

Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework



iYunivesithi

Walter Sisulu

Vision

An African-centred university shaping flourishing, sustainable futures through knowledge, innovation, and public developmental action.

Core Purpose and Mission

A societal university committed to advancing knowledge in a changing world; producing capable, future-fit graduates with purpose; co-creating solutions for a just and sustainable South Africa, Africa, and world; functioning as an integrated system for public value creation.

iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu advances its societal purpose through three interdependent and mutually reinforcing mission pillars: education that transforms students and society, public good knowledge production and innovation, and societal impact through engagement.





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Foreword by the Chairperson of Council



Universities hold a unique position in society. They act as co-guardians of knowledge, incubators for future leaders, and institutions dedicated to advancing the public good. At their best, universities do more than react to change; they actively shape it. In this context, the Council presents the Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework for iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu, a long-term statement of purpose, direction, and ambition.

Vision 2040+ reflects the Council's belief that the University must continuously evolve in response to a rapidly changing world, while remaining committed to the knowledge project and communities it serves. Today, higher education institutions face and must respond to profound challenges such as technological change and unequal access to enabling technology, climate change, widening inequality and worsening conditions for the poor, nutrition and public health concerns, strained public finances, and shifting labour markets. These realities require universities to be agile, innovative, and deeply connected to society. They must not only prepare graduates for the future but also actively contribute to shaping more just, sustainable, and prosperous futures.

iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu is uniquely positioned to meet this responsibility. As one of six comprehensive universities in South Africa, with the widest geographic footprint in the national university system, iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu occupies a distinctive position in advancing higher education, knowledge production, and societal development across the Eastern Cape and beyond. The University's history has been defined by expanding access to higher education, promoting transformation, and creating opportunities for those who have historically been excluded. This legacy continues to shape our identity and informs the future we aim to create.

The Council believes that this Strategic Framework provides a clear and compelling vision for our future. It enhances the University's identity as an African-centred societal university, whose purpose extends beyond the campus boundaries. It challenges us to integrate teaching, research, innovation, and societal engagement in ways that produce graduates of character and capability, generate and advance knowledge that addresses society's most pressing challenges, and strengthen the communities, institutions, and economies with which we engage.



The Council recognises that the successful realisation of this vision depends on a resilient and sustainable institution. Financial sustainability, sound governance, ethical leadership, skilled personnel, modern infrastructure, and digitally enabled systems are not just operational requirements; they are essential foundations for academic excellence and institutional credibility. Therefore, this Strategic Framework places equal emphasis on strengthening the University's internal capabilities as an important guarantor for optimising our external impact.

Equally important is our ongoing commitment to transformation. The Council affirms that transformation is not a finite goal but a continuous institutional responsibility. It encompasses Africanisation, decolonisation, and our commitment to the shared project of the global scholarly commons, equity and inclusion, curriculum renewal, gender equality, institutional culture, and the creation of an environment where every member of the University community can thrive.

The success of Vision 2040+ will also depend on a collective commitment to pursuing excellence, shared leadership, conscientious and responsible conduct by all stakeholders, meaningful collaboration, and constructive engagement. We therefore urge the university community, government, industry, and our many partners to embrace this Strategic Framework as a unifying agenda for institutional advancement and societal transformation.

On behalf of the Council, I would like to express our appreciation to the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, fellow Council members, Executive Management, Senate, staff, students, and all stakeholders who contributed to the development of this Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework. The breadth of consultation and the diversity of perspectives involved have strengthened this document and reaffirmed our shared commitment to the future of the University.

Vision 2040+ is more than a strategic framework; it is a statement of confidence in what iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu can become, and in the contributions it can make to the Eastern Cape, South Africa, the African continent, and the world. The Council is confident that through disciplined implementation and a collective sense of purpose, the University will continue to grow as an institution distinguished not only by academic excellence, but also by its lasting impact on individuals and the advancement of society.

Professor Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi

Chairperson of Council
iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu



Foreword by the Vice-Chancellor



The Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework signifies an important milestone in the evolution and ongoing development of iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu. Setting out a long-term strategic horizon, it builds upon the foundation laid during the University's previous strategic cycle, while responding with greater clarity and ambition to the realities that will shape higher education, society, and development in the coming decades.

Over the past decade, iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu has undergone a significant journey of institutional stabilisation, consolidation, and renewal. Progress has been made in strengthening governance, enhancing academic quality, improving student support, expanding research capability, and upgrading digital systems and infrastructure. These achievements provide a solid foundation from which the University can now aim beyond mere recovery and incremental improvement, towards a long-term trajectory of institutional excellence, sustainability, and societal impact. The Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework therefore reinforces foundations and achievements that should be continued, while addressing remaining limitations and establishing a clearer direction for the future.

