction to the [Wits Learning and Teaching Plan 2020-2024](#) we wrote,

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.

Little did we know how prescient these words would turn out to be. The plan was approved in November 2019. Four months later, in March 2020, all on-campus educational activities ceased as we were struck by the COVID-19 pandemic. In late 2022, as we were looking forward to a year free of pandemic-related restrictions, a new, potentially destabilising actor appeared on the global stage – ChatGPT, a powerful Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool for generating well-written text in response to user prompts by using machine learning and drawing on an enormous store of data. And it was free. Educational institutions everywhere scrambled to figure out how to respond, seeking to prevent a torrent of AI-generated student assignments while exploring ways in which education could be enhanced.

These past four years have brought into sharp relief the unpredictability and turbulence of the times we live in, and consequently, how essential it is for us to be agile and adaptable. In the face of external events that threaten to tumble us about like flotsam in rough seas, we must maintain our sense of direction, identity and purpose. At Wits that means holding fast to the vision and values articulated in [Wits 2033 Strategic Framework](#), and building on our long history. It also means being flexible. In high winds, only the trees with deep roots and flexible branches remain standing; those that are rigid will break and fall.

Over the past few years we have increasingly been working together in a networked way, building links across erstwhile silos; this facilitates collaboration, collective thinking and communication, as well as strengthening relationships and a sense of common purpose. This way of working gives us both strength and flexibility, attributes that will be vital to our continuing ability to realise our vision in a world of uncertainty.

In this document we spell out our intentions for teaching and student learning for 2024, but we recognise that we may have to adapt to unforeseen circumstances.

## INTRODUCTION

The year 2024 marks the final year of implementation of the *Wits Learning and Teaching Plan 2020-2024*. The plan has seven focus areas:

1. Increasing flexible and life-long learning opportunities
2. Enhancing academics as university teachers
3. Strengthening institutional capacity for curriculum development and renewal
4. Diversifying assessment methods
5. Expanding post-graduate education
6. Expanding innovative formal and informal learning spaces
7. Using data analytics to promote student success.

Four months after the plan was approved, in March 2020, all on-campus educational activities ceased as we were struck by the COVID-19 pandemic. For most of 2020 and 2021 our educational activities were severely constrained by pandemic-related restrictions on the movement of people and venue capacity, and had to be conducted almost entirely online. In 2022 we were able to resume on-campus activities, which we combined with online activities to implement blended learning, something that had been an institutional goal in our 2015-2019 learning and teaching plan.

Surprisingly, accommodating pandemic-related restrictions helped us accelerate progress in several of our focus areas. The need to rapidly learn how to teach and support student learning in an online mode, and, later on, in a blended mode, advanced our ability to offer flexible learning opportunities. These changes to our mode of provision were supported by the appointment of additional academic development professional staff, who developed a number of resources and learning opportunities for enhancing academics as university teachers. Academics, from their side, generally welcomed the support. In 2023, when all COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted and it was tempting to think we could return to our old, pre-COVID ways, it soon became apparent that those ways were no longer effective with students who had experienced more flexible modes of learning. The need for better curriculum design became evident. In response, in 2022 and 2023 new learning opportunities were created to support academics with course and curriculum design, including facilitated retreats lasting several days. The pandemic also forced us to rethink our approaches to student assessment, which previously had a strong emphasis on end-of-course invigilated written examinations. Drawing on the impetus created by the pandemic, we rewrote the *Senate Standing Orders on the Assessment of Student Learning* to both promote and enable more diverse forms of assessment.

In 2022 the *Strategic Plan for Postgraduate Research Training 2023-2027* was developed. Implementation began in 2023. One component of the plan involves increasing support for postgraduate students, which includes collaboration between Postgraduate Affairs and Student Affairs to enhance the postgraduate student experience. It also identifies the importance of strengthening postgraduate supervision capacity, including employing a variety of approaches to supervision.

