Terms of Reference for an Impact Evaluation of the Siyaphumelela Student Success Initiative

01 February 2026

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Background and Context

About Saide

Established in 1992, Saide is an education support organisation founded on social justice, human-centeredness and open learning principles. We believe that education is the foundation for lifelong success. As such, we are on a mission to unlock the power of education and expand opportunity for children, youth and adults across Africa.

Innovating data-informed solutions and leveraging technology, Saide supports education providers across diverse modes of provision (in-person, remote and hybrid), partnering with governments, public and private institutions, as well as civil society organisations. We work across the education system from early learning through primary and secondary schooling, to higher education and training.

About Siyaphumelela

The *Siyaphumelela ("We Succeed") Initiative* seeks to broaden evidence-based strategies for post-school student success in South Africa. Launched in 2014 with funding from the *Kresge Foundation*, the initiative is led by *Saide* and draws on insights from global student success innovators like the *University Innovation Alliance* and *Achieving the Dream*.

In 2019, with additional funding support from the *Kresge Foundation*, *Saide* launched *Siyaphumelela Network 2.0.* By 2022, 17 South African public higher education institutions had joined the network. The current phase, *Siyaphumelela Network 3.0*, was launched in June 2024. A total of 20 institutions were admitted as members of the network, representing 20 out of 26 public universities in South Africa. These 20 institutions receive grant funding from the *Kresge Foundation* to accelerate and embed their student success efforts.

The Siyaphumelela Initiative aims to collaboratively promote equitable student success in South African higher education through six key objectives shown in Figure 1.
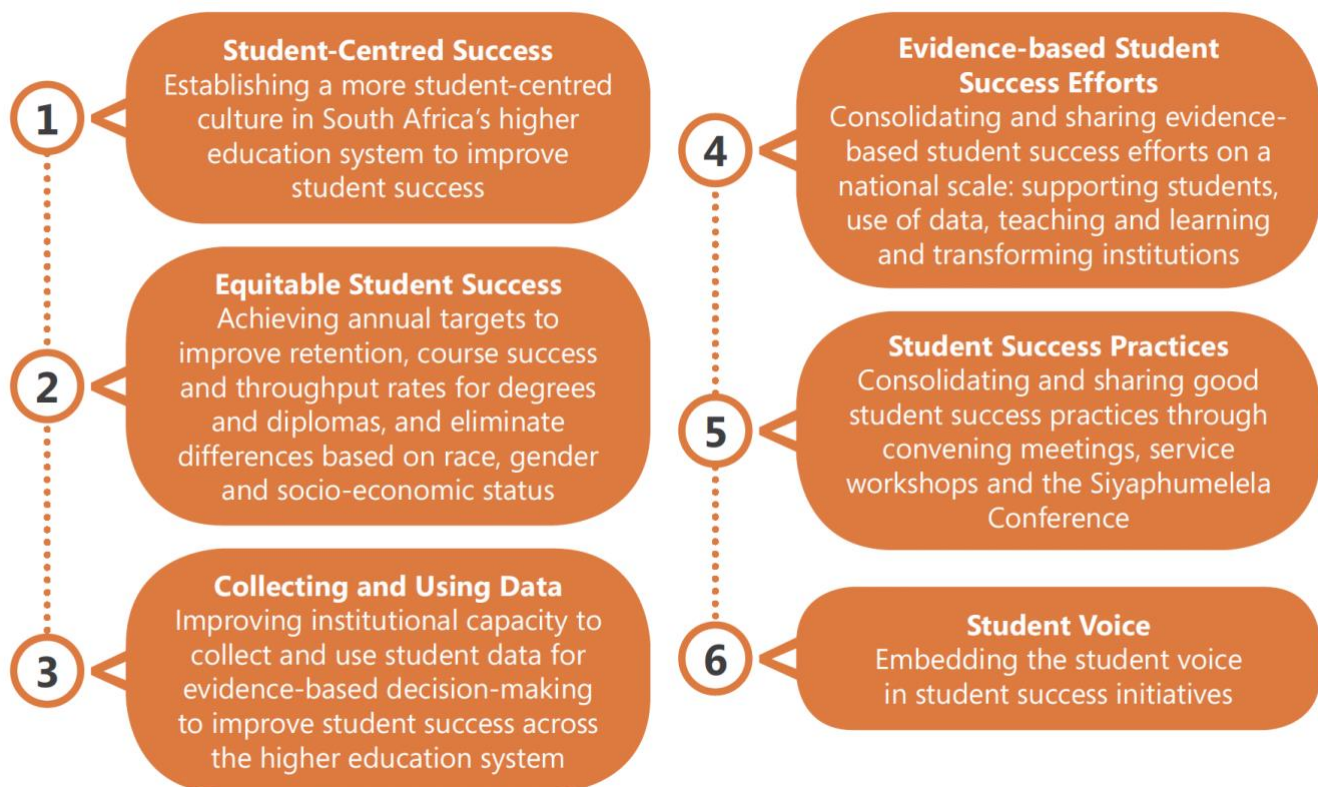
Student-Centred Success
Establishing a more student-centred culture in South Africa's higher education system to improve student success — **1**

Evidence-based Student Success Efforts
Consolidating and sharing evidence-based student success efforts on a national scale: supporting students, use of data, teaching and learning and transforming institutions — **4**

Equitable Student Success
Achieving annual targets to improve retention, course success and throughput rates for degrees and diplomas, and eliminate differences based on race, gender and socio-economic status — **2**

Student Success Practices
Consolidating and sharing good student success practices through convening meetings, service workshops and the Siyaphumelela Conference — **5**

Collecting and Using Data
Improving institutional capacity to collect and use student data for evidence-based decision-making to improve student success across the higher education system — **3**

Student Voice
Embedding the student voice in student success initiatives — **6**

Figure 1 Aims of the Siyaphumelela Network Student Success Initiative

The initiative uses a collective-impact approach with the five conditions of collective success (Kania and Kramer, 2011).

1) **Common agenda** of equitable student success

2) **Shared measurement** of student success as measured through a) retention of first time entering students to second year, b) undergraduate credit degree success rates c) pass rates in high impact modules (high impact modules are modules with high enrollment, low pass rates and prevent students from graduating in minimum time and d) throughput for 3 year diplomas and 3 and 4 year degrees and diplomas. These are disaggregated by race, gender, and socio-economic status (as measured by NSFAS funding status and/or School Quintile, if available).

3) **Mutually reinforcing activities** such as professional development for the network offered by Saide and Partner institutions, known as service workshops or short learning programmes, coaching, work streams to solve student success challenges, regional networks lead by partner institutions, bi-annual partner convenings for institutional leads, and attendance at the annual Achieving the Dream Conference in the USA and the annual Siyaphumelela Student Success conference.

4) **Continuous communication** through Siyaphumelela newsletters, the Siyaphumelela website and knowledge portal.

5) **Backbone support** is provided by Saide, although this support has evolved to play a more leadership role, consolidating and sharing best practices, and supporting less-resourced institutions that joined the network.

Note on funding context: Since 2014, the initiative has been catalysed by support from the Kresge Foundation. The current phase of Siyaphumelela 3.0 is expected to be the final Kresge cycle, creating an imperative to evidence impact, inform sustainability pathways, and mobilise alternative and complementary funding.

Development/problem context

Since the project's inception in 2014, the context has evolved considerably; however, issues related to equitable student success and performance gaps based on race, gender, and socio-economic status persist. The higher education environment has been affected by factors such as the #FeesMustFall movement and subsequent policy changes in 2017 that introduced free higher education for students from poor and working-class backgrounds (South African Government News Agency, 2017), ongoing funding challenges due to reduced state support for universities, increased expectations for producing employable graduates amid rising graduate unemployment rates (currently above 12%), as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a shift towards emergency remote teaching and learning at universities, and contributed to high school students being less prepared for university studies.

The project team recently re-examined the problem, and these efforts are shown in Figure 2.

Problem statement: The higher education sector needs to adapt to a changing society, learn collectively, prioritise student success, teaching and learning and student-centred approaches in Universities, and have systems incentives in order to do teaching and learning and student success differently and integrated across the institutions and for all students, which enables us to solve the equity challenges. Throughout this we need to measure and manage progress using data.
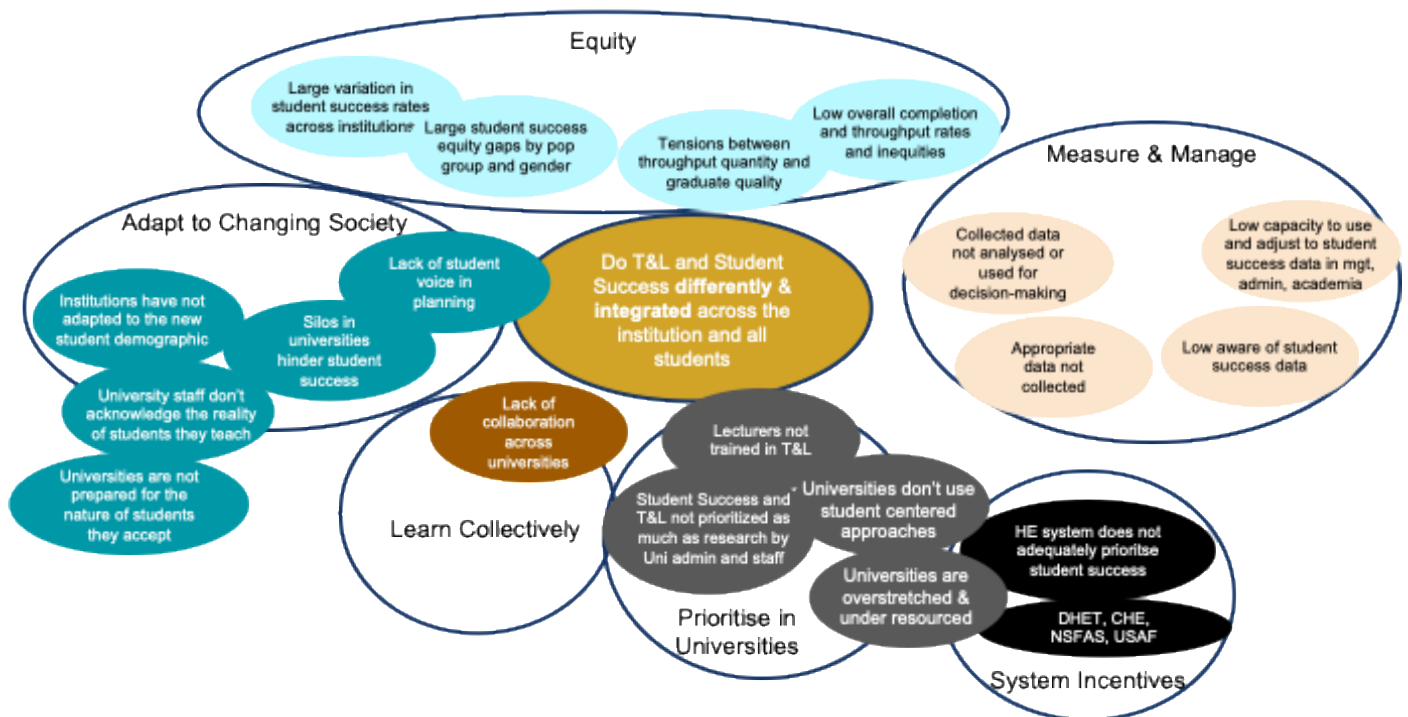

Figure 2 Visual depiction of the problem that Siyaphumelela is trying to address

Stakeholders and intended beneficiaries

Primary stakeholders include Saide (as the backbone organisation), the project sponsor, the Kresge Foundation, and the 20 Partner universities within the network.

Strategic stakeholders encompass the Department of Higher Education and Training, Universities South Africa, the Council on Higher Education, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and Siyaphambili, based at SALDRU at the University of Cape Town.

Intended beneficiaries are undergraduate students across Partner institutions, with a clear emphasis on equity concerning race, gender, and socio-economic status.

It is important to note that although Siyaphumelela works specifically with staff at universities to transform institutions, the ultimate beneficiaries are, in fact, the students.

Purpose and Objectives of the Evaluation

The evaluation is being undertaken now to document the impact of Siyaphumelela since its inception in 2014, tracing the evolution from five to twenty universities and assessing contributions to systemic change in student-success practice and equity outcomes across South Africa's higher-education sector.

The evaluation also responds to the uncertainty of funding and the broader donor environment and geo-political landscape. Findings will inform decisions on future sustainability, resource mobilisation, and potential scaling (including to the remaining public HEIS, private HEIs and TVET colleges).

It is also envisaged that the impact evaluation will generate data to engage DHET, philanthropic foundations, and other potential funders by demonstrating the return on investment (ROI) of systemic interventions like Siyaphumelela relative to traditional philanthropic approaches such as providing individual bursaries to students. By demonstrating impact at scale, Siyaphumelela can be positioned as a high-leverage, cost-effective strategy for enhancing student success and equity nationwide. This was explored at the 2025 Siyaphumelela Conference session entitled Raising the Tide of Student Success: a conversation with business and philanthropy. In the same way that a rising tide lifts all boats, so can systemic interventions like Siyaphumelela raise the tide so all students succeed.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

1. Assess the cumulative impact of Siyaphumelela (2014 to current) on institutional capacity, student-success indicators, and equitable student success in the partner institutions.

2. Identify key evidence-based student success practices and enabling change mechanisms that resulted in improved student outcomes.

3. Provide evidence to inform sustainability and funding beyond the current grant cycle.

4. Validate the theory of change for translation to the remaining six public higher education institutions, most of which are historically disadvantaged institutions and under-resourced, and expansion to the private HEIs, TVET colleges and African universities. The project team recognises the successful collaboration within the network, but it is not well understood as to how it happened and why it has been so successful.

The evaluation results will inform strategic and operational decisions critical to the future of Siyaphumelela and student success in South Africa. Specifically, it will guide resource allocation and programme adjustments for the remaining implementation period (2026–2027), ensuring that professional development, coaching, convenings and conferences deliver maximum value. It will provide evidence for sustainability planning and funding strategies, including engagement with DHET, philanthropic foundations, and other partners, by demonstrating the return on investment of systemic interventions. The findings will also shape decisions on scaling the model to additional institutions (including private HEIs and TVET colleges), refining the Theory of Change and shared measurement framework, and determining the most effective mechanisms for institutional and sector-wide impact.

Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) Principles

The Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) paradigm aims to return control of evaluation to Africans, centring African culture, ethics, and values (Chilisa & Mertens, 2021; Omosa et al., 2021). This approach shifts perceptions from Africans as passive recipients of Western aid to active participants shaping evaluations

for their own long-term benefit. The evaluation should, as far as possible, include the Made in Africa Evaluation principles, in particular when comparing impact in the historically advantaged institutions and the historically disadvantaged institutions, and different students that these institutions serve.

Scope of the Evaluation

Time period: 2014–2026. Quantitative analyses are provided for periods with available indicators and data series. Greater detail is generally included from 2020 onward with better internal reporting within Saide. All findings should be presented in a longitudinal narrative beginning in 2014, from inception to present.

Geographic focus: South Africa only

Target groups: University leadership (both existing and retired); Institutional Leads (known more commonly in other projects as Principal Investigators) in the 20 partner institutions; students (where appropriate); Siyaphumelela Scholars; Saide project staff; Siyaphumelela Coaches; sector bodies (DHET/USAf/CHE/NSFAS/SALDRU); and retired individuals who were previously involved with Siyaphumelela at their institutions.

The scope of the evaluation is to evaluate outcomes and impact of the Siyaphumelela initiative. The Theory of Change for Siyaphumelela is shown in Appendix A: Theory of Change. These include:

1) The impact that Siyaphumelela has made on equitable student success at the learner level, the sector level and the institutional level.

2) The extent that the student has been placed at the centre of the university

3) The extent that the university collects and uses data towards student success

4) The extent that the university designs, shares and implements evidence-based student success practices

5) The extent to which there is increased collaboration within and across institutions as a result of Siyaphumelela.

Evaluation Questions

Note: It is expected that the evaluation proposal include an evaluation matrix as part of the submission. The proposal is also expected to adapt and include additional evaluation questions if deemed appropriate. Sub-questions are to be added and included in the evaluation matrix. The OECD-DAC criteria (OECD, 2019) have been included to align with internationally recognised evaluation criteria and principles.

1) To what extent has the Siyaphumelela initiative improved performance on the four key student success indicators across participating universities over 2014–2026? What changes are plausibly attributable to Siyaphumelela versus other factors?