At the heart of this renewed Strategic Framework is a focused effort to clarify our identity, values, and the contributions we aspire to make. Our revamped identity as iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu is not just a change of name, logo, or visual representation; it signifies a deeper affirmation of our African identity, historical responsibilities, and commitment to intellectual leadership rooted in the realities of the Eastern Cape, South Africa, and the African continent. It calls upon us to view ourselves not just as a university situated in Africa, but as an African-centred societal university that confidently contributes to national, continental, and global knowledge systems.

This process of institutional renewal has necessitated a clear redefinition of our purpose. Vision 2040+ positions Walter Sisulu as a societal university dedicated to advancing knowledge, developing capable and purposeful graduates, and co-creating solutions for just, sustainable, and flourishing futures. It strengthens the integration of our three core functions: transformative education that impacts students and society; the production of knowledge and innovation for the public good; and meaningful societal engagement. These functions do not operate as separate entities; their true power lies in how they cross-reinforce to generate substantive public value.

Setting out the long-term vision of Vision 2040+ is intentional: the scale of transformation we aspire to cannot be achieved in a single medium-term planning cycle. Building academic excellence, strengthening institutional resilience, transforming curricula, expanding postgraduate education, developing research excellence, and making significant contributions to regional development are generational endeavours. This framework therefore provides an enduring institutional direction to be implemented through successive medium-term strategies, operational



plans, and performance commitments. It gives the University a stable sense of purpose while allowing it to remain adaptable in a rapidly changing world.

An important defining feature of this framework is the introduction of three Signature Themes – namely, **Food Futures**: *Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems*; **One Health**: *Human, Animal, and Ecological Health Futures*; and **Justice, Governance, and Leadership Futures**. These themes reflect the intersection of the University's existing strengths, the needs of the communities and regions we serve, and the major societal challenges facing South Africa and the continent. They aim to create greater focus, encourage interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, strengthen postgraduate and research development, attract strategic partnerships and funding, and establish areas where iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu can achieve recognised intellectual and societal leadership.

The Signature Themes do not diminish the importance of the University's full academic offerings. Instead, they provide focused platforms through which faculties, researchers, students, and partners can collaborate across disciplinary and organisational boundaries to address complex challenges. They offer a means to concentrate efforts where iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu has both a responsibility and an opportunity to make a distinctive contribution.

We also approach this future with a sense of realism. The University continues to face significant institutional and sectoral challenges, with financial vulnerability being one of the most pressing issues. iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu operates in an environment marked by constrained public funding, rising costs, high student debt, infrastructure backlogs, and increasing demands for access. Our current funding model remains overly dependent on state subsidies and tuition-related income, while our reserves and alternative revenue streams require substantial improvement. These conditions put pressure on institutional sustainability and limit our capacity to invest at the scale needed to achieve our ambitions.

Vision 2040+ places institutional sustainability and resilience at the core of its implementation. This approach necessitates disciplined financial management, diversified income sources, stronger engagement with donors and partners, increased research funding, responsible

commercialisation, improved infrastructure planning, and more efficient institutional systems. Additionally, it requires an honest alignment between our enrolment goals, academic capacity, physical and digital infrastructure, and available resources. Long-term transformation must be supported by a viable and resilient institution.

Our challenges extend beyond financial and structural issues. Successful implementation will also depend on institutional culture, leadership, communication, collaboration, and trust. The Strategic Framework calls for a university community that is ethical, inclusive, performance-driven, and committed to a shared purpose. It requires constructive engagement among the Council, Senate, management, organised labour, students, staff, alumni, and external partners. No strategic framework can succeed without the active participation and collective ownership of those expected to bring it to fruition.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the members of the Council, Executive Management, Senate, staff, students, organised labour, alumni, and external stakeholders in the development and refinement of this Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework. Their insights have enhanced its relevance, sharpened its focus, and ensured that it reflects both the aspirations and realities of the institution.

Vision 2040+ invites us to envision iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu beyond current limitations of capability and imagination. It challenges us to build upon the foundation already established, to deepen our identity, to strengthen our academic and institutional capabilities, and to seek a future where the University is recognised for the quality of its graduates, the relevance of its knowledge, the strength of its partnerships, and the impact it makes on society.

This is an ambitious journey, but it is both necessary and achievable. It will require courage, discipline, innovation, and sustained commitment. Together, we must ensure that iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu continues to rise as an African-centred societal university, rooted in its communities and regional realities, connected to the world, and dedicated to shaping flourishing futures.