In the sixth focus area, increasing innovative formal and informal learning spaces, little progress could be made during the pandemic. In the latter part of 2022 and 2023 several informal learning spaces were created by adding suitable furniture to spaces that had been mostly empty, including the foyers of the Architecture Building and the new Commerce, Law and Management Administration Building. Furnishing and equipping a large informal learning space on the ground floor of the Wartenweiller Library, begun before the pandemic, was completed and the space opened for student use in 2023.

In 2020 a set of indicators for student success was developed by the Student Success Committee. Business Intelligence Services (BIS) provides the committee with data twice a year to monitor student success at both institutional and faculty levels. They have also developed predictive models, using machine learning, to identify students likely to be academically at risk, and flag them in dashboards that are available to Faculty Student Advisors.

# LEARNING AND TEACHING IN 2024

## Artificial Intelligence

In 2024, Wits will foster discussions and produce resources and guidance for staff and students on how to use AI to support good teaching and student learning, while avoiding potentially harmful consequences. Staff will be encouraged to explore possible uses of AI tools within their own disciplines. Documents related to academic misconduct will be reviewed.

One of the big challenges to higher education globally in 2023 was the unexpected and widespread availability of new, extremely powerful Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. Although AI tools, such as predictive text, had been available for years, the release in November 2022 by Open AI of ChatGPT caused a sensation. ChatGPT was the most powerful, freely available, text-based AI tool ever accessible to the general public. In response to user prompts, it could produce coherent, well-written text<sup>1</sup> by drawing on a vast store of data and combining the data in original ways. The fear among educators was that students would use it to write their assignments for them, and, of course, many did. As the year progressed, other powerful AI tools were released, some text-based and some image-based. There was a flurry of activity in cyberspace as people across the globe grappled with how to respond to these eerily human-like tools, how to harness them for good<sup>2</sup> and avoid falling victim to those who wished to use them for ill.

During 2023 Wits ran a series of institutional webinars, led by our own experts, on how ChatGPT worked, what it could and could not do, potential risks and dangers and possible positive uses. The Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development (CLTD) also organised a conference on the ethical and equitable use of AI in higher education.

It is clear that we cannot either prevent students from using AI or reliably detect<sup>3</sup> that they have done so and penalise them for it. Nor should we. Instead, we need to help our students develop what is being termed “critical AI literacy”<sup>4</sup>, the understanding of what AI can and cannot do and the ability to apply critical thinking to how to use it ethically and effectively. On the other hand, there need to be sanctions that discourage academic dishonesty. As AI tools evolve and become increasingly available for little or no cost, Wits’ [Student Academic Misconduct Policy](#) will need to be regularly reviewed and possibly updated.

Staff in academic disciplines also need to learn what AI tools can accurately and reliably (and often rapidly) do that can enhance their own teaching and assessment. For example, ChatGPT can integrate with sophisticated mathematical tools developed by the respected Stephen Wolfram’s company, “to give it what we might think of as ‘computational superpowers’<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the text is not always factually correct, as generative AI tools can “hallucinate” – invent responses that sound plausible based on syntax but are not based on actual facts.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, <https://beta.jisc.ac.uk/innovation/national-centre-for-ai>

<sup>3</sup> Various attempts have been made to identify AI-generated text, but none are foolproof. See, for example, <https://foundation.mozilla.org/en/blog/how-to-tell-chat-gpt-generated-text/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://blog.mahabali.me/educational-technology-2/what-i-mean-when-i-say-critical-ai-literacy/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://writings.stephenwolfram.com/2023/03/chatgpt-gets-its-wolfram-superpowers/>

## Assessment, learning and academic integrity

In 2024, concerted efforts will be made to strengthen the alignment between learning outcomes and assessments and to diversify assessment, in line with the new *Senate Standing Orders on the Assessment of Student Learning*, while supporting students to experience the joy of learning and to track their learning progress.