The four key student success indicators are a) retention of first time entering students to second year, b) undergraduate credit degree success rates c) pass rates in high impact modules (high impact modules are modules with high enrolment, low pass rates and prevent students from graduating in minimum time and d) throughput for 3 year diplomas and 3 and 4 year degrees and diplomas. These are disaggregated by race, gender, and socio-economic status (as measured by NSFAS funding status and/or School Quintile, if available).

Rationale: This question tests whether the initiative is achieving its intended outcomes and contributing to systemic impact, which is essential for accountability and for demonstrating value to funders and stakeholders.

OECD-DAC Criteria: Impact: What difference does Siyaphumelela make?

2) How well do Siyaphumelela's activities meet Partner needs and align with institutional strategies and sector priorities (DHET/USAf/SALDRU)? How coherent is the initiative with complementary interventions such as DHET's University Capacity Development Grant and Foundation Grants?

Rationale: This ensures that Siyaphumelela remains fit-for-purpose, policy-aligned, and complementary with other initiatives, which is critical for sustainability and sector buy-in.

OECD-DAC Criteria: Coherence: How well does Siyaphumelela fit?

3) How efficiently are resources converted into outputs and outcomes? What is the return on investment (ROI) of systemic interventions like Siyaphumelela compared to traditional philanthropic approaches, such as individual bursaries paid for by philanthropic foundations?

Rationale: This demonstrates the cost-effectiveness and comparative advantage of a systemic initiative like Siyaphumelela, providing evidence for funders and policymakers to justify continued or expanded investment.

OECD-DAC Criteria: Efficiency

4) Through which mechanisms (e.g., data capacity, leadership engagement, student voice, culture shift) does change occur, and under what institutional contexts?

Rationale: This identifies the causal pathways and enabling factors behind observed impact, informing adaptive management and replication in diverse institutional contexts.

OECD-DAC Criteria: Effectiveness

5) Which outcomes and institutional capabilities are likely to be sustained or scaled (including to private HEIs and TVETs), and what contextual factors such as enabling conditions or risks are evident?

Rationale: This provides evidence for medium-term planning, resource mobilisation, partnerships and strategic decisions on scaling the model beyond the current network.

OECD DAC Criteria: Sustainability

Evaluation Design and Methodology

Suggested approaches

The suggested approach is a mixed-methods, theory-based evaluation. The theory-based evaluation design aims to better articulate and test the intervention's theory of change (Weiss, 1997). The design combined the quantitative impact analysis of the four key Siyaphumelela student success indicators with qualitative inquiry to explain mechanisms that contributed to student success, contextual factors and institutional narratives.

In addition, these complementary frameworks will guide the design:

1) Contribution Analysis to assess whether and how Siyaphumelela contributed to the observed changes (Mayne, 2011) in student success indicators of retention, success rates, pass rates in high-impact modules and throughput, and eliminating performance gaps based on race, gender and socio-economic status.

2) Realist Evaluation to answer what works, for whom, in what contexts and how, by investigating the context, mechanism and outcomes (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

3) Quasi-experimental estimation to strengthen causal inference on impact indicators using Difference-in-Differences (DiD) (Angrist & Pischke, 2009; Gertler et al., 2016; Fredriksson and Oliveira, 2019). Difference-in-Differences can be employed to estimate the causal effect of Siyaphumelela over time by comparing the changes in outcomes among network institutions that joined in Phase 1, those that continued and joined in Phase 2, and those that joined in Phase 3. Similarly, it is also possible to include institutions outside the network as a control group. A critical assumption of DiD is that, in the absence of the intervention, the difference between the treatment and comparison groups would have remained constant over time-the so-called parallel trends assumption (Angrist and Pischke, 2009). This can be tested through event-study plots and staggered-adoption estimates, which are more applicable for multiple phases and staggered rollouts (Callaway and Sant'Anna, 2021), as happened in Siyaphumelela phases 1 to 3, whilst noting that spillover to non-network institutions is likely to have occurred.

Justification of design choice

This design balances evaluation rigour and practicality for a complex, system-level initiative like Siyaphumelela. Pure experimental designs are impractical given the networked nature of Siyaphumelela, the challenges of identifying a counterfactual due to the uniqueness of the universities, and the ethical constraints of excluding institutions from the network. A contribution-focused approach, strengthened by Realist Evaluation and quasi-experimental estimation of Difference-in-Differences, provides credible evidence for accountability, learning, and advocacy with funders and policymakers.

Although the expansion of the network from 5 institutions in 2014 to 20 institutions in 2024 approximates a stepped wedge design for a cluster randomised trial (Hemming et al., 2017), it differs substantially in that membership in the Network was not random, as institutions had to submit a proposal to the Kresge Foundation for funding to become a partner institution. The first five institutions selected comprised four historically white institutions, traditional research institutions, and only one university of technology. The logic at the time was that the approach would first be piloted in well-resourced institutions that had the capacity to identify and pilot student success practices and develop a model for student success that could be scaled to other institutions. In the second phase in 2019, there were seven partner institutions, including one historically disadvantaged institution. Towards the end of the second phase, the network model was adapted to include participant institutions that could pay a membership fee to belong to the network but did not receive Kresge grants. In the third phase, all existing institutions in the network received a grant, as well as three additional institutions that had not previously belonged to the network but had participated in some Siyaphumelela network activities. In addition, the movement of staff involved in Siyaphumelela between institutions, including executive leadership, means that there is no pure counterfactual, as almost every public higher education institution in South Africa has had some exposure to Siyaphumelela and student success. The six public higher education institutions that don't belong to Siyaphumelela are predominantly historically disadvantaged institutions and rural universities, whose progress cannot be measured against the well-resourced urban institutions that belonged to Siyaphumelela in phase 1. This is because of the legacy of the impact of apartheid on the non-white institutions, and the legacy of apartheid on the staff and students at these non-network institutions.

Data collection and analysis methods

The project team has conceptualised a monitoring and evaluation framework with proposed indicators as shown in Appendix B: Draft Siyaphumelela M&E Matrix and Indicator questions. Table 2 presents the existing data points in green, along with the proposed quantitative indicators that could be collected through Likert scale questions and the proposed qualitative indicators that could be gathered through open-ended questions in an online survey. It is envisaged that this survey instrument will be finalised as part of the impact evaluation, in collaboration with Saide and its partners, and will then be administered on an annual basis to continue monitoring the impact over time. This survey is referred to as the *M&E against Siyaphumelela Aims survey*. It is noted that administering this survey will not provide baseline data for previous partners, but may aid in the Difference-in-Difference analysis. Meanwhile, the qualitative questions may offer some insight into the changes that have occurred over time within the institution.

Quantitative component

The purpose is to address Evaluation Question 1 (Impact) and partially Question 3 (Efficiency).

Indicators:

a. Retention of first-time entering students to second year

b. Undergraduate credit degree success rates

c. Pass rates in high-impact modules (high enrolment, low pass rates, critical for minimum-time completion)

d. Throughput for 3-year diplomas and 3- and 4-year degrees/diplomas

Disaggregated by race, gender, and socio-economic status (NSFAS status and/or school quintile where available). Note that this data has already been submitted to Saide for the 20 partner institutions, with the indicator data extending to the academic year before the institution joined Siyaphumelela. Additional HEMIS data is available freely through Stellenbosch University's Information Governance website (https://www.sun.ac.za/english/InformationGovernance/national-hemis-data). No time delays are expected in collecting a, b, and d, while c is available for the baseline year of Siyaphumelela 3.0, based on 2024 academic data.

Indicators beyond graduation can be included, such as graduate employability, if this data is available.

Data sources: *M&E against Siyaphumelela Aims* survey (to be finalised and administered to partner institutional leads) in particular the quantitative data points shown in blue in Table 2. Institutional Student Success Indicator templates, which have been completed by all 20 institutions; DHET HEMIS data; Partner Progress Reports; prior Siyaphumelela 1 and 2 evaluations, including any institutional evaluations that have been conducted.

Analytical strategies:

- Trend analysis (2014–2026) to assess longitudinal improvement.

- Difference-in-Differences (DiD) (Angrist & Pischke, 2009; Gertler et al., 2016; Fredriksson and Oliveira, 2019: Compare changes in key indicators for Partner universities versus a matched group of non-Partner universities over time, controlling for baseline differences and historical contexts of the non-Partner universities. Additionally, taking into account the development context from 2014 to the present, as discussed earlier.

- Equity gap analysis: Examine differential impacts across demographic and socio-economic subgroups.

- Return on Investment estimation: Calculate the cost-effectiveness of Siyaphumelela relative to gains in retention, throughput, and success rates and the resultant increase in DHET subsidy for students completing their degrees. Contrast with bursary-based support using published benchmarks.

Qualitative component

The purpose is to address Evaluation Questions 2, 4, and 5 (Coherence, Effectiveness, Sustainability).

Methods:

- *M&E against Siyaphumelela Aims* survey (to be finalised and administered to partner institutional leads). The qualitative responses shown in purple in Table 2.

- Semi-structured interviews with Saide, Partner institutional leads, Coaches, DHET, USAf, CHE, NSFAS, SALDRU, and philanthropic stakeholders.

- Focus groups with Student Success Committees and selected student cohorts, including the Siyaphumelela Scholars

- Document review of institutional strategic plans and annual reports, DHET policy instruments (e.g., ministerial statements on UCDG, Foundation Grants), and Partner Progress Reports.

- Case studies of high-performing and contextually diverse institutions to explore mechanisms and contextual enablers/barriers of successful evidence-based student success interventions. The priority interventions include High-Impact Module (HIM) redesign, Academic Advising, data warehousing, executive support, student success committees, the First-Year Experience, and peer tutoring, including supplemental instruction.

Analytical strategies:

- Contribution Analysis: Develop and test contribution stories for each major outcome, considering alternative explanations and evidence strength (Mayne, 2011).

- Realist Evaluation lens: Identify Context-Mechanism-Outcome to explain how and why change occurs under different conditions (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

- Thematic analysis for relevance, coherence, and sustainability dimensions.

Mixed-methods component

Integration will be used so that quantitative and qualitative findings are integrated to answer each evaluation question comprehensively, ensuring that the statistical trends are combined with contextual insights.

Evidence will be cross-validated and triangulated across multiple data sources and narratives to strengthen credibility and reduce bias. Validation workshops with stakeholders will test the plausibility of contribution claims and the Context-Mechanism-Outcome patterns will be compared across institutions.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Programme Leads, Student Success, Mr Ashton Maherry, and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning, Dr Ephraim Mhlanga, will jointly co-manage the evaluation. Mr Ashton Maherry is the project lead for Siyaphumelela and has been involved in Siyaphumelela since 2016, when he was at a partner institution in the first phase of Siyaphumelela. Co-management is necessary in this instance, as Saide is taking a developmental approach to Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning within the organisation to build internal capacity for M&E. It is not anticipated that co-management will result in any delays or ambiguity in the implementation of the evaluation. Both Mr Ashton Maherry and Ephraim Mhlanga will be involved in the evaluation design and assist in validating emerging findings and co-designing recommendations.

The external evaluation team will be an independent provider with senior expertise in higher education systems and equity, as well as strong quantitative and qualitative capabilities, including experience in national-scale network evaluations. The lead evaluator should have a minimum of a PhD in Education or Monitoring and Evaluation, with sufficient track record and experience to conduct interviews with Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors and CEOs.

Technical advisors, engaged as needed, will provide specialist input on evaluation design, indicators, and analytics to ensure framework coherence and methodological soundness.

Partner universities will play a crucial role in facilitating data access, coordinating institutional interviews and focus groups, and validating emerging findings.

Sector stakeholders, including DHET, USAf, CHE, NSFAS, and SALDRU, will provide policy and system context, assist in interpreting findings, and actively engage in discussions on sustainability and scaling.

Deliverables and Timeline

Key deliverables

1) Inception report (refined evaluation questions and sub-questions, evaluation matrix, sampling, tools, ethics and risk log, Gantt chart).

2) Data-collection instruments and protocols, including the finalised M&E against Siyaphumelela Aims survey in consultation with Saide and partner institutions.

3) Interim learning brief (rapid feedback after administering survey, initial interviews and focus groups to inform implementation during the existing phase).

4) Technical annexe (cleaned datasets, codebooks, analysis notes, and reproducibility documentation).

5) Draft evaluation report, including a high-level executive summary.

6) Validation Workshop Slide Deck and Proceedings Notes.

7) Final evaluation report and a policy/advocacy brief (funders and policy audience), including a succinct Return on Investment (ROI) narrative.

Propose Timelines

February-March 2026: Inception and instrument design, including a roadshow presentation at the virtual Siyaphumelela Partner Convening in March-April 2026 and engagement with partner institutions to finalise the *M&E against the Siyaphumelela Aims* survey.

April-May 2026: Data collection and early analysis.

End of May 2026: Interim learning brief to Saide

End of June 2026: Validation Workshop at the 2026 Siyaphumelela Conference

June-July 2026: Full analysis and draft report

August 2026: Final deliverable

Total 8 months.

Timeline will be refined at inception to accommodate university academic calendars and Siyaphumelela events, most notably the virtual Partner Convening in April-March 2026 and the Siyaphumelela Conference in June 2026.

Budget Overview

The evaluation budget is subject to a maximum ceiling of **R450,000 (excluding VAT)**. This budget is intended to cover the professional time of the evaluation team and the costs associated with remote engagement activities. Proposals exceeding this threshold will not be considered. The budget should therefore reflect a judicious allocation of resources to ensure methodological strength and value for money within the prescribed financial constraints.

Certain cost categories will be borne directly by Saide and should not be included in the evaluator's financial proposal. Specifically, where in-person meetings or interviews are deemed necessary, Saide will assume responsibility for the associated travel and accommodation expenses, as well as the costs of catering for focus groups. Where local interviews are necessary, Saide will reimburse kilometres at the SARS rate. To save on costs, preference will be given to hosting focus groups at university venues. The precise configuration of in-person engagements, including the number of site visits and their geographic distribution, will be finalised during the inception phase to enable Saide to make appropriate logistical and budgetary arrangements.

In addition, Saide will administer the *Monitoring and Evaluation against Siyaphumelela Aims* survey and will provide the resulting dataset to the evaluator. Consequently, any costs related to survey administration should be excluded from the evaluator's budget. However, the evaluator is expected to incorporate the costs of conducting telephone and virtual interviews and focus groups, including any data or connectivity support required to facilitate participation. These provisions extend to expenses associated with virtual platforms, transcription services, and other remote engagement modalities. The evaluator's budget should primarily reflect the cost of professional services, encompassing project management, data analysis and interpretation, reporting writing, and quality assurance.

The financial proposal should adopt an activity-based format, specifying the level of effort by role, daily rates, and a clear breakdown of remote engagement costs. A concise value-for-money narrative should accompany the budget, describing the trade-offs between virtual and in-person and demonstrating how efficiencies will be achieved without compromising data quality or inclusivity. The final configuration of in-person activities and the corresponding logistical arrangements will be confirmed in the inception report, thereby enabling Saide to allocate internal budget appropriately.

All quoted prices must be exclusive of VAT, which will be applied where applicable. The evaluator remains responsible for ensuring compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and for implementing robust measures to safeguard the confidentiality and security of all data collected during the evaluation.

Ethical Considerations

The *M&E against Siyaphumelela Aims* survey is a monitoring instrument, and the 20 partner institutions will complete the survey as part of their reporting requirements and the data made available to the evaluator.

The evaluation will comply with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and Saide's ethical standards. Saide has existing Memoranda of Agreement with the 20 Partner Institutions, which include POPIA clauses and allow for the sharing of relevant data. Prior to fieldwork, the evaluator will obtain any required institutional ethics approvals, especially if affiliated with a university, as the results and outcomes may be published in an accredited journal.

Participation in interviews, focus groups, and any surveys will be entirely voluntary. No academic, financial, or programme consequences will arise from declining participation. Responses will be anonymised and reported in aggregate unless a participant explicitly opts-in to attribution for a specific quotation. All procedures will comply with POPIA and institutional ethics requirements.

Informed consent will be obtained through digital consent forms for virtual interviews or focus groups, and paper-based consent forms for in-person engagements. Data will be anonymised, stored securely, and shared only under approved data-sharing agreements. The evaluation team will ensure equitable participation (including student voice), be sensitive to exam periods and workloads, and minimise burden on institutional leads at the partner institutions. Risks (e.g., data access, timing, sensitivity of results) and mitigations will be maintained in a live risk register throughout the assignment.

When interviewing institutions, the evaluator should probe and ask if there is any information that they wish to disclose that they felt unable to share in the *M&E against Siyaphumelela Aims* survey. This approach allows for anonymised and honest feedback to be obtained.