Dr Thandiswa Mgwebi

Vice-Chancellor
iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu



Executive Summary

iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu is a dynamic and developmental institution that embodies a distinctly African identity and civilisational ambition, rooted in place and heritage, and committed to societal impact and an ever-evolving future of flourishing for all.

This Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework (2026–2040+) is presented with a clear sense of purpose and direction. Walter Sisulu is more than just a centre for higher learning. It is also a public institution with a developmental mission to co-create flourishing and sustainable futures for the people of the Eastern Cape, South Africa, the African continent, and beyond.

Walter Sisulu is among South Africa's most spatially distributed institutions, with campuses in Mthatha, Gcuwa (Butterworth), Buffalo City Metro, and Komani. With seven academic faculties, over 30,500 students, more than 2,500 staff members, and a current annual budget of approximately R3.4 billion, Walter Sisulu operates at a significant scale. As one of only six comprehensive universities in South Africa and the most widely distributed in geographic coverage, Walter Sisulu offers a diverse range of career-oriented professional qualifications and advanced academic programmes – from diplomas to doctoral degrees – catering to varied student pathways. Walter Sisulu's campuses are also mostly located in rural regions of the Eastern Cape, placing the Institution in a unique position to make tangible contributions to regional and national development priorities for the transformation and upliftment of predominantly rural environments.

A University Rooted in Purpose

Established on July 1, 2005, in honour of one of South Africa's most esteemed figures in the fight for liberation and democracy, Walter Sisulu was formed as an amalgam of three institutions: the University of Transkei, founded in 1976; Eastern Cape Technikon, established in 1985; and Border Technikon, established in 1988.

Our core purpose is our commitment to knowledge and to the students in our care – to ensure they receive the highest-quality academic and formative experiences Walter Sisulu can offer. They should emerge as conscientious, virtuous, knowledgeable, and skilled graduates and professionals who will add significant value to public life and a flourishing society.

A University on the Rise

Walter Sisulu is determined to build on the solid foundation laid in the past, while enhancing its current and future academic and societal contributions.

- Our Medical School is internationally recognised for its Community- and Problem-Based Learning model. Upon this foundation, the pioneering Walter Sisulu Rural Clinical School was established, demonstrating our commitment to education and service embedded in the community.
- We offer over 150 accredited academic programmes across various professional and disciplinary fields.
- Our research capacity and postgraduate development are expanding through targeted investments and strategic partnerships.

Repositioned through the adoption of a renewed institutional identity, including the transition to the name iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu, the University enters Vision 2040+ with a strengthened African-centred identity and a clearer articulation of its societal mission. The new institutional brand identity reflects more than a visual transformation; it signals a deeper commitment to African intellectual leadership, institutional cohesion, inclusivity, public relevance, and global distinction rooted in local realities. The implementation of the new identity across institutional systems, campuses, communication platforms, partnerships, and stakeholder engagements forms an important part of consolidating Walter Sisulu's transformation journey and future positioning.



A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Real-World Impact

The Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework represents a shift towards a sharper strategic focus in setting out Walter Sisulu's distinctive value offering, identity, and impact on personal and societal futures.

The Strategic Framework will inform a series of rolling medium-term frameworks and plans over the next 15 years to address the following priorities:

- The enhancement and deepening of the University's core mission, including curriculum reforms aligned with the Global South's movement towards decoloniality and epistemic sovereignty
- Technological transformation and digital disruption for optimal impact on the University's academic project and operations, as well as wider developmental endeavours
- Evolving labour market demands and the needs of future-ready graduates
- Entrepreneurship, innovation, and self-employment for graduates are essential pathways to promote economic participation, sustainable livelihoods, and societal resilience in a rapidly evolving political economy
- Local, national, and continental goals for sustainability, equity, and inclusive development
- Institutional resilience, accountability, and strategic coherence

Through its Signature Themes and refocused Strategic Goals to enhance institutional integration and cohesion, academic delivery, research and innovation, and support systems, Walter Sisulu is geared towards improved intra-institutional efficiencies and impact, as well as serving as a valuable participant and partner in regional, continental, and global knowledge networks and development endeavours.

Despite these goals and priorities, there is an acknowledgement of the financial and resource challenges the University faces as it moves forward. The Strategic Framework, therefore, includes a commitment to address these vulnerabilities and their root causes systematically.

Vision 2040+ is both aspirational and practical. It clarifies our identity, outlines our leadership direction, and sets a basis for rolling plans that will detail how we will deliver measurable public value over the medium to long term. Welcome to the next exciting chapter of iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu.

2025 THE Impact Rankings / 2026 THE Sustainability Impact Ratings