In 2023 we implemented our new *Senate Standing Orders on the Assessment of Student Learning* (available on the Registrar's [intranet site](#)), which both enable and promote the use of diverse forms of assessment that are appropriate for supporting, monitoring and measuring diverse students' achievement of diverse learning outcomes. The appearance of ChatGPT and the growing awareness and availability of AI tools highlight the importance of avoiding the temptation to fall back into old ways that may not be suitable for new times. In particular, they provide an impetus for us to think critically about what we really want students to know and be able to do, and then how to ascertain what they actually know and can do.

While we may lament the fact that we might no longer be able to utilise our favourite forms of assessment, such as many types of essay that can easily be produced by AI tools, as with any technology, we cannot ban AI tools. When calculators replaced slide rules and computers became personal, we had to rethink what mathematics to teach and how to assess it. We now need to rethink how best to appraise students' learning that may be AI-assisted.

*Learning* is the key word. It is easy for students, and even staff, to focus so much on marks that students do not have the time and opportunity to experience the joy of learning. Academic staff are passionate about their disciplines. They love learning. How do we create an environment in which our students love learning?

One strategy is to make assessment an integral, interesting and rewarding part of the learning experience that we map out for students when we design courses. Well-designed assessments, which include timeous and useful feedback, can help both students and staff track and support students' progress and measure their achievements in relation to learning outcomes. The new standing orders encourage the use of cumulative assessments that do just that. The standing orders also support continuous assessment as well as multiple summative assessments<sup>6</sup> in various formats of one or more learning outcomes during a course rather than only at the end.

In 2024 greater use will be made of forms of assessment that are authentic and contextually relevant. Assessments that require students to cultivate their own voice and draw on their own lived experience will be encouraged.

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<sup>6</sup> In the *Senate Standing Orders on the Assessment of Student Learning*, summative assessment is defined as, "An assessment that is used to measure student achievement of one or more course or programme learning outcomes." Although summative assessment has sometimes been thought of as assessment conducted at the end of a course, in this definition, measuring achievement of one or more learning outcomes, as opposed to monitoring progress towards that achievement (formative assessment), can be done at any time during a course. Moreover, all learning outcomes do not need to be measured at the same time; achievement of some learning outcomes could be done earlier in the course than others.

When students are motivated not by marks but rather by the joy of learning, there is less temptation to use a chatbot or ghost writer to do their assignments for them. When they are encouraged and expected to find and use their own voice, they are less likely to let someone else speak for them. Ensuring that students (and staff) maintain academic integrity is more possible in an environment in which there is less pressure and more support to achieve. It is also more possible when there is less opportunity or perceived value to commit academic misconduct.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a sharp rise in the number of academic misconduct cases referred to the Legal Office. At the end of 2022, we produced the [Wits Framework for Academic Integrity](#). The framework includes a number of suggestions for how assessments can be designed that reduce the temptation and opportunity for academic misconduct. One of these is to design assessments that are authentic in the sense that they pertain to real-world situations. Another suggestion is to include assessments that require students to draw on personal experiences, or to give personal responses. In addition, academic integrity can be promoted by using assessments that are contextually relevant for our local situation, which also support our decolonisation agenda. Contextualised assessments make it harder for AI tools to generate useful responses, at least for now, as little data from Africa, let alone Southern Africa, has been used in the training of generative AI tools (like ChatGPT).

## Blended learning

In 2024 we will enhance the design of courses offered in blended mode, taking into account time and space considerations and constraints. Professional learning opportunities and support will be offered by the CLTD and Faculty Teaching and Learning units.

Since 2022 Wits has adopted blended learning as the predominant mode of educational provision. In our approach to blended learning, we have drawn on the framework of Joosten et al<sup>7</sup>, who consider four dimensions:

Blended learning is instruction that blends technological, temporal, spatial, and pedagogical dimensions to create actualized learning.

Technological ranges from no or low-tech to technology supported to technology enabled. Temporal ranges from completely asynchronous (anytime) to time-restricted (within a specified window) to synchronous (at a specified time). Spatial ranges from specified locations (on-site) to anywhere (fully remote). Pedagogical ranges from teacher-centred (such as presentation-style lectures) to interactive (such as discussion classes) to student-driven (such as inquiry-based and problem-based learning).