Submission requirements for external Service Providers

Prospective service providers are invited to submit proposals that meet the following requirements:

a) Technical Proposal (maximum 15 pages)

- Approach and methodology: Clearly describe the proposed evaluation design, including integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, Contribution Analysis, Realist Evaluation, and quasi-experimental estimation where feasible.

- Evaluation matrix: Include a draft evaluation matrix linking questions, indicators, data sources, and analytical methods.

- Workplan and timeline: Provide a detailed schedule aligned with the deliverables and indicative timeline in this ToR.

- Governance and quality assurance: Outline internal QA processes and risk management strategies.

- Team roles and responsibilities: Specify roles, level of effort, and relevant expertise.

- Ethics and risk management: Describe how ethical considerations and POPIA compliance will be addressed.

b) Organisational and Experience Requirements

- Evidence of experience in up to three comparable multi-institutional or system-level evaluations, preferably in higher education or related sectors.

- Contact details for two professional references from recent assignments.

- Team CVs of key personnel demonstrating relevant expertise.

c) Financial Proposal

- Detailed activity-based budget and pricing assumptions, exclusive of VAT.

- Include daily rates, level of effort by role, and any anticipated remote engagement costs (e.g., virtual interviews, data support).

- Provide a value-for-money narrative explaining efficiencies and trade-offs.

d) Compliance and Governance

- Declaration of conflicts of interest.

- B-BBEE status: Submit a valid B-BBEE certificate or sworn affidavit.

- Indicate whether the service provider is based in Gauteng or has a local presence, as this may influence logistical considerations.

e) Submission Details

- Deadline: **18 February 2026 (23:59 SAST).**

- Submission email: info@siyaphumelela.org.za

- Technical queries: Direct to Ashton Maherry at ashtonm@saide.org.za

- Late submissions will not be considered.

f) Evaluation of Proposals

Proposals will be evaluated using an 80/20 preference point system in accordance with applicable procurement guidelines:

- Technical and Cost Proposal (80 points):
    - Methodological soundness and alignment with ToR: 30 points
    - Relevant experience and team expertise: 20 points
    - Workplan and feasibility: 10 points
    - Cost competitiveness and value for money: 20 points

- B-BBEE Status and Local Presence (20 points):
    - B-BBEE level and valid certification: up to 15 points
    - Gauteng-based or local operational presence: up to 5 points

The highest-scoring proposal within budget will be recommended for appointment, subject to Saide's internal approval processes and procurement policy

Saide reserves the right not to appoint if no suitable proposal is received.

References

Angrist, J. D., & Pischke, J.-S. (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion*. Princeton University Press.

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Appendix A: Theory of Change

The theory of change for Siyaphumelela 1 was conceptualised as a Change in Knowing, Change in Doing and a Change in Being. This was significantly improved in 2025, with a real emphasis on impact. The Siyaphumelela theory of change, takes a systems thinking view, and notes that there are many inputs in the higher education space, with funding from institutional funds, government grants and the Kresge grant, which provide for a wide range of activities that happen within and between universities, and the Siyaphumelela Network activities and by Saide. These result in changes in the institution in their culture, their systems and policies, and their practices and capacity related to the four outcomes of student centredness, institutional capacity to collect and use data, evidence-based student success practices and collaboration. This ultimately leads towards the impact of equitable student success. This is depicted in Figure 3. It should also be noted that Siyaphumelela is collectively owned by the institutions and that it has become synonymous with student success, so when institutions refer to Siyaphumelela, it can mean both the student success activities funded by their Kresge grant, as well as their broader student success ecosystem that is funded by their institutional funds, block grants and Kresge grants.
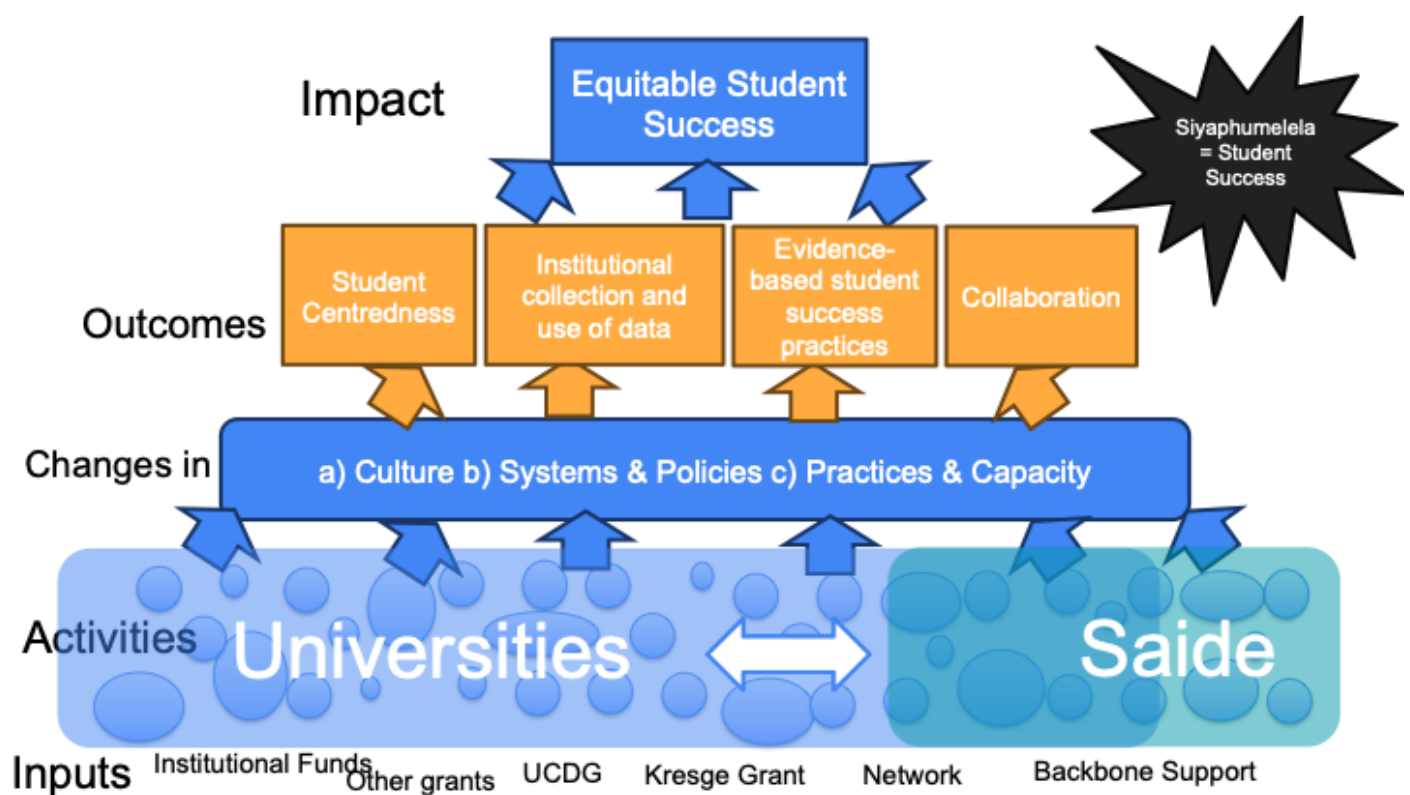

Figure 3 Siyaphumelela Network 3 Theory of Change (draft)

There are various activities that take place within in the university, within Saide and collaboratively within the Siyaphumelela Network that contribute towards the outputs and outcomes that Siyaphumelela aims to achieve. These are shown in Figure 4.
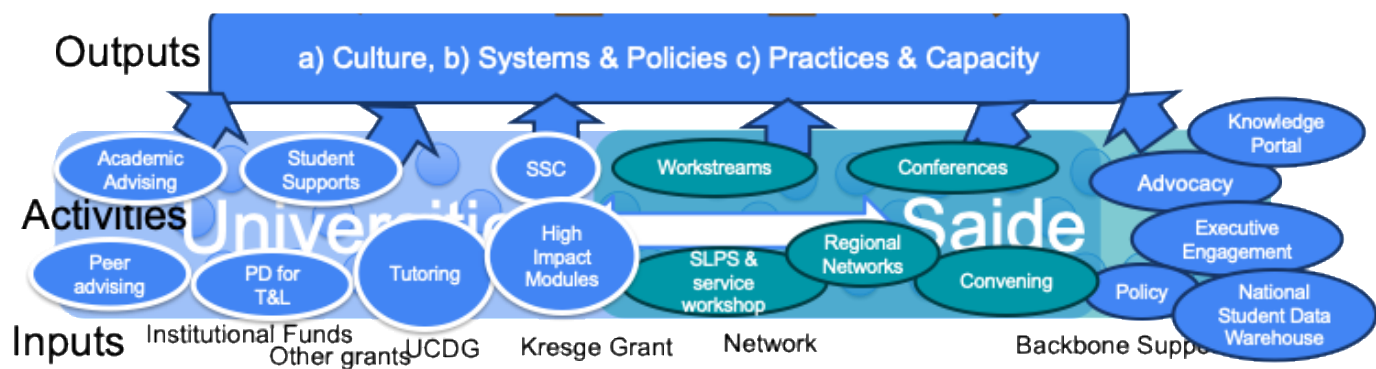
Figure 4 Illustration of some of the activities that take place which are related to Siyaphumelela's theory of change.

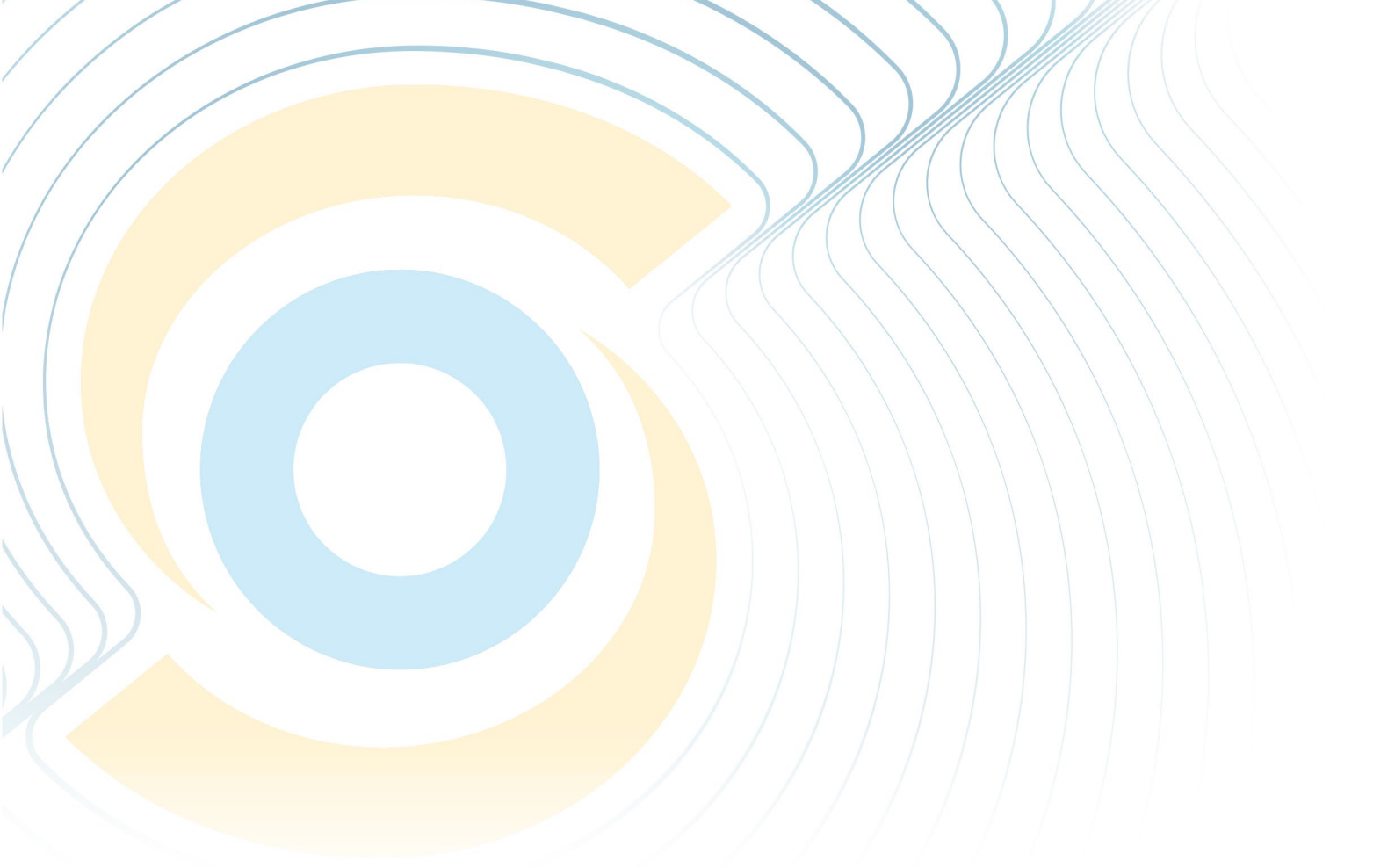# Appendix B: Draft Siyaphumelela M&E Matrix and Indicator questions

Table 1 Draft Siyaphumelela M&E Matrix with statements of success

Aims (Evaluation Question)	Level			
Equitable Student Success (What difference has Siyaphumelela made on Equitable Student Success)	Ultimate Impact (Learner Level)	Improvements and Equity in: • Retention • Success Rates (and High Impact Modules) • Throughput		
	Intermediate Impact (Sector Level)	Culture	Systems & Policies	Practices & Capacity
		DHET/CHE/USAf has a culture of prioritising equitable student success in dialogue and communications	DHET/CHE/USAf policies, incentive and reporting systems that entrench equity and student success among universities, including NSDW & UCDP	
	Intermediate Impact (Institution Level)	University leaders at all levels have a culture of prioritising equitable student success in dialogue and communications	Transformed policies & systems that entrench equity and student success within universities, e.g. strategic plans, student tracking, financial systems	institutions have improved their aggregate and disaggregated annual student success indicators
Student Centredness (To what extent has the student been placed at the centre of the university)	Outcomes	university leadership across the university prioritises student voice in dialogue, communications, curriculum, support	policies that holistically support students (e.g. student success framework, holistic student support policy, mental health policy, student at risk identification, etc.)	student-centred professional development of academic and support staff; student participation in the Student Success Committees and implementation of student success interventions;
Collection and use of data (To what extent does the university collect and use data towards student success)		evidence-based decision-making culture at all levels within and across universities	Policies & Committees/ structures in place to integrate data siloes, and tools (warehouses/ dashboards/ surveys) to use data for student success	Universities generate data, report consistently, have data management capacity, train (academic) staff to use data
Evidence-based student-success practices (To what extent does the university design, share and implement evidence-based SC practices)			Institutionalisation of student success practices across university	Regular and capacitated implementation of student success practices across university, like first-year experience, academic advising, supplementary instruction, etc.
Collaboration (To what extent is there increased collaboration within and across institutions as a result of Siyaphumelela)		collaborative culture within and across universities		collaborative practices between universities

Table 2 Draft Indicator Questions. Green indicates where data is already being collected. Blue indicates quantitative data points that could be collected through a Likert scale, and purple indicates qualitative data points that can be collected through a open ended question.

Aims	Level			
Equitable Student Success	Ultimate Impact	Data currently being collected: Retention, Success Rates (and High Impact Modules, Throughput		
	Intermediate Impact	Culture	Systems & Policies	Practices & Capacity
	Intermediate Impact	Describe your institution's leadership in prioritising equitable student success in dialogue and communications	(Question 3.1)To what extent and in what ways has you Institution changed its policies to achieve Siyaphumelela 3.0 objectives, specifically reducing achievement gaps and creating a more student-centred culture?	Data currently being collected on aggregate and disaggregated annual student success indicators
Student Centredness	Outcomes	Describe your institution's leadership in prioritising the student voice in dialogue, communications, curriculum, support etc.	• An institutional student success framework or policy that reflects a unified vision of success, applicable to all students, and that supports equitable student outcomes.	• Student-centred professional development is prioritised for academic and support staff • Student representation, beyond the SRC, is incorporated into the Student Success Committee e.g. student representatives in faculties, clubs and societies, Residence Committees etc. • Students participate actively in the design, implementation and evaluation of student success policies and interventions e.g. students participate in the working groups of the Student Success Committee.
Collection and use of data		Describe your institution's evidence-based decision-making culture, taking into account decision making at all levels and across your institution.	• There is a data working group, task force or alternative mechanism responsible for breaking down data siloes within the institution and that works to facilitate data-driven discussions and decisions on student success. • Digital infrastructure to support data-driven decision making in student success work is prioritised, e.g. data warehouse, network infrastructure, internet access, software, predictive analytics, chatbots etc.	• All academic and support staff can identify key student success data indicators and understand their role and importance,(e.g. retention rates, student success rates, throughput rates etc),. understand their role and importance and how to use such data effectively to support student success • Quantitative and qualitative data (including using a range of data collection methods) about students are collected and used to inform student success work.
Evidence-based student success support and L&T practices		Describe how your institution ensures active and authentic student engagement in learning, teaching and assessment.	• Student support operations in the institution have been redesigned and integrated as student-centred operations that holistically address the academic and non-academic needs of all students • There are established processes for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of the progress and impact of evidence-based student success initiatives implemented through Siyaphumelela and other support programmes e.g. Orientation.	There is regular and capacitated implementation of evidence-based student success practices across the university with • First-year experience (include definition) • Academic Advising • Peer Support (including SI) • Graduate employability and work readiness • Interventions in High Impact Modules that improves module pass rates
Collaboration		Describe the nature and extent of collaboration within your institution and across institutions as a result of Siyaphumelela.		List the current collaborative practices between your university and other institutions as a result of Siyaphumelela. Include the nature of the collaboration and the institutions involved.