A recent report by JISC (the UK Joint Information Systems Committee)<sup>8</sup> adds nuance and practical considerations to these dimensions. This includes the need to see time and space as finite resources to be allocated judiciously. ‘Time’ in the JISC document refers not only to the

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<sup>7</sup> Joosten, T., Weber, N., Baker, M., Schletzbaum, A., & McGuire, A. (2021). *Planning for a Blended Future: A Research-Driven Guide for Educators*. [Report] Every Learner Everywhere Network. Retrieved from: <https://www.everylearnereverywhere.org/resources/>

<sup>8</sup> Beetham, H. and Macnei, S. (August 2023). *Beyond Blended*. <https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/9227/1/beyond-blended-post-pandemic-curriculum-and-learning-design-report.pdf>.

choice of whether educational activities are conducted synchronously or asynchronously but also the workload required of both staff and students. Considerations related to ‘space’ extend beyond the choice of whether educational activities are conducted on-site or remotely to also include timetabling, room availability and design (which can affect how and whether students participate), and physical resources. In the Wits context, this includes availability of reliable internet connections and charging facilities, lack of which can thwart efforts to implement innovative blended learning.

While we have implemented blended learning for two years, there is room for improvement in how we design courses that provide a blend of dimensions that caters to the needs of our students, is appropriate for the nature of the subject, enables students to achieve the learning outcomes of the courses and takes account of resource constraints. For example, when we consider time and space constraints, we need to think critically and how much time students need for various educational activities and where these are best done. Our timetable was designed for a different era. In 2024 we need to be intentional about deciding when we need students to be on campus, for how long and in which types of venues. Certain activities are best done in-person, sometimes for more than one hour, while others can be done at least as effectively remotely. The sections below elaborate on this point.

## **Student engagement and social interactions**

In 2024, Wits will increase in-person educational activities that support student engagement with course content, other students, tutors and staff.

The lockdown restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic led to substantial social isolation. However, the lifting of the restrictions has not completely removed a sense of social isolation for many students. In the context of the university, even when students are physically on campus, they may not have the confidence or skills to interact with one another and with staff in ways that support their learning. In addition, during the pandemic much of the teaching was conducted in an online mode by staff who were not familiar with the theory and practice of online course design and pedagogy, especially techniques for promoting online engagement. These factors are likely contributors to what is being perceived by many staff as a widespread lack of student engagement in their courses.

One of the important factors that influences student success is student engagement – with the course content, other students and staff. According to Vincent Tinto,<sup>9</sup> a leading scholar on student success,

The more students are academically and socially engaged with faculty, staff and peers, the more likely they are to succeed in college. Such engagements lead not only to social affiliations and the social and emotional support they provide, but also to greater involvement in educational activities and the learning they produce.

There are a number of teaching approaches that promote student engagement through structured interactions among students and with tutors and academics. Such approaches support

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<sup>9</sup> Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing College. Rethinking Institutional Action*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p 7.

social connections, sense of belonging<sup>10</sup> and learning. The social connections and sense of belonging help combat feelings of isolation and can support students' well-being; the active engagement of students is likely to lead to learning that is deep and lasting. Examples of such teaching approaches are cooperative learning<sup>11</sup>, inquiry-based learning<sup>12</sup> and project, problem and team-based learning.<sup>13</sup>

## Maintaining an online presence

In 2024 course sites on the LMS will be enhanced and updated in order to implement teaching in a blended mode that effectively promotes student learning and engagement. Support will be offered by CLTD and Faculty Learning and Teaching Units.

Since 2020 every course has had to have an active site on our Learning Management System (LMS). During the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person activities were restricted, we were reliant on these sites to enable teaching and student learning to continue. In 2022 and 2023, after the restrictions were lifted, we adopted a blended approach to educational provision, as mentioned above, in which each course was designed to utilise a blend of on-site and online activities, which meant that each course still had an active LMS site. This enabled us to be resilient and agile in 2023 when our planned educational activities were disrupted by stage 6 load-shedding and student protests.