Appendix C: THE SIYAPHUMELELA INITIATIVE IN SOUTH AFRICA. June 2020 – early 2023. Prepared by John Butler-Adam

THE SIYAPHUMELELA INITIATIVE IN SOUTH AFRICA

June 2020 – early 2023

Prepared by John Butler-Adam

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Acknowledgements

Acronyms

DHET	Department of Higher Education and Technology
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
USAf	Universities South Africa
CHE	Council on Higher Education
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFS	University of the Free State
DUT	Durban University of Technology
NMU	Nelson Mandela University
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UWC	University of the Western Cape
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
NWU	North-West University
RU	Rhodes University
SMU	Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University
SPU	Sol Plaatje University
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UniVen	University of Venda
VUT	Vaal University of Technology
WSU	Walter Sisulu University
UniZulu	University of Zululand
UP	University of Pretoria

Background to South African Higher Education

The landscape and conditions of South African education – and higher education in particular (the focus of this report) -- have changed dramatically and in unexpected ways, particularly over the past 20 years. These changes have had a variety of effects on the performances between, and successes of, institutions. Overall, however, almost all universities have faced challenges (some considerable) with regard to student success and graduation rates.

During this period, the number of public universities in the country has varied from 36 to 23 (due to mergers) and now to 26 (as a result of the creation of new institutions). These changes are largely the result of the intentions and implementations of the consequent policies of pre- and post-apartheid governments.

The 17 higher education institutions which constitute the current Siyaphumelela Initiative in South Africa, are defined in terms of three categories: Participants, of which there are nine; seven Partner members, funded by the Kresge Foundation, and one Associate member (the University of Pretoria). This leaves nine universities outside the programme -- an important issue that will be addressed later in the report.

This report is focused on assessment of the seven Partner institutions (some of which started in Phase One) but all of which are now fully involved in the Siyaphumelela work, which started when they were first funded by the Initiative. These Partners are an extremely diverse group in terms of size, composition of different race and income groups, staff student ratios, and the ratios between diplomas and degrees on the one hand and under and post-graduate on the other. Appendix 1 gives a series of graphs to show these differences.

What follows immediately explains, without unnecessary details, the politico-geography of South African universities and provides a sense of where the seven institutions relevant to this report are located in that landscape -- as their history has relevance to their Siyaphumelela work. The research methodology is then set out.

The historic state of university education in South Africa – relevance to the Siyaphumelela Initiative 2

The historic "landscape" of South African universities can best be thought of as one of hills of advantaged, and valleys of disadvantaged, institutions -- hills of political, locational and historical advantage; and valleys of locational, and political and historical disadvantage.

Post apartheid, the major consequences for the universities in the designated Black areas were declining, or erratic, funding, and increasingly poor and politically driven management systems. In general, they were already less functional than those in the "white" areas and these conditions gradually declined further. These became the valleys of the landscape, while the institutions in White areas were (in the main) the "hills." The Universities of Cape Town, Witwatersrand Pretoria and Natal were, for example, considered to be substantial hills, while the University of the Transkei (now Walter Sisulu University) was a rather low valley.

This situation is, to some extent, significant in terms of the performance of the members of Siyaphumelela Phase 2, and highly significant in terms of the remaining nine universities yet to be engaged in the Siyaphumelela Initiative.

Irrespective of their location in this uneven landscape, most South African universities experience the challenges of low success and throughput rates. This problem was (and in many cases remains) a challenge in a country greatly in need of successful graduates in the workplace. Reasons for the challenges were the inability to collect, analyse and use student data, traditional approaches to teaching and learning (in both high schools and universities) and, for the greater part, a poorly performing school system for many black learners.

That there was, and still is, a very uneven surface of conditions in the high school system, remains a serious problem. The Siyaphumelela Initiative started addressing the problem, beginning with the stronger universities as the basis for creating models and practices for other institutions. The situation is made more challenging in view of the reality that just over 75% of all university students are Black, most of whom are from schools located in very poor communities (actual figures vary between institutions). Among Siyaphumelela Partners, for 2021, five had between 64 and 77 per cent of under-graduate students sponsored by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). The availability of this funding has produced a remarkable change in the profile of students in the sector by allowing for the inclusion of far more students from poor families.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that most entering students were educated up to Grade 12, in what the Centre for Development and Enterprise report calls *South Africa's Failing Education System* (see footnote [1]). This has demanded more, and innovative, efforts from the universities – many of which rely on the precepts of the Siyaphumelela Initiative.

It is these conditions, as well as outdated university systems that marginalised student needs, that the Siyaphumelela Programme has been addressing, and continues to address, with considerable success (as the report will set out).

Research Methodology

Unlike the Report on Phase One of the Siyaphumelela Initiative, this report does not include material collected by an external organization. The important difference is that the reviews and the report have been undertaken by a researcher who has considerable experience of the higher education system, working with critical contributions and insights from equally skilled colleagues within *Saide* and the member institutions.

The report is still, of course, entirely independent, but has benefitted from the firsthand experience, knowledge and insights of colleagues who have worked directly with the Siyaphumelela Teams. This means that areas of uncertainty have been discussed but are still interpreted from an "outside" perspective. The result is, therefore, unlikely to include misinterpretations of information from the sources relied upon.

The resources used to prepare this report are (1) reports from *Saide*; (2) from Partners; (3) a synopsis of Partner presentations; and (4) from Partner Convening meetings. Also included were interviews with Siyaphumelela Partner Deputy Vice Chancellors (responsible for the Programme); and key senior national-level managers in the South African Higher Education System: the Executive Director of Universities South Africa (USAf) [representing all universities]; the Executive Director of the Council for Higher Education, and the former Deputy Director General for Higher Education in the Department of Higher Education and Training). In short, the report is based on a range of detailed reports and essential interviews with wide-ranging respondents – the interviews being "by Zoom" or in person where possible.

Analyses of the documents and discussions provided by all sources revealed in most instances, very clear themes. The report is, therefore, structured around those themes, followed by a summary of significant issues and recommendations. These emerge from the information that relates directly to the work of the themes, progress, and ongoing developments with *Saide*'s support, and to the challenges that institutions have identified and which, at times, impeded their work.

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[1] The Centre for Development and Enterprise describes this schooling (in a five-volume report) as The Silent Crisis.
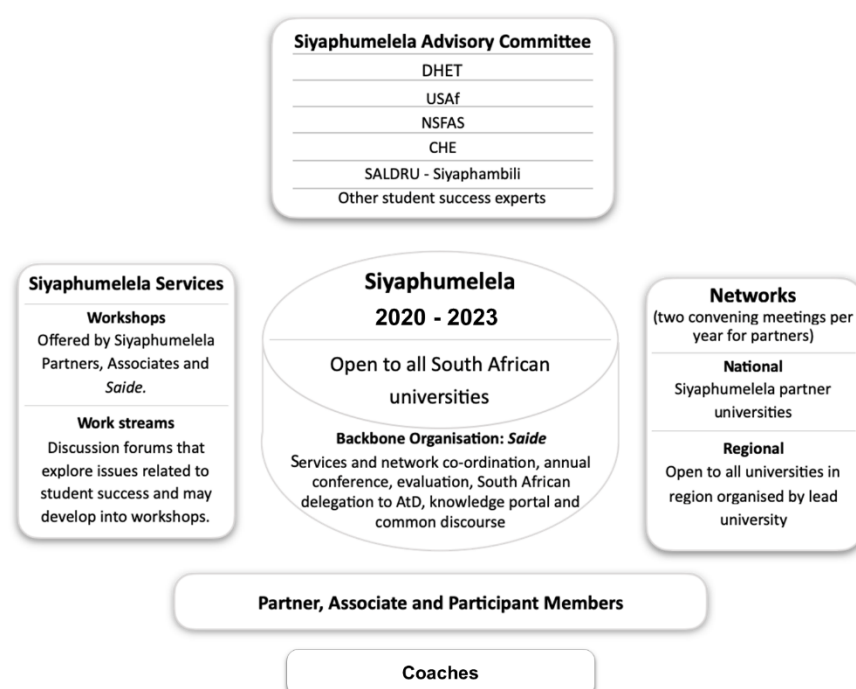
The Siyaphumelela Network 2.0 Initiative

Overview[2]

A section later in the report sets out the specific roles played by *Saide*. This section deals with specific themes and patterns that emerge from the work of the Initiative.

The Siyaphumelela Network 2.0 aims to:

- Establish a more student-centred culture in South Africa's higher education system to improve student completion rates and reduce race and gender equity differences

- Improve institutional capacity to collect and use student data to improve student success across the higher education system

- Expand evidence-based student success efforts on a national scale, using a networked approach that builds on existing strengths, shares capacity throughout the system, and serves institutions based on their current needs and abilities.

The design of the Siyaphumelela Network 2.0 to address these aims includes several different components (figure below) that support the development and integration of a range of different tools, methodologies and approaches to improve student success in South African higher education institutions.

The components of the Siyaphumelela Network include *Saide* as the backbone organization responsible for intellectual leadership and Siyaphumelela Services (including, Conferences, Workshops, Coaches and Workstreams), Networks of higher education institutions (National and Regional), Siyaphumelela Members (Partner, Participant and one Associate institution), and the Advisory Committee. Work undertaken in each of the components over the past year is detailed

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[2] Parts of this section are drawn from a relevant part of the Siyaphumelela Network 2 Report (01 August 2022)

where relevant, in the sections below. Achieving the Dream has supported the Siyaphumelela Initiative in several ways, and reference will be made to these roles.

It seems appropriate that, in a section addressing Siyaphumelela Phase 2, the views of the three senior national-level Higher Education Leaders should be included for their "overall" comments on the Initiative. These are set out in alphabetical order:

- Professor Ahmed Bawa, recently returned from a Visiting Professorship at the University of Japan) and until recently, the Executive Director of Universities South Africa (USAf);
- Dr Whitty Green, the Executive Director of the Council for Higher Education (CHE); and
- Dr Diane Parker (until recently the Deputy Director for Higher Education in the National Department for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation).

Professor Bawa: With the advantage of his own extensive experience and knowledge, and the responses of the leaders of all South African Universities, with whom he worked, Professor Bawa offered perceptions of Siyaphumelela Network 2.0 and of its relationship to, and differences from, Siyaphumelela 1. His assessment included a sense of the importance of the role played by *Saide* in both Phases of the Siyaphumelela Initiative.

Starting with Phase 1, he pointed out that Siyaphumelela (and *Saide*) had unquestionably played a central role -- unique, significant and successful -- in opening the South African Higher Education system to new ways of thinking about, and addressing coherently, the critical, interrelated issues essential for student success. Siyaphumelela Network 2.0, on the other hand, (the focus of this report), has been more diffuse, broadening the basis laid in Phase 1 in ways that have aimed at an increasingly powerful and successful system. Siyaphumelela Network 2.0, has been more complex, building on inherent capacities. This stage had, therefore, a further aim: to create a firm, increasingly sophisticated approach to student success that could be extended more broadly -- while Siyaphumelela 1 required the introduction of new ways of thinking and convincing institutions of their value in practice. It makes sense, therefore, that Phase 1 started with the universities that had (and still have) the operational and visionary capacity to welcome and work with the values that Siyaphumelela had to offer.

Siyaphumelela Network 2.0, however, aimed:

> (1) to strengthen what had previously been created, and improve the systems in place;
>
> (2) make them more sophisticated and (in some ways) more intricate – and
>
> (3) place them in a position to move to the extension of the Initiative into at least some of the remaining nine universities.

This third aim will of course, be the most challenging as it will include the least prepared of South African universities – whether because of their location, their apartheid legacy, a history of inadequate funding and management, and internal uncertainties and instabilities. Or, at worst, all of these circumstances. (Professor Bawa pointed out that uncertainties and instabilities are not confined to the nine universities but are also faced by a few institutions already "in the system" – a situation of which to be aware.)

In other words, Siyaphumelela 1 was focused and successful in getting new ways or "seeing and doing" in operation. In this, it has been highly successful. Siyaphumelela Network 2.0, on the other hand, has been broader, larger, and more complex to manage – and yet in this, too, *Saide* has been successful, enabling Siyaphumelela to make considerable progress.

The process of moving towards including the remaining nine institutions, however, has, not yet been possible, although it was initially hoped it might be. This essential move therefore remains to be

addressed while not losing the impetus at work in the 17 universities already in the "Siyaphumelela ambit."

In all of this, *Saide*'s management and leadership skills have been highly effective – pointing to *Saide*'s undoubted success.

Dr Green: Based on his considerable experience at the DHET and now at the CHE, Dr Green emphasised the invaluable role that the Siyaphumelela Initiative has played in changing the way in which participating institutions think about student success, foregrounding it and basing action and monitoring on reliable, focused data. That the programme has been able to play this role has, he believes, been made possible by *Saide*'s management and leadership roles, and the provision of valuable support. It is these factors, he believes, that have led to the increase in student success, while poor administration in student funding has militated against even greater impacts than those which have been seen.

Regarding the difficulties associated with obtaining staff who can undertake the various aspects of data analysis, use and presentation, he acknowledged that current legislation does indeed play a role and that, facing the same problem, the CHE has adopted a strategy of hiring suitable university staff on a contract basis to provide the skills needed for specific problems. This might, of course, be problematic for universities, in hiring staff from fellow institutions, but might be worth at least considering.

His advice, in this regard, is that USAf and Vice Chancellors might consider preparing a motivation for the relevant state departments (including, for example, -- amongst others -- Education and Labour) to modify legislation to take account of the challenges faced by universities.

A concern that he expressed is the reality that nine public universities, in need of Siyaphumelela support, remain outside the scope of the Siyaphumelela Network 2.0 and the Initiative's work. He acknowledged that these universities are primarily located in distant rural areas but felt that their students are greatly in need of student systems specifically designed to ensure improved rates of success and retention, especially as many will have had inadequate schooling. He pointed out that reaching such universities had been an important consideration in the discussions leading to the support of The Kresge Foundation for what became "Siyaphumelela."

Dr Parker: Dr Parker explained that she had been introduced to the principles underlying what is now the Siyaphumelela Initiative when she attended an Achieving the Dream Conference in the United States of America around 2015. At that time, she had had discussions with the Kresge Foundation's Programme Officer, Mr. Bill Moses, and subsequently, a meeting was held in South Africa, attended by Mr. Moses and The Kresge Foundation's President, Rip Rapson JD, at which she (Dr Parker) had been present, along with a number of other South African education leaders. One of the critical issues discussed at the meeting was the matter of who should be selected as the fund holder and Initiative manager if the fund were to be granted; and secondly, which universities might be instructive starting points from which the Initiative could spread.

Another issue discussed was how best to reach all universities in the longer run. The DHET, which provided teaching and learning grants to universities, in addition to their normal budgets, hoped that the teaching grants would include strategies and means for improving student success. If this happened, the work proposed for what became the Siyaphumelela Initiative could be supported and extended. Dr Parker mentioned, however, that universities seemed largely to ignore this option – and she no longer knows whether or not the Teaching and Learning grants are still available.

As far as the remaining nine universities are concerned, which are still outside the Siyaphumelela "umbrella", she pointed out that the size and location of many of the nine might continue to be a challenge – but that when new universities such as Sol Plaatjie University (SPU) were established, they started off as partnerships with established institutions. She suggested that such partnerships might possibly be revived, and recommended that, were this to happen, a partnership between SPU

and UFS might be a helpful starting point. Dr Parker pointed out that SPU and UFS had had a previous partnership when SPU was established. In this regard, an initial discussion with Professor Francois Strydom (long involved in student support and success) could well be of help. She also suggested that if agreements between universities were established, they might effectively be facilitated and launched using the Coaches.

Dr Parker went on to make the critical point that for Siyaphumelela values and practices to be successful and grow, the most critical issue would be to ensure that what is being achieved must be embedded in the universities – as is the case, for example, at UFS, UP, Wits and DUT. *She proposed interviewing the relevant Vice Chancellors of these universities in this regard.*

Finally, she made the point that the selection of *Saide* as the grant recipient and core manager for the Initiative has turned out to be a very wise move. *Saide* has strengthened the Initiative's work, provides ongoing, substantial and varied support, and works effectively with The Kresge Foundation -- proving itself to be an invaluable part of the project

Note: Perhaps it is worth mentioning that both Professor Bawa and Dr Parker stressed the significance of universities recognising that, at the core, Siyaphumelela is about *new ways of thinking, as well as of doing; that embeddedness is critical to long term success, and that this is dependent on Vice Chancellors and the relevant Deputy Vice Chancellor(s).*

Partners, Associates and Participants

There are three categories of membership in the Siyaphumelela Network 2.0:

Siyaphumelela Partner Institutions play a leading role in the development of promising practices for their institutions and the higher education system, lead and support the development of student success interventions in a regional network of universities, provide services to all Siyaphumelela Network institutions, and make use of and learn from services provided by other Partner Institutions.

Siyaphumelela Participant Institutions are more developmental in their orientation and contribute to regional networks and make use of services to develop their institutions.

Siyaphumelela Associate Institutions are members of the Siyaphumelela Network that provide additional services as appropriate. They may lead and/or contribute to their regional network. Associate Institutions (there is only one at present) also participate in various services workshops, as well as contributing key services.

Growth of the Network

Siyaphumelela can be justifiably proud of the growth of its network. Siyaphumelela 1 consisted of five partner universities all funded by The Kresge Foundation. While there was considerable support from the DHET higher education branch, there was also criticism that the initiative was confined to largely historically advantaged and/or traditional institutions. Siyaphumelela Network sought to rectify this situation.

During the 2020-2021 cycle, 14 out of 26 South African Universities participated in the Siyaphumelela Network 2.0. In the current cycle, participation in the Siyaphumelela Network has grown to 17 South African Universities - 65% of the sector – and now includes five historically disadvantaged universities, three universities of technology and two post-apartheid universities.

Membership has been formalised through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with each Partner, Associate and Participant University. These agreements have been signed by the respective vice-chancellors and *Saide*. The MOA specifies both *Saide*'s responsibilities as well as the Partner or Participant responsibilities. A Siyaphumelela Network membership fee of R150 000 p.a. is required

for members to access the *Saide* and Partner services. New Partners and Participants also enjoy the benefit of an assigned institutional coach.

The Members (including new and existing) are now as follows:

Partners:

- University of Cape Town (UCT)(since July 2020)

- University of Free State (UFS) (since 2015)

- Durban University of Technology (DUT) (since 2016)

- Nelson Mandela University (NMU) (since 2015)

- University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) (since July 2020)

- University of the Western Cape (UWC) (since July 2020)

- University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) (since 2015)

Participants:

- Cape Peninsula University of Technology (since 2020)

- North-West University (since 2021)

- Rhodes University (since 2022)

- Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (since 2022)

- Sol Plaatje University (since 2020)

- University of Johannesburg (UJ) (since 2022)

- University of Venda (since 2020)

- Vaal University of Technology (since 2022)

- Walter Sisulu University (since 2020)

University of Zululand (only for 2020)

Associates:

- University of Pretoria (since 2015)

Enrichment of the programme: – institutionalization (a critical issue) whether successful or in the process of development.

It is important to note, in this regard, that institutionalization ranges from departments, faculties, groups of faculties and entire institutions (the most difficult and critical level). For the value and practices that the Siyaphumelela Initiative requires, however, the cooperation of the senior management of universities including the Vice Chancellor and her or his influence on decisions of the University Council, are vital. As previously noted, this has been achieved in a number of institutions.

The introduction of Coaches with a range of skills -- and their support

Following the Achieving the Dream (ATD) model, *Saide* recruited the coaches in 2020. The Coaches organised some capacity development and support from ATD, and held regular meetings with ATD attendees to reflect on their experience. Introducing the Coaches to the Initiative has been an invaluable development, to the extent that the contracts of the Coaches were extended from their introduction to the end of 2022, and then on to 2023. Coaches' skills cover all of the support areas of importance to the team members and have been widely accepted and valued by the twelve (nine Participant plus three new Partner) institutions.

Siyaphumelela Conferences, Service Workshops and Regional Networks

Role and significance

Conferences, workshops and regional networks play an essential and core role in expanding Siyaphumelela Initiative practices and insights: During the period being reviewed (2021 to early 2023, *Saide* has organized two online conferences and about 50 workshops, including those presented by Partner institutions, and established five regional networks.

Siyaphumelela Conferences

In 2021, 277 participants attend the virtual 2021 Siyaphumelela Network Conference, nearly twice as many as previous face-to-face Siyaphumelela conferences during Siyaphumelela 1. Another change was the increase in the number of keynote and invited speakers who accepted invitations to participate at the 2021 conference, especially from abroad. The virtual conference was live-streamed to the YouTube platform enabling non-registered members of higher education to view all the keynote presentations.

In 2022, 271 participants attend the virtual 2022 Siyaphumelela Network Conference, with an increase in South African speakers taking part in the plenary sessions. *Saide* received 40 proposals for paper presentations, all of which were of exceptional quality. Due to the ongoing pandemic situation, the entire programme was designed to be presented online.

Siyaphumelela Workstreams

Workstreams are discussion forums that explore issues related to student success and may develop further into things such as projects, workshops, webinars or conference presentations. Some started in Siyaphumelela 1 and some started as recently as 2022. The Academic Advising workstream resulted in the accredited and UCDG-funded Academic Advising courses. The National Student Data Warehouse workstream culminated in the DHET National Student Data Warehouse UCDG project. The First Year Experience workstream runs an annual webinar series, collaborates with and organises presentations and/or workshops at the South African National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, and Siyaphumelela Conferences. It has also produced podcasts and runs service workshops. The Mental Health workstream started in 2022 and aims to present a workshop at the 2023 Siyaphumelela Conference on a data-driven strategy for co-creating a national mental health framework for higher education. The Open Education workstream has run service workshops and advocated for an amendment to the 2023 MoAs so that all materials (e.g. workshop and conference presentations) carry a creative commons licence. The first meeting of the Student Tracking workstream took place in October 2020 but not much progress has happened since that first meeting.

Siyaphumelela Service Workshops

In 2022, 13 service workshops were held, with 11 online and two in person. These were attended by 18 institutions, with 307 staff trained. The average attendance was 26 people per workshop, with Partner institutions attending on average eight workshops and Participants and Associates attending five workshops.

In the first half of 2023, eight service workshops were held online, attended by 16 institutions with 251 staff trained. The average attendance increased to 31 people per workshop. On average, Partner Institutions, Participants and Associates each attended four workshops - a sure sign of growing interest and commitment.

Saide found that at times participants found workshops either inappropriate or beyond their current level of expertise. Towards the end of 2022 *Saide* embarked on a review of the workshops to align them with the three competency levels (basic, intermediate and advanced) that link to Siyaphumelela's Theory of Change (Knowing, Doing and Being or Transforming). In addition, three learning pathways were identified: Supporting Students, Use of Data for Student Success and Transforming Institutions.

In addition to the service workshops, *Saide* held induction workshops for new members, the Know Your Data series which is split over three workshops and the Ethics workshops on the ethical use of data.

Regional Networks

Regional networks have been established for the Central, Eastern Cape, Gauteng (encompassing two regional networks that were later combined into one regional network), KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape provinces. These foster a variety of cooperative activities. Of these, the most important is establishing the means for the staff members involved in the Siyaphumelela and Student Success programmes to know one another and their responsibilities; secondly, for staff to share ideas and developments that form part of their work; and finally, to learn new techniques and skills from one another.

They also sponsor talks and discussions and receive and discuss regional reports. Critically, the regional network meetings enable sharing and fellowship and play an important role in supporting a sense of national coherence through common goals and work. It is important, in this regard, to recognise the invaluable role played by regional networks and institutional programmes in contributing substantially to the Conferences and Workshops.

As originally planned, the Regional Networks were also thought to have a critical role to play in reaching out to the nine universities not yet part of the Siyaphumelela Network. The collective experiences and practices of the Partner institutions would form the basis for approaching universities in the region and discussing the possibilities of using lessons learned and becoming involved in the Siyaphumelela Initiative. The workload of each of the Partner members has, however, been onerous and the intention has yet to be fully realised.

It should be added that, since not all the Regional Networks are equally active, the national workshops and other coordinating events, and their fostering of knowledge and coherence, are invaluable in ensuring that all public universities in South Africa derive benefit from student success initiatives in the Siyaphumelela Network.

Achieving the Dream annual DREAM Conference

South African delegates attended the annual DREAM conference virtually in 2021 and 2022, with dedicated sessions for the South African delegates because of the time difference. In 2023, all 17 universities that are part of the Siyaphumelela Network, along with four Saide Siyaphumelela team members, one Council for Higher Education (CHE) representative and three Siyaphumelela Coaches made up the South African delegation, with 34 of the South African delegates receiving sponsorship to attend the conference from The Kresge Foundation. The 19th Annual Convening took place from the 14-17 February 2023 in Chicago, Illinois, USA.

South African delegates participated in the DREAM programme, with:
- Mr *Munienge Mbodila* from Walter Sisulu University presenting a 30-minute "Lightning Learning" session entitled, Toward Institutionalising Student Success at One of the South African Universities in South Africa;

- Prof *Randhir Rawatlal* from University of KwaZulu-Natal presented a one-hour session, "Supporting Automated Self-Study: The creation of meta-questions in auto-generated assessments"; and
- A South African/New Zealand Panel presentation: "Acting with Urgency and Purpose: Adapting Lessons from New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States", was facilitated by *Bill Mosses* (The Kresge Foundation) with South African panellists, Dr *Mzwandile Khumalo* (Durban University of Technology) and Prof *Subethra Pather* (University of the Western Cape). Prof *Cheryl de la Rey*, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Pretoria, and since 2019 Vice-Chancellor at University of Canterbury also participated in the panel and shared her experience of both South Africa and New Zealand.

Thematic Findings: Partner Successes and Innovation

The primary intention in this section is to relate the Partners' actual "successes and innovations" to those of the Siyaphumelela Initiative institutional commitments, identified as follows:

1. Establish a broadly representative student success committee or task force
2. Develop sustained capacity to implement and manage a data chain
3. Use data analytics to review 10 modules or courses with high enrolment and low pass rates
4. Strengthen and integrate data analytics across multiple departments
5. Scale-up across the institution evidence-based student success efforts selected and developed in response to problems identified through data analytics and share good practice more widely in the national system.

It is important to state that myriad factors contribute to outcomes, some of which may be constrained by the challenges set out in the following section.

Regarding innovation, the critical factors are (1) new implementations and (2) the extent to which existing successes have notably been extended. In all such cases, however, the challenges have been addressed to greater or slightly lesser degrees, or the Initiative considerably extended. Seen in relation to the Initiative itself, the key factors addressed are the enabling of invaluable changes or developments in institutional attitudes, practices, and capacities and capabilities.

Siyaphumelela 2.0 Aim: Establishing a more student-centred culture in South Africa's higher education system

Perhaps the overarching measure of the success of Siyaphumelela is the way in which it has elevated student success to a priority issue in institutions and in many cases made it a strategic objective to be pursued at the highest level. This speaks to the first aim of Siyaphumelela 2.0 which is to establish a more student-centred culture in South Africa's higher education system to improve student completion rates and reduce race and gender equity differences

The focus in this phase of the Initiative has been on data – its collection, integration, interpretation, use and application to make student success interventions as appropriate and effective as they can be.

This section does not, therefore, assess student success per se, but the success of the Initiative. That said, it is important to note that student success rates have continued to improve – and even during the challenges of Covid, dropped only marginally. The improvement in success rates can be attributed to many factors, of which Siyaphumelela is just one intervention made in Higher Education in the past few years. In terms of gender, it has been observed that women students have generally performed better than men, and there are higher levels of retention of women students. But ethnicity (particularly in relation to Black students) remains a challenge requiring attention, despite improvements.

A key consideration here is the extent to which the Initiative has changed institutional thinking, practices, policies and capacities by enabling the development of a rich data culture that has the potential to advance student success. In other words, what have institutions been able to do that they would not necessarily have done without this Initiative? How has this changed attitudes towards the importance of student success? In the discussion below, successes are presented in relation to the institutional commitments set out for the Network members, but as with any project, there are achievements that fall outside or beyond the parameters of these stated objectives and as far as possible they are also reflected here.

Institutional Commitment 1: Establishing a broadly representative student success committee or task force

In relation to commitment 1*: Establish a broadly representative student success committee or task force*, all institutions report that they have been able to establish Student Success Committees with broad representation from a number of divisions within the institution, student representatives and very often senior management. Where senior management has been represented on these committees, the effect has been very positive and ensured that concerns are raised at the highest level in institutional management and governance.

Institutional Commitment 2: Develop sustained capacity to implement and manage a data chain and 4: Strengthen and integrate data analytics across multiple departments

Successes in relation to commitment 2 (*Develop sustained capacity to implement and manage a data chain*) and 4 (*Strengthen and integrate data analytics across multiple departments*) are presented together here as there are close connections between them and some overlaps.

Most institutions report a broadening of the data skills base that has enabled many more people in a variety of different departments and divisions to access, interpret and use data to determine and shape interventions. In addition, the realisation of the importance of integrating data at the institutional level was in itself a significant success. Much of this has come about as a result of implementing systems to integrate data from multiple sources (in Business Intelligence strategies, for example) although capacity remains an issue in some institutions.

Particular innovations include the development of student success indicator dashboards that can be accessed by faculties and committees working on student success and the development of data-based systems for monitoring and evaluating learning activities.

Institutional Commitment 3: Use data analytics to review 10 modules or courses with high enrolment and low pass rates (high impact modules)

Institutions have approached the use of data analytics to review 10 courses/modules with high enrolment and low pass rates, called high impact modules, in a variety of ways. In one case, Auto ScholarDifferent approaches have been used to identify high impact modules and not all institutions have been explicit in what they do with the high impact modules after they have been identified. The reporting of high impact modules without intervention and the identification of new high impact modules for each year can explain the decrease in pass rates from 2020 to 2021. An example of improved identification and the tracking of high impact modules is the use of AutoScholar software, which has been customised to identify programmes with poor student performance, particularly those that are pre-requisites, as these can act as gatekeepers for progression. Where there have been active interventions in the identified high

impact modules, those modules were selected for Supplemental Instruction (SI) to support students, resulting in an increase of 7% in the pass rate from 2020 to 2021.

Institutional Commitment 5: Scale-up across the institution evidence-based student success efforts selected and developed in response to problems identified through data analytics, and share good practice more widely in the national system

Significant coordination and collaboration activities have taken place, some of which have already been described in this report, and they answer in part to Objective 5: *Scale-up across the Institution evidence-based student success efforts selected and developed in response to problems identified through data analytics and share good practice more widely in the national system*.

A number of institutions report on the alignment of their institutional with national initiatives, whether launched from DHET or USAf, which has resulted in compounded benefits. In addition, the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) has been reviewed and revised.

Academic advising has been very limited in the SA higher education system and Siyaphumelela has enabled the development and promotion of this critical function through the launch of the first South African Academic Advising Association in June 2021 with 72 participants.

Scaling up student success efforts has also taken several different forms, from instituting mentorship programmes, to standardising measures of success for student support programmes.

Siyaphumelela conferences, networks and workshops have put the initiatives to advance student success, that have been developed through this project, on the national higher education agenda. The conferences and workshops (the core of national work managed and supported primarily by *Saide*) feature significantly in various sections of this report but the regional networks, initiated by *Saide*, are primarily the responsibilities of the lead institutions of each of the five regional networks.

Additional Partner Successes and Innovation: Breaking down siloes

There are, however, other developments that lie beyond the specific framing of these objectives. One of the greatest benefits of the Siyaphumelela Initiative is that it has enabled the breaking down of siloed realms of activity within institutions and fostered much greater active collaboration at all levels (not just in relation to data) between divisions, departments and centres. This has resulted in a more comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting student success from fundamentals such as food and financial security to academic literacies.