As we continue to learn together about how to design courses in a blended mode that promotes effective learning and enhances student engagement both in-person and online, we need to continuously improve the design of course sites on the LMS, as well as updating content.

One of the advantages of the LMS Wits adopted, ulwazi, is that the architecture makes it easy to integrate external tools. Over the past few years, we have acquired several tools that have been integrated into ulwazi, and will continue to do so as the need arises and finances permit. The Education Technology Committee, a sub-committee of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee that includes representatives from all faculties, is responsible for identifying and considering suggestions for educational technology that is made available at institutional level.

As mentioned in the section on blended learning, we need to be intentional about our course design choices, including which activities are best done in-person and which can be done as effectively or more effectively online. Feedback from students, both at Wits and internationally, indicates that many students value the opportunity to access presentations online so that they can go over sections that they have not understood the first time, revise and consolidate their learning, use them as a learning tool when studying with peers, and catch up if they fall behind because of illness or outside commitments or constraints.

Ulwazi has a number of assessment tools that are particularly useful for diagnostic and formative assessment, some of which provide immediate feedback to students. This helps

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<sup>10</sup> <https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2022/10/Building-Belonging-October-2022.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.co-operation.org/what-is-cooperative-learning>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.queensu.ca/ctl/resources/instructional-strategies/inquiry-based-learning> ;  
<http://www.ceeb1.manchester.ac.uk/eb1/>; <https://www.interacademies.org/education/ibse>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.teambasedlearning.org/>; <https://vu.nl/en/employee/didactics/team-based-learning>  
<https://instructionalmoves.gse.harvard.edu/team-based-learning>



students gauge their own level of understanding, while providing motivation for them to participate, especially if each online assessment counts (even for a small amount) towards the final mark. It also helps academic staff gauge their students' understanding and monitor their participation, providing information about where additional support or learning materials may be needed, as well as identifying students who may be academically at-risk and need to be offered proactive support.

## Enhancing curriculum through programme reviews

In 2024 the QAPO and faculties will develop a process for the regular review of existing programmes.

Wits undertakes reviews of schools every five years, but programmes offered by schools are only one component of these quinquennial reviews. In addition, there are programmes that involve more than one school for which Wits does not have a formal review process.

Wits has a rigorous quality assurance process for the development of new programmes, but there is no institutional process for regularly reviewing existing programmes. Some programmes are subject to external reviews by professional bodies, but many are not. This can potentially affect the quality and fitness for purpose of those programmes, as changes to individual courses over time may affect the overall purpose, learning outcomes and coherence of a programme. This issue was identified in the institutional audit that the CHE carried out of Wits in 2022, and the need to institute programme reviews was included as a recommendation in the audit panel's report (available on the QAPO [intranet site](#)).

The QAPO will therefore work with faculties to develop a process for programme reviews, drawing on resources from professional bodies and other universities, for implementation in 2025.

## Postgraduate supervision

In 2024 a Postgraduate Education Specialist will be appointed in the CLTD who will create a ladder of learning opportunities in postgraduate supervision for supervisors at all levels of experience, including opportunities to learn about different models of supervision.

In 2023 the *Strategic Plan for Postgraduate Research Training 2023-2027* was implemented. One of the activities in the plan is “supervisor capacity development”. In order to support this activity, a new position has been created in the CLTD of Postgraduate Education Specialist, which should be filled by the start of 2024. This person will be responsible for coordinating learning opportunities for postgraduate supervisors at all levels of experience and seniority, and structuring them into a “ladder of learning”. The specialist will work with Wits staff who currently provide supervision training, draw on existing learning opportunities – formal and short courses, workshops, webinars and online resources – and create new ones to address identified needs and help Wits respond to global developments in postgraduate supervision. We envisage that this person, working closely with the Postgraduate Research and Development Office and faculties, will assist Wits in implementing a wider range of supervision models, include cohort models. This should relieve the burden on individual supervisors resulting from the traditional apprenticeship model in which a supervisor works

with students individually, while strengthening the support, learning opportunities and sense of community for students and supervisors who work collaboratively.