Thematic Findings: Challenges Faced by the Partners – a context for successes and innovation

To provide context for the Partner Successes and Innovations from the previous section, context is needed for the challenges faced by the Partner institutions which remain relevant for the next phase of Siyaphumelela and for newer institutions in the Siyaphumelela network as they embed student success in their institution. These challenges are:

1. The role of institutional leadership and executive support
2. "Projects" verses Institutional Integration
3. COVID-19
4. Student Unrest
5. The challenge of data and related skills

Challenge 1: The role of institutional leadership and executive support

It is the insights, commitments and dedication of the institutions' Siyaphumelela core teams that, with the consistent support of *Saide*, make the Siyaphumelela Initiative effective -- and change the lived experiences and success of university students. But the role played by institutional leaders is critical in providing support and recognition of the relevance and importance of the programme in changing students' experience and success.

Without the insights and consistent backing and support, the intellectual and financial cooperation of institutional senior leaders, the Siyaphumelela Initiative could not survive and become part of institutionalised operations.

The seniority of the institutional lead in each of the institutions played a key determining factor in how hands on the executive leadership needed to be. Where the institutional leads were senior leaders themselves, the executive leadership played a supportive role and was able to be fairly "hands off". Where the institutional leads are less senior, more support is needed from the executive to institutionalise the student success interventions. Any change in executive leadership in the institutions was also raised as a challenge as a new executive would need to be inducted into the importance of student success and the Siyaphumelela Initiative. The nature of the executive support also changes based on the institutional culture of the autonomy of faculties/colleges within institutions which sometimes makes it challenging to institutionalise student success interventions.

Overall, it is very clear that the support and authority of executive managers is an essential, indeed critical, part of the Siyaphumelela Initiative's operations and success – especially in the cases in which they attend and participate in relevant Siyaphumelela meetings, workshops and conferences. However effective the institutional core teams are, they are dependent on the policies and committed support of the leaders of their institutions.

Challenge 2: "Projects" versus Institutional Integration

A central element of Siyaphumelela's support is the underlying understanding and commitment with which senior managers and institutional leaders view, support and develop Siyaphumelela's effective presence and value in the universities.

Whether Siyaphumelela interventions are viewed as "projects" with a distinct start and end as opposed to processes and practices that require "institutional integration" is important to consider. It arose during the interview with the Team from UWC and resulted in checking back with other teams on their positions in this regard.

The Vice Chancellor at DUT has made it clear that the work initiated by Siyaphumelela funding is specifically not a *project* but an essential *function* of the university – in his terms, "bolted on" to the intuition's functions. Similarly, the fact that Siyaphumelela work is firmly embedded in an existing department of the university and has the full support of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and the Vice Chancellor would clearly seem to mean that it is a de facto element of the institution's work.

The same conditions seem to apply to Nelson Mandela University (NMU), where the DVC has played a strong, leading role in the Siyaphumelela Programme at the University. Changes in Vice Chancellor during the course of the Programme mean that the DVC's role has been crucial – and there is no doubt that she will have continued to work with the new Vice Chancellor, on the basis of Siyaphumelela principles and values being part of the intrinsic operation of the University.

The situation at UFS seems to bear very close resemblance to that at NMU and at DUT, with support from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, the Vice-Chancellor and the Council. The Siyaphumelela Initiative and its work are firmly embedded in the core processes, operations and activities of the university. This is also the case at the University of the Witwatersrand, where the

previous and current Vice Chancellors, the Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, and the Senior Director for Academic Affairs have all shown a consistent adoption of Siyaphumalela principles for student success as integral elements of the university's operations.

Despite Siyaphumelela being the glue that holds together a group of closely related (and most likely embedded) functions at UCT, uncertainty regarding the nature of the future Executive structure is a concern. In the short term, the Acting Vice Chancellor, Professor Daya Reddy, is a scientist of international repute and is highly regarded and respected in South Africa and at the University, so for the foreseeable future, the work would seem to be securely placed. That the Institutional Team works closely with a firmly ensconced Centre (the Centre for Higher Education Development) whose work complements that of the Institutional Team, bodes well for the future.

The situation at UKZN is presently unclear: Two conditions at UKZN are somewhat worrying: the institutional lead will retire at the end of this year; and in view of the complex structure and nature of the University's executive structure, some consideration might be required as to what will happen in 2024.

Challenge 3: COVID-19

The realities and consequences with which Covid (in its various manifestations) presented the Initiative, have not been insignificant – both negatively and, in the longer term, positively.

The first cases of "locally-transmitted" Covid-19 in South Africa were identified on March 5th 2020 and a State of Emergency (National Lockdown) was declared on March 15th that year, the lockdown having five stages of rigour. Initially, the lockdown was due to end on 27 March 2020, but as WHO announcements were made, the stages of the lockdown rose and were lowered erratically, until they finally ended on April 4th, 2022.

Of relevance to this review is the fact that the Minister of Education, Science and Technology declared all post-school institutions closed from March 18th. As the "stages of disaster" varied, some institutions opened in part, but it was only in 2021 that the Minister announced that "All universities will open after the matric results are announced on 26 February." He said. "We have given instructions for now that institutions should open between March and April 2021."

Many institutions had partially opened (physically) before that date, but the effect of the closure was to push the extension or (where needed) development of online learning. Some institutions also opened call centres for students who were referred to appropriate academics for support and advice. However, challenges (some severe) were experienced by students who could not afford mobile phones or who lived in areas not covered, or effectively covered, by the internet.

Reporting on their efforts to deal with the impact of Covid, five universities outlined the specific steps they had taken in support of the students. While the steps varied among the institutions, the fundamental considerations in all five cases were the same.

And they all rested on Siyaphumelela Initiative values learned from *Saide* Workshops and broad interactions.

The Partners all recognised that the the most fundamental concern was being able to deliver teaching and learning online.

One Partner established an Emergency Remote Teaching system across the university and a Learning Management System for online learning – both of which relied on close working relationships among all staff involved. This institution also looked carefully at the daily life conditions and experiences of their students and addressed those wherever they could.

Another Partner surveyed its students to determine the nature of online access available to them. Responses were received from 13 500 students and determined that most had access by means of a laptop) or iPad (their own or borrowed) and mobile phones – although these varied in their levels of

sophistication. It is likely that a similar pattern might well apply to other regions, but these statistics were not specifically mentioned (other than the fact that, for a different university, the proportion of students with such access was 65%). Some institutions made additional laptops available, put platforms for virtual support in place, or established sophisticated telephone services – but the clear pattern was an insightful provision of online teaching, and specially designed online "classes."

It followed that students needed, and were provided with, guidelines as to how they could use and make the most of their devices; and that lessons had to be upgraded and generally tailored to use online learning. All academic staff were provided with support in this regard (if needed); workshops were held to develop better teaching strategies; and all members whose responsibilities covered student learning and life were engaged in the process.

All faculties in the universities were drawn into the process so that no groups of learners would be disadvantaged. In addition, it was generally the case that all university staff were informed about the changes and encouraged to assist in whatever ways they could.

Since online learning was a new experience for most students, calendars were adjusted (semesters were extended, for example, or courses adjusted to accommodate online demands). Data analyses were used to monitor progress or problems.

An important observation emerging from this period, was that the new situation revealed a slight deepening in ethnic discrepancies in performance.

The positive effects included the rapid and widespread initiation of, or extensive improvements to, the complex area of online delivery and a significant drive towards enhancement of mixed-mode learning. These benefits continue to grow and have changed the way in which a good number of universities offer richer modes of learning, with the benefits that accompany new ways of teaching and learning.

Bearing in mind the challenge of accurate statistics for parts of the year, and the fact that most members of the institutional Core Teams referred to "reduced numbers" (especially with respect to students in the second to fourth years), the potentially negative impact of COVID-19 on student success was minimized due to the steps taken by institutions based on Siyaphumelela learning experiences. This is, in itself, a testimony to the effectiveness of Siyaphumelela.

Challenge 4: Student Unrest

Student Unrest remains a challenge at most institutions, in particular at the start of the academic year. The key issues tend to be outstanding student fees and academic exclusion, and delays in disbursement of funds from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). These have been issues since the major "Fees Must Fall" unrest, which began at the University of Cape Town in 2015, spreading rapidly nationwide, and the introduction of fully subsidised higher education and training for poor and working class South African undergraduate students, starting in 2018 with students in their first year of study at public universities, a dispensation that was announced by President Jacob Zuma in December 2017

The 2023 student unrest was also prompted by the issue of student fees. Students at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg stormed the campus and marched to the Vice Chancellor's office to protest against increasingly high fees. The protests spread to the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, the University of Johannesburg, Tshwane University of Technology, Durban University of Technology and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, while growing in intensity at the University of the Witwatersrand. In most cases, the protests continued into April.

There is also the issue of strikes by academic staff related to inadequate salary increases. For one institution the strike did not take place as the matter was referred to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (which deals, with Labour disputes among other issues). The commissioner recommended both parties return to wage negotiations at the CCMA, and that all pay

classes be included in a single bargaining unit at the following year's wage negotiations. The matter has therefore yet to be resolved, protests continued, but classes also continued.

Interestingly enough, although the interviews with the Siyaphumelela Core teams were held in March and early April this year (2023), none of the academics mentioned the 2023 student unrest. If there have been effects on student performance, they will only become clear later in the year. In fact, Partner members did not, make much reference to the effects of protests as they tended to be sporadic and/or of short duration.

Challenge 5: The challenge of data and related skills

A Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and qualified Engineer, expressed the core of the "data" problem in this way: "I have an excellent Siyaphumelela team, who regularly report on successes, problems, and progress and I always end up by asking Where are the significant statistics?" In most cases, there are statistics available, most of them invaluable and revealing, but all the Teams, and some of the Executive Leaders, complain about limitations in the range and depth of numerical information with which they are currently provided.

Improving student success is importantly (although not only) identifiable using statistical changes. In the local situation, three groups of data specialists are critical: those who rigorously measure and analyse raw (student performance) data; those who turn the primary results into data comprehensible to internal and external users; and those who make them readily meaningful. Most often, but not always, the second and third skills are combined. But every Institutional Core team, its managers and council, need to have access to this primary set of clear indicators. In addition, it was generally the case that all university staff were informed about the challenges and encouraged to assist in whatever ways they could.

Finding two or three people with those skills is not difficult -- but their salary and promotion opportunities are so much more attractive in the private than in the academic sector that they are very difficult to retain. In the wider world of South African employment, there are, however, many possible candidates for such posts. Yet the South African employment equity rules require that people with specific ethnic and/or gender characteristics ("black" and women candidates) must be their first employment options, and they are in equally high demand in science, commerce and industry, where better employment and salary options are available. There is, of course, good sense in this state policy, but the rule is wider: not only "white" South Africans but any foreign nationals fall outside this category: so, the many who could be employed are not.

Every Partner institution faces the problem of limited staff in the data domain – and does its very best to overcome the challenge. An exception has been the success in this area at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). As a result, data are more broadly generated, interpreted and made available – but not always at the rate and in the manner that would be ideal for understanding students' success rates. Nonetheless, what is made available is, both accurate, insightful and revealing.

Saide – some concluding words

As mentioned earlier, *Saide* is the key, operational, coordinating and supportive driver of the success of the Siyaphumelela Initiative in South Africa. But there are specific roles and activities that *Saide* plays and offers that need to be detailed.

Fundamental and ongoing support: *Saide* staff are always willing to help and advise team members (and institutions, if necessary) regarding tasks, steps to be taken or ways to participate in *Saide*/Siyaphumelela work and processes. Since these may change from time to time, according to the needs and advice of the Funders, this is critical in order to ensure that all seven Partners follow the same or effectively related paths to success, depending on the specific needs of each institution.

The provision of diverse and valuable Workshops and Conferences is a critical part of *Saide*'s work and is covered above.

In conversation with Professor Murray Leibbrandt), Director of the South African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU]) which also works closely with [Siyaphambili](#), he observed that while *Saide* is the managerial backbone of the Siyaphumelela Programme. *Saide* is also, he believes, the Initiative's intellectual and motivational core, which the evidence of this report clearly supports.

[As an independent reviewer, not employed by *Saide*, and who has assessed almost 50 funding proposals for the Ford Foundation (before making grants); as the Editor-in-Chief of the South African Journal of Science, and the Head of one of South Africa's major institutes for social and economic research, I feel confident in saying that *Saide* has not only managed, but also supported and enriched the Siyaphumelela Programme. In so doing, it has made valuable contributions to the Initiative's invaluable work in addition to its primary responsibilities] *Animum Autoris Agunto*

Conclusion

Other organisations (including USAf) have established programmes to create learner-centred systems and plans to educate university staff responsible for student success as to how to fulfil their tasks more effectively. It is not clear as to how far these plans have been implemented (or had success), while Siyaphumelela has already made substantial progress and is widely known and regarded as a successful change agent. It should be recalled that *Saide*'s aims for the Siyaphumelela Network are to:

- Establish a more student-centred culture in South Africa's higher education system to improve student completion rates and reduce race and gender equity differences

- Improve institutional capacity to collect and use student data to improve student success across the higher education system

- Expand evidence-based student success efforts on a national scale, using a networked approach that builds on existing strengths, shares capacity throughout the system, and serves institutions based on their current needs and abilities.

The Siyaphumelela Initiative, along with 'Achieving the Dream' have therefore been unique in their roles (since they cover both USAf plans and a good deal more) and have done so with demonstrable success. What is more, they have been in place, and operating effectively, long enough to create a sound basis for the future.

The Siyaphumelela Initiative, therefore, plays a unique and essential role in South African Higher Education. In the process, it has also generated a considerable set of invaluable techniques, information and skills. And, in a different sense, has created communities of universities which respect and enjoy working together in previously unknown or ignored ways.

The Siyaphumelela Initiative's contributions have, quite clearly, been invaluable in addressing essential national needs, and have mobilised key stakeholders in higher education to embrace and prioritise student success in South African Higher Education.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Overview of Siyaphumelela Partners' Institutional Profiles
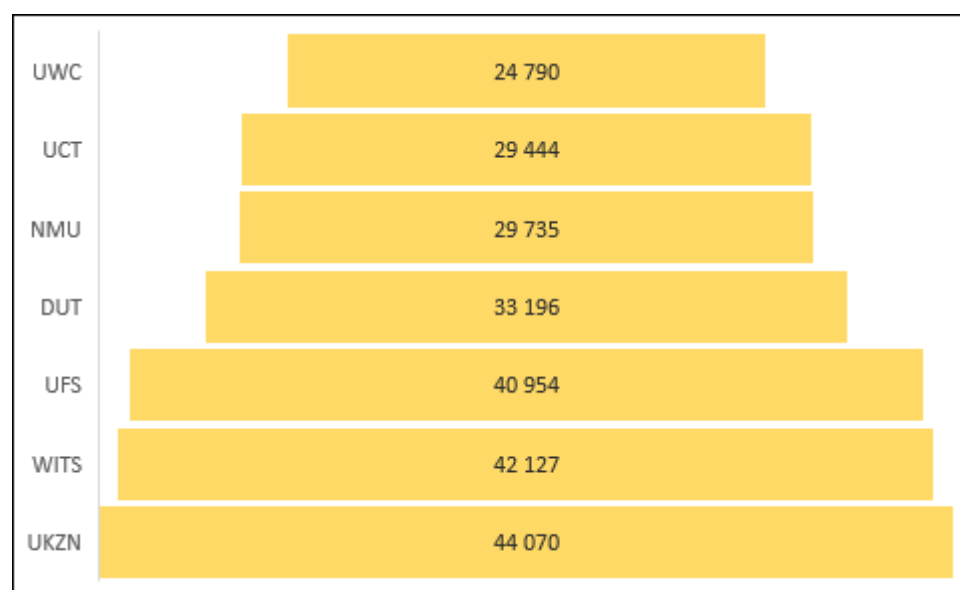
Introduction

The Partner Universities are:

- Durban University of Technology (DUT)

- Nelson Mandela University (NMU)

- University of Cape Town (UCT)

- University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

- University of the Free State (UFS)

- University of the Western Cape (UWC)

- University of the Witwatersrand (WITS)

The data were collected through templates that had to be completed by the universities as part of their annual progress reports. This was supplemented by analyses of the national Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) data sets supplied by the Department of Higher Education and Training (HEMIS).

An overview is provided of the institutional profile of the seven universities. Each university differs in terms of size, range of qualifications they offer, demographic profile of their students, and levels or resourcing in terms of academic staff. All these factors contribute to the extent of challenges they face in supporting their students to be academically successful.
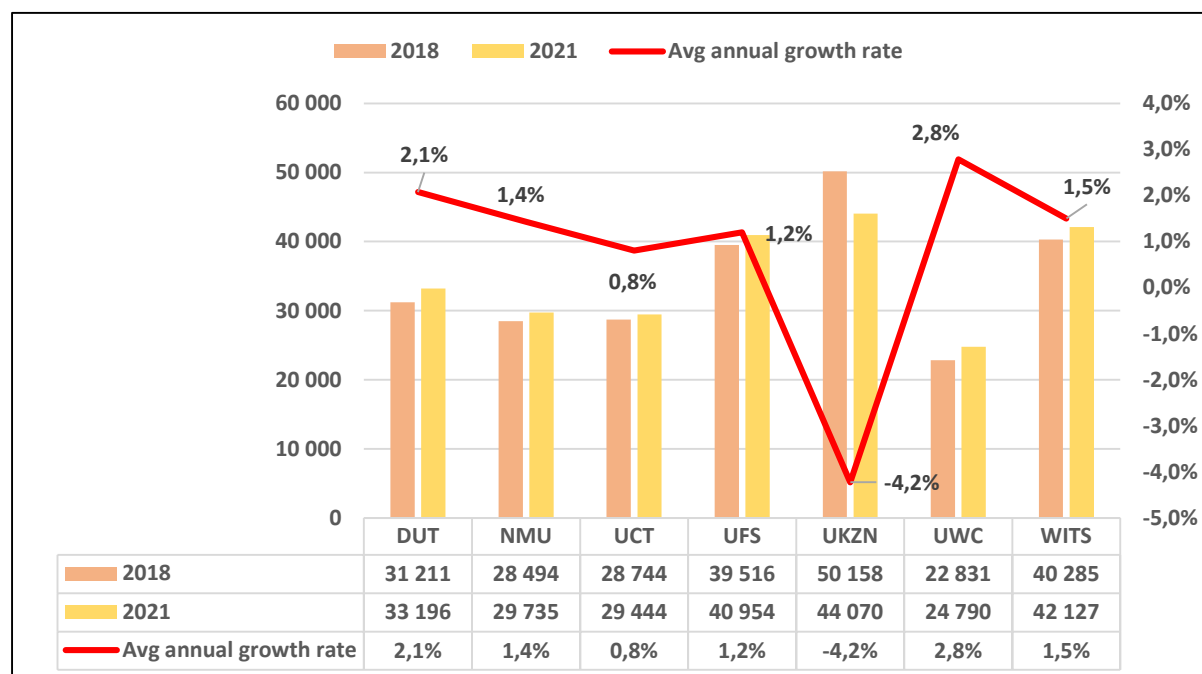
Graph 1 - Relative size in terms of student enrolments, 2021

The average annual growth rates over the period 2018 to 2021 is shown in Graph 2. UWC had the highest average annual growth rate of 2.8% in enrolments over this period, followed by DUT with an average annual growth rate of 2.1%. Wits had an average annual growth rate of 1.5%, followed by

NMU with an average annual growth rate of 1.4% and UFS with an average annual growth rate of 1.2%. UCT had experienced a low average annual growth rate of 0.8% over the period 2018 to 2021. UKZN was the only university which experienced a decline over this period, which was quite steep with a decline of 4.2% on average per annum. UKZN's enrolments declined from 50 158 in 2018 to 44 070 in 2021.
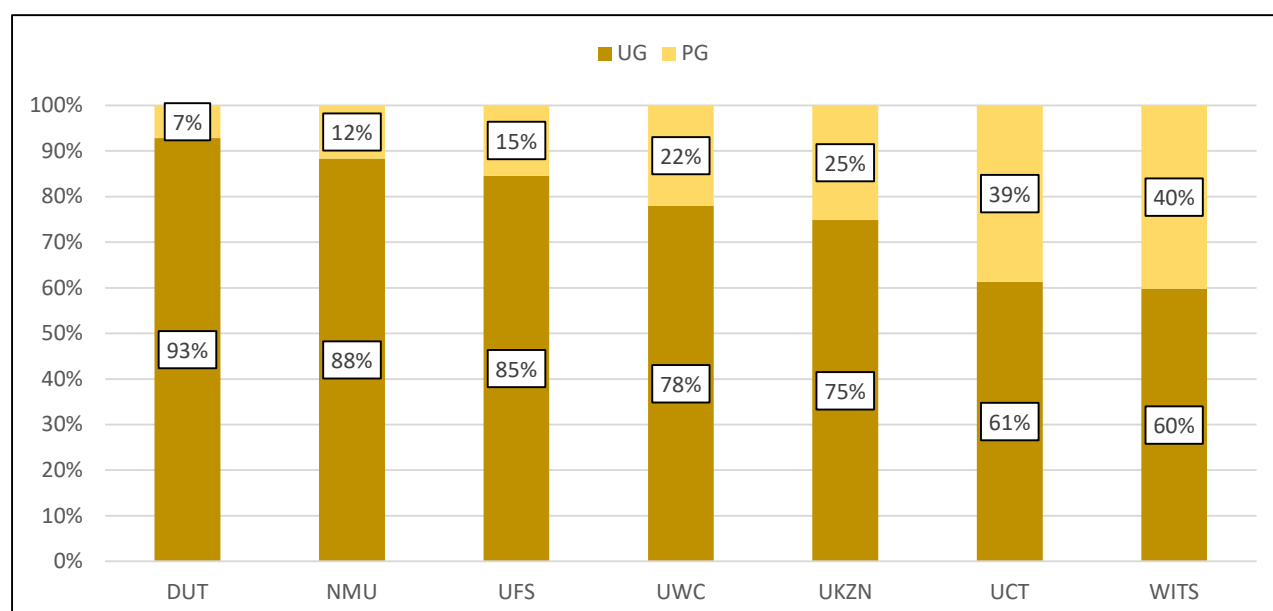
Graph 2 – Average annual growth rate in enrolments, 2018 - 2021

	DUT	NMU	UCT	UFS	UKZN	UWC	WITS
2018	31 211	28 494	28 744	39 516	50 158	22 831	40 285
2021	33 196	29 735	29 444	40 954	44 070	24 790	42 127
Avg annual growth rate	2,1%	1,4%	0,8%	1,2%	-4,2%	2,8%	1,5%

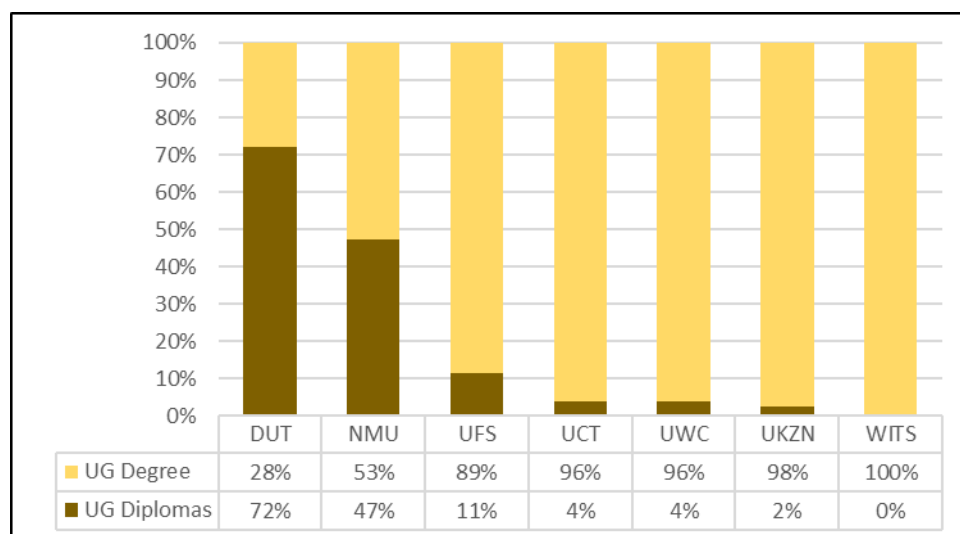Enrolments according to level and qualification type

Three Universities had very high percentages of undergraduate enrolments namely, DUT (93%), NMU (88%), and UFS (85%), which means that they were mainly teaching universities. UWC and UKZN had higher percentages of postgraduate enrolments (22% and 25% respectively). UCT and WITS had considerably higher percentages of postgraduate enrolments, 38% and 40% respectively. (See Graph 3).

Graph 3 – Undergraduate and postgraduate enrolment distribution, 2021

In Graph 4 the percentages of undergraduate enrolments in diplomas and degrees are shown for 2021 and reflects the university types clearly.

Graph 4 – Distribution of undergraduate diplomas and degrees, 2021

	DUT	NMU	UFS	UCT	UWC	UKZN	WITS
UG Degree	28%	53%	89%	96%	96%	98%	100%
UG Diplomas	72%	47%	11%	4%	4%	2%	0%

DUT is a university of technology with very high enrolments in diplomas (72%) and 28% enrolments in degrees. It is important to keep in mind that the entrance requirements for diploma studies are lower than for degrees and that the national data show that success and throughput rates are lower for diploma students. NMU is a comprehensive university which was formed through the merger of a traditional university and a former Technikon and thus had a high percentage of enrolments in diplomas (47%) and 53% enrolments in degrees. The UFS, a traditional university had 11% enrolments in diplomas and 89% enrolments in degrees. UCT (4%), UWC (4%) and UKZN (2%) had very low percentages enrolments in diplomas, while WITS had no diploma enrolments and offered only degrees at undergraduate level. It is expected that the throughput and success rates of universities with very high enrolments in degree programmes will be higher than those with substantial percentages of enrolments in diploma programmes.

Enrolments by major field of study

The percentage of enrolments according to major field of study is shown in Graph 5. The major fields of study consist of:

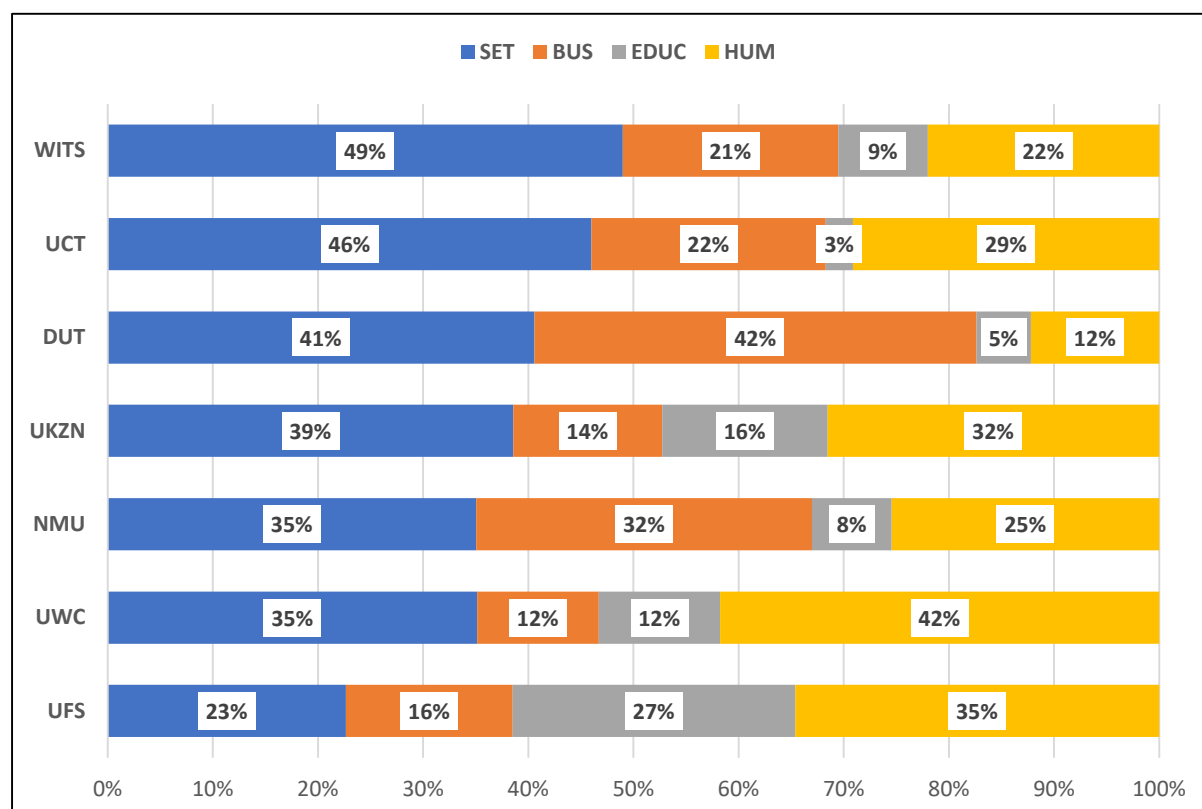SET – Science, engineering and technology

BUS – Business and management sciences

EDUC – Education

HUM- Other human sciences.

Five of the seven universities had their highest percentage enrolments in SET: WITS – 49%; UCT – 46%; DUT – 41%; UKZN – 39%; and NMU – 35%.UWC had 42% in HUM with 35% in SET. UFS had 35% enrolments in HUM and 23% in SET. UFS had the highest percentage enrolments in EDUC (27%) of all the universities. The highest percentages of enrolments in BUS were DUT (42%) and NMU (32%). UCT (22%) and WITS (21%) also had substantial percentages of enrolments in BUS.

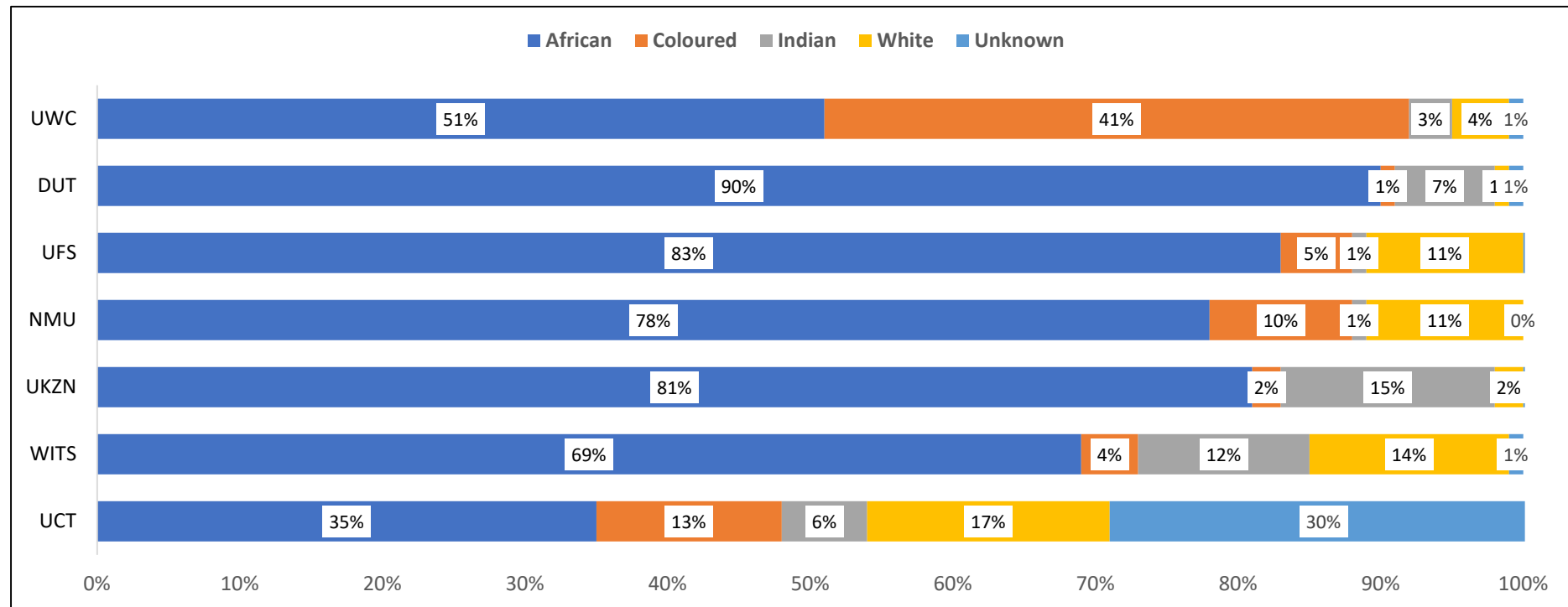Graph 5 – Percentage enrolments according to major field of study, 2021

	SET	BUS	EDUC	HUM
WITS	49%	21%	9%	22%
UCT	46%	22%	3%	29%
DUT	41%	42%	5%	12%
UKZN	39%	14%	16%	32%
NMU	35%	32%	8%	25%
UWC	35%	12%	12%	42%
UFS	23%	16%	27%	35%

Enrolments by population group

Enrolments by population group for 2021 is shown in Graph 6. This information is very important since national data on throughput rates and success rates show big differences in throughput rates and success rates of the various population groups. It is difficult to make specific conclusions on UCT's data since 30% of the student population group classification is unknown. For various reasons some universities have decided to move away from population group classifications.