## **Life-long learning**

In 2024, Wits will consolidate the administration of its short courses and run them through a new commercial company, Wits Plus (Pty) Ltd. Some short courses will be marketed as microcredentials and attract digital badges.

One of the consequences of rapid global change is the transformation of the nature of work. Both the knowledge and skills to do specific jobs and the jobs themselves are changing. This means that Wits graduates need opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills over their lifetimes. For many years Wits has run short courses, which have contributed to students' lifelong learning for both personal and professional development. These short courses have been administered by several dozen entities across the University. In order to better support lifelong learning, in 2024 Wits will consolidate the administration of the many short courses it offers under a single entity, Wits Plus (Pty) Ltd, a wholly Wits-owned commercial company. This consolidation will make it easier for potential students to find short courses of interest to them and increase income to the University through streamlined administrative processes and better financial controls.

In 2023, the Academic Planning and Development Committee approved the motivation for the introduction of microcredentials that will be digitally badged. Digital badges are online certifications of achievement that are securely generated and stored in the Cloud using blockchain technology. When a recipient clicks on a digital badge they have earned, they are taken to an internet site that displays whatever information the education provider has supplied, such as the name, level and learning outcomes of the course. The digital badge is stored in the user's digital "backpack" and can be digitally shared, e.g., on curriculum vitae and personal social media sites. Our LMS provider has a badging application that integrates with ulwazi for a cost per badge.

## **Informal learning spaces**

In 2024 detailed plans and costs will be drawn up for several informal learning spaces, which will be implemented as funding becomes available.

The creation of several open learning spaces, both indoors and outdoors, are being explored on the Wits campuses, which will provide conducive and inspiring spaces for learning, working and collaboration. Envisaged improvements for these spaces include furniture, landscaping, connectivity, power points and possibly other technology. These spaces will be linked to nearby amenities. Driven by the Faculty, in 2023 the foyer of the Commerce, Law and Management Administration Building was furnished and became available as an informal learning space.

For several areas early concept renders have been developed. Detailed plans need to be developed before they can be accurately costed, but it has been proposed that R10 million per year will be allocated to informal learning space development.

## **DATA ANALYTICS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

In 2024 BIS will run data literacy training for staff, with a focus on complex data terminology rather than technology. They will identify, encourage, and develop citizen data scientists (data champions) in faculties, schools, and administrative departments. They will also work with students to contribute their voice to BIS' data analytics work.

Over the past few years, Business Intelligence Services (BIS) has developed dashboards to identify students who are academically at risk, as well as monitor student requests for various forms of support. In 2024 a Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) framework will be developed and a logic model of thinking will be used to focus on outcomes of interventions rather than only outputs, with a view to ultimately strengthening the impact of the student success analytics work.

In 2024, BIS will seek an implementation partner to configure and implement the Salesforce Student Success Hub (SSH). We aim to use the SSH to record and improve communications between Faculty Student Advisors and students and to record whether students attend the interventions that have been made available. This will provide a 360° view of the student and will aim to improve the student experience. BIS will also implement the Autoscholar system, developed at the University of KwaZulu Natal to provide data and tools to enhance student advising, and investigate whether it will help us improve our student success analytics.

BIS will continue to increase its portfolio of AI models to support student success at different levels. They will offer training for staff to understand and be able to use the AI models effectively in promoting student success. They will also seek ways to solicit input from students on how they think data can be used to increase their success.

BIS will also engage with academics to determine whether we can introduce analytics (beyond those available in ulwazi) that will assist lecturers to promote student success in the classroom.

In response to the CHE institutional audit and in consultation with schools, BIS will develop a data dictionary to ensure that all stakeholders use common definitions of complex data. They plan to run data literacy training for staff, and solicit and support data champions throughout the University who will support evidence-based decision-making to promote student success.

## **STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT**

In 2024 the Student Affairs Division will create the Centre for Student Development, which will consolidate Student Governance, Wits Citizenship and Community Outreach, and the Development and Leadership Unit into a single structure under the Deputy Dean: Student Affairs. The centre will also house a new unit, the Student Transitions and Persistence Unit, which will be responsible for Gateway to Success, the year-long First Year Experience programme, the First Year Mentorship Programme and transition support for senior students and postgraduates. The transition support for postgraduate students will include the postgraduate orientation programme, which was run for the first time in 2023 in collaboration with the Postgraduate Affairs Office, as well as a postgraduate student experience programme.

Gateway to Success, our integrated academic and student life orientation programme begun in 2022, will be run for all new first students in the two weeks before classes begin in 2024. The programme is co-led by the Dean of Student Affairs and the Senior Director: Academic Affairs, and organised by a project committee comprising representatives from faculties, student affairs, student academic development, student enrolment, ICT, services, institutional research, marketing, communication and facilities. There will be a mixture of on-campus activities led by faculties and student affairs and two online courses, *Climate Change and Me* and *Digital Abilities*.

In 2023 several co-curricular programmes were approved for official recognition. To qualify for official recognition, a co-curricular activity needs to advance student development of one or more Wits graduate attributes, be overseen by a Wits staff member, and have clearly stated learning outcomes that are assessed. ICT developed an online tool for capturing the information needed to produce official co-curricular records, which will be implemented in 2024. The co-curricular record is an important means of recognising the role and value of co-curricular activities in helping students develop the attributes of a Wits graduate.

Helping You Learn Online (HYLO), an ulwazi site in which all students are enrolled, was created in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Since then, it has been expanded considerably. In 2023 modules were added related to academic integrity and self-regulated learning, including “Becoming a self-directed learner” and “Developing a growth mindset”. In 2024 new modules on artificial intelligence tools will be added. Lecturers are encouraged to include a link to the site on their ulwazi course sites.

In 2023, as part of the implementation of the *Wits Institutional Student Success Framework*, the Institutional Research Unit (IRU) worked with ICT to create a searchable online database of student supports available across the University. In 2024 a link will be placed on the Wits website to enable both students and staff to search for available supports. Units that offer new forms of student support that could be added to the database should notify the IRU.

## **CONCLUSION**

The *Wits Learning and Teaching Plan 2024* laid out seven focus areas, which highlight key aspects of the educational landscape in which enhancements were needed for Wits to strengthen its educational provision and the success of all of its students. We have made significant progress in each of these areas, and are also now taking a more holistic and systemic view of teaching and student learning and success. In contrast to working in silos, we have developed a networked way of working in which role players across the University communicate and collaborate to improve our effectiveness in teaching and student learning. This way of working enables us to be responsive and agile in the face of unforeseen and potentially destabilising external events. This was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when some of the priorities we had identified just a few months earlier in our learning and teaching plan were actualised rapidly through our network of people. The plan also informed the development of sections of the *Wits 2033 Strategic Framework* related to academic excellence, one of the framework’s four pillars.

In the second half of 2022, just as the COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted, Wits underwent an institutional audit by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). While there are always areas for improvement, the audit panel report sent to us in 2023 was favourable about how we ensured good quality teaching and student learning and success, even during lockdown. Going forward, in 2024 we will implement the *Wits Framework for Quality Assurance of Educational Provision* (available on the QAPO [intranet site](#)) approved by the Academic Planning and Development Committee in 2023. The framework identifies five clusters of activities that contribute to the quality of educational provision: academic offerings, teaching, student learning and engagement, student support, and services, facilities and resources. The focus in the framework is on assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience.

During 2024 a new five-year learning and teaching plan will be developed, aligning to the *Wits 2033 Strategic Plan*, drawing on what we have learnt during these five years and keeping us abreast of global developments in higher education. Our values-driven leadership, world-class academics, committed and capable professional and support staff and talented students will ensure that Wits continues to promote academic excellence with social justice and be a force for good in South Africa, Africa and the world.