One of the reasons is that it has become increasingly difficult to classify students according to population group, another reason is that the population group classification is a South African practice and international students are not classified according to population group. Furthermore, some universities leave it to students to decide whether they want to classify themselves into a particular population group or to opt out of it. Similarly, the classification of gender into male and female has also been expanded to include a classification category as gender neutral

Enrolments by population group and gender

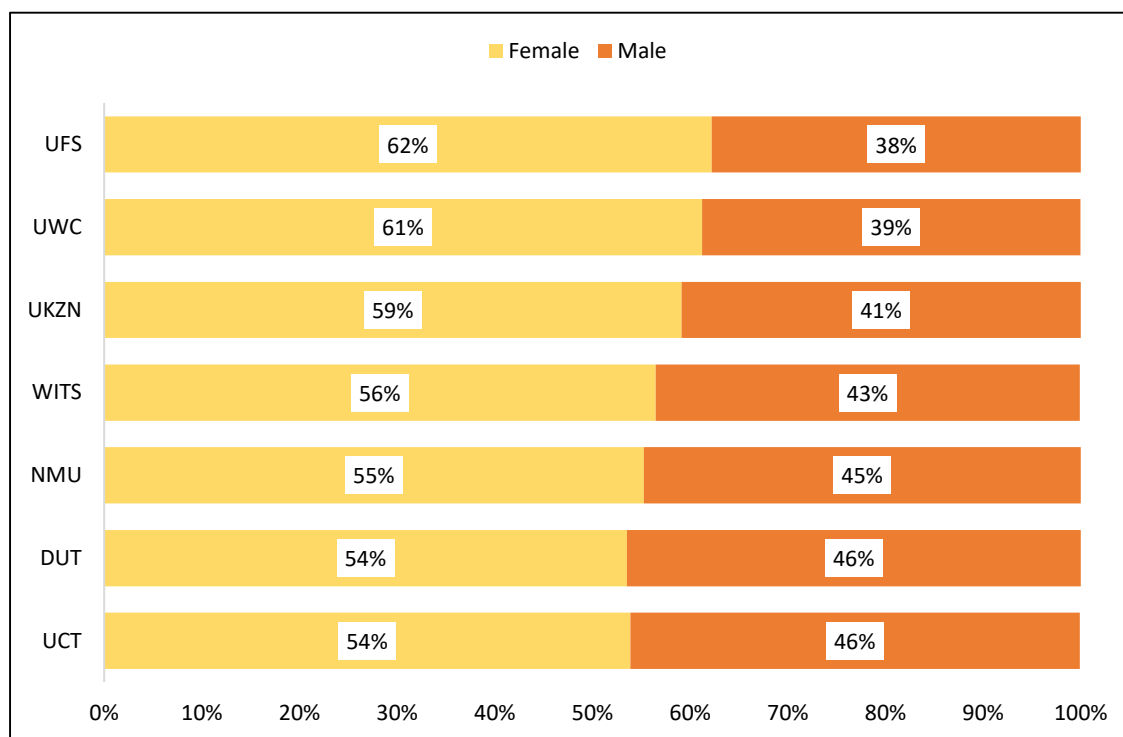Graph 6 – Enrolments by population group, 2021

The Universities with the highest percentage of African and Coloured students in 2021 were UWC (92%), DUT (91%), UFS (88%), NMU (88%), and UKZN (83%).

WITS had 73% African and Coloured students and UCT 48% (although 30% of the students at UCT has not been classified according to population group). they

will constitute much lower percentages of the enrolments. The highest percentages of Indian enrolments were at UKZN (15%), WITS (12%), DUT (7%) and UCT (6%). The highest percentages of white student enrolments amongst the seven universities were at UCT (17%), WITS (14%), DUT (7%) and UCT (6%).

Indian and white students in general perform better in success rates and throughput rates. The Indian and White population numbers are however much lower in the general population and therefore the most disadvantaged groups in universities are African and Coloured students. The full-time equivalent enrolment of African and Coloured students who are South African citizens are used to allocate an institutional factor grant for disadvantage to universities. The purpose of this grant is to provide additional funding to universities. It was originally introduced to encourage universities to enrol higher percentages of African and Coloured students, but since the enrolments in universities have become more representative of the South African population, the funding is allocated to support universities in providing additional support to students from disadvantaged schooling backgrounds.
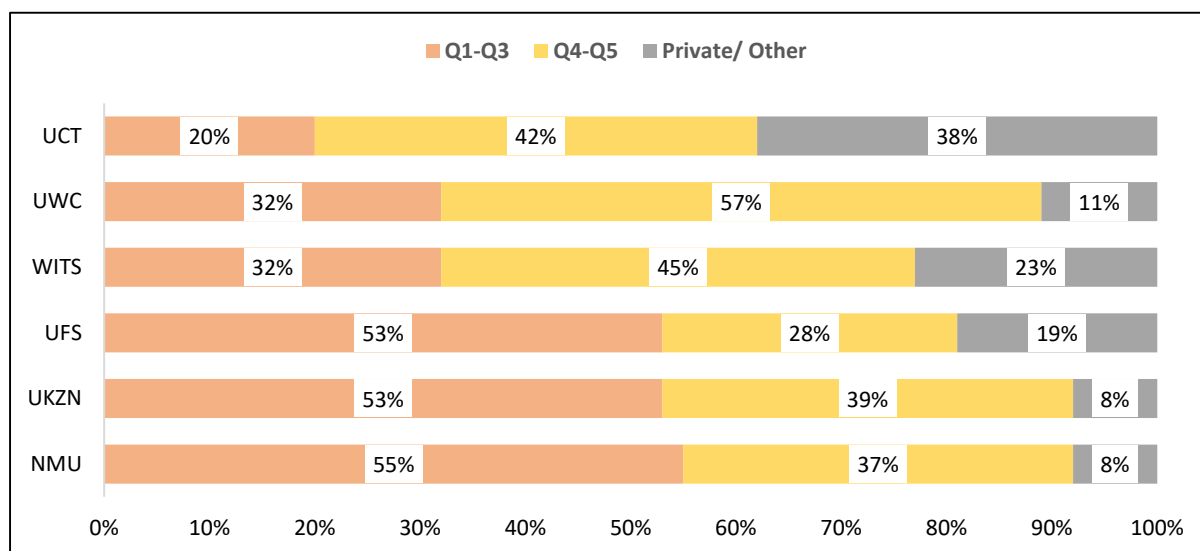
Graph 7 – Enrolments by gender, 2021

In the South African universities, higher percentages of female students are enrolled in undergraduate studies and perform considerably better than the male students with higher success rates and throughput rates. Graph 7 shows that UFS (62%) and UWC (61%) had the highest percentages of female students, followed by UKZN (59%) and WITS (56%). NMU had 55% female enrolments, while DUT and UCT both had 54% female enrolments.

First-time entering undergraduate enrolments by quintile

South African public schools are classified by quintile to determine which schools' students are exempted from paying fees or lower fees based on the socio-economic conditions of the areas in which the schools are situated. Quintiles 1 to 3 (Q1-Q3) schools are in the most socio-economic deprived areas, while quintiles 4 to 5 schools (Q4-Q5) are situated in more advantaged areas and where students must pay considerably higher school fees. Universities also enrol students from private and other (such as international students) schools which is shown separately.

Graph 8 -Percentage first-time entering undergraduate enrolments by quintile, 2021
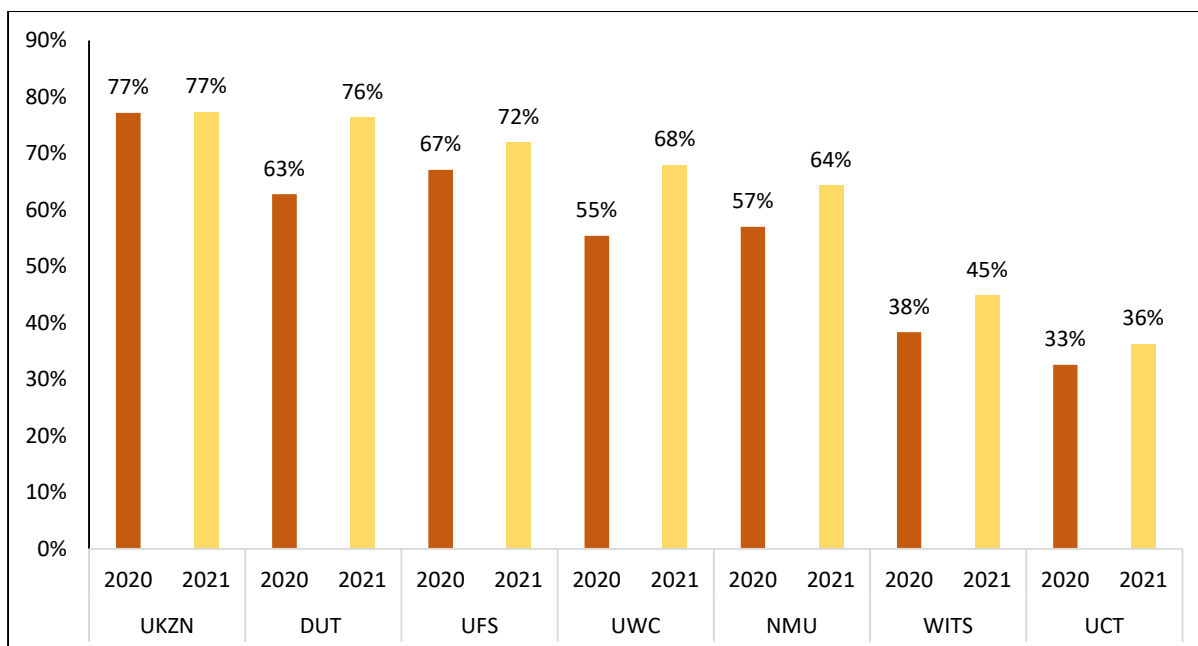

Universities with the highest percentage of students from Q1-Q3 schools enrol higher percentages of students from poor socio-economic and deprived backgrounds and thus must invest much more in academic support to improve student success. The universities which had the highest percentages of first-time entering undergraduate students from Q1-3 schools were NMU (55%), UKZN (53%) and UFS (53%). Wits and UWC had 32% first-time entering undergraduate student enrolments from Q1-3 schools and UCT had 20%. This information was not available for DUT.

Undergraduate sponsored NSFAS students

The percentage of NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students is also an indicator of the socio-economic backgrounds that students come from. NSFAS funded students come from disadvantaged and poor backgrounds and will also need substantial academic support to ensure that they success academically. UKZN had the highest percentage of NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students in both 2020 and 2021 of 77%. The percentage NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students of the other six universities all increased from 2020 to 2021 which is an indication that higher percentages of undergraduate students from poor households are enrolling at these universities. DUT experienced an increase of 13% in NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students from 63% in 2020 to 76% in 2021.The percentage NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students increased from 67% in 2020 for UFS to 72% in 2021. The UWC also experiences a huge increase from 55% NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students in 2020 to 68% in 2021. The NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students at NMU increased from 57% in 2020 to 64% in 2021. WITS and UCT had the lowest percentages of NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students. The percentage NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students at WITS increased from 38% in 2020 to 45% in 2021. UCT had a 3% increase in NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students from 33% in 2020 to 36% in 2021.
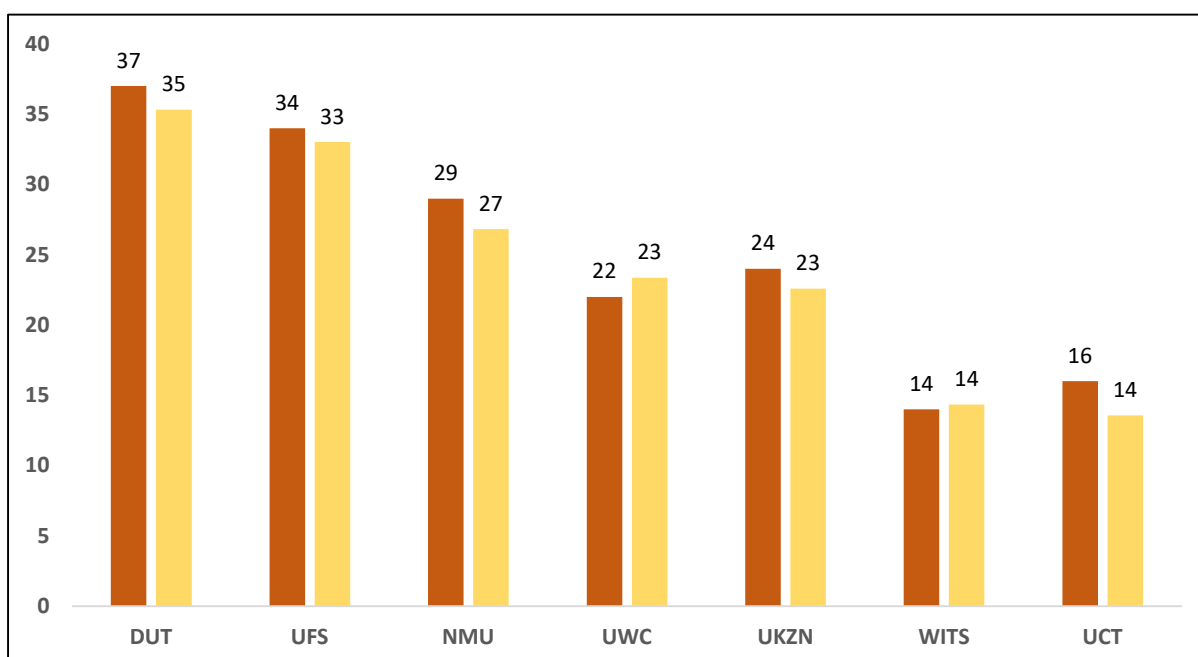
Graph 9 – Percentage of NSFAS sponsored undergraduate students, 2020 and 2021

Student: staff full-time equivalent ratios (FTE), 2020 and 2021

Graph 10 – Student: staff FTE ratios, 2020 and 2021

The ratio is calculated by dividing the enrolled student FTEs by the academic staff FTEs. For these purposes all full-time as well as part-time academic staff is included in the calculation. The lower the student: staff FTE ratio the assumption is that the higher the quality of learning and teaching because of smaller classes of students that need to be lectured by academic staff. There are also other contributing factors. Historically the former Technikons which became Universities of Technology (DUT) or were incorporated into Comprehensive Universities (NMU) had higher student: staff ratios in their diploma programmes than traditional universities. Large enrolments in distance

programmes (UFS) will also have higher student: staff ratios. Universities with high percentages postgraduate enrolments will have lower student: staff ratios because of smaller postgraduate classes and the requirements of supervision (UCT and WITS). UCT and WITS are also more research-intensive universities with large number of researchers.

DUT had the highest student: staff ratio in 2021 (35:1), followed by UFS (33:1) and NMU (27:1). UWC and UKZN both had a student: staff ratio of 23:1. UCT and WITS had the lowest student: staff ratios in 2021 of 14:1.

Summary of Key Features

A summary overview of the key institutional feature is provided below:

Table 1-Summary of key institutional features: Size and Shape, 2021

University	Headcounts enrolments	% UG	% PG	% UG Diplomas	% UG Degree	% SET	% BUS	% EDUC	% HUM
DUT	33 196	93%	7%	72%	28%	41%	42%	5%	12%
NMU	29 735	88%	12%	47%	53%	35%	32%	8%	25%
UCT	29 444	85%	15%	11%	89%	46%	22%	3%	29%
UFS	40 954	78%	22%	4%	96%	23%	16%	27%	35%
UKZN	44 070	75%	25%	4%	96%	39%	14%	16%	32%
UWC	24 790	61%	39%	2%	98%	35%	12%	12%	42%
WITS	42 127	60%	40%	0%	100%	49%	21%	9%	22%

Table 2 - Summary of key institutional features: Student Demographics, 2021

University	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Unknown	Q1-Q3	Q4-Q5	Private/ Other	NSFAS	Staff : Student FTE Ratio
DUT	90%	1%	7%	1%	0%				71%	35
NMU	78%	10%	1%	11%	0%	55%	37%	8%	64%	27
UCT	35%	13%	6%	17%	30%	53%	39%	8%	36%	14
UFS	83%	5%	1%	12%	0%	53%	28%	19%	72%	33
UKZN	81%	2%	15%	2%	0%	32%	45%	23%	77%	23
UWC	52%	41%	3%	4%	1%	32%	57%	11%	68%	23
WITS	69%	4%	12%	14%	1%	20%	42%	38%	26%	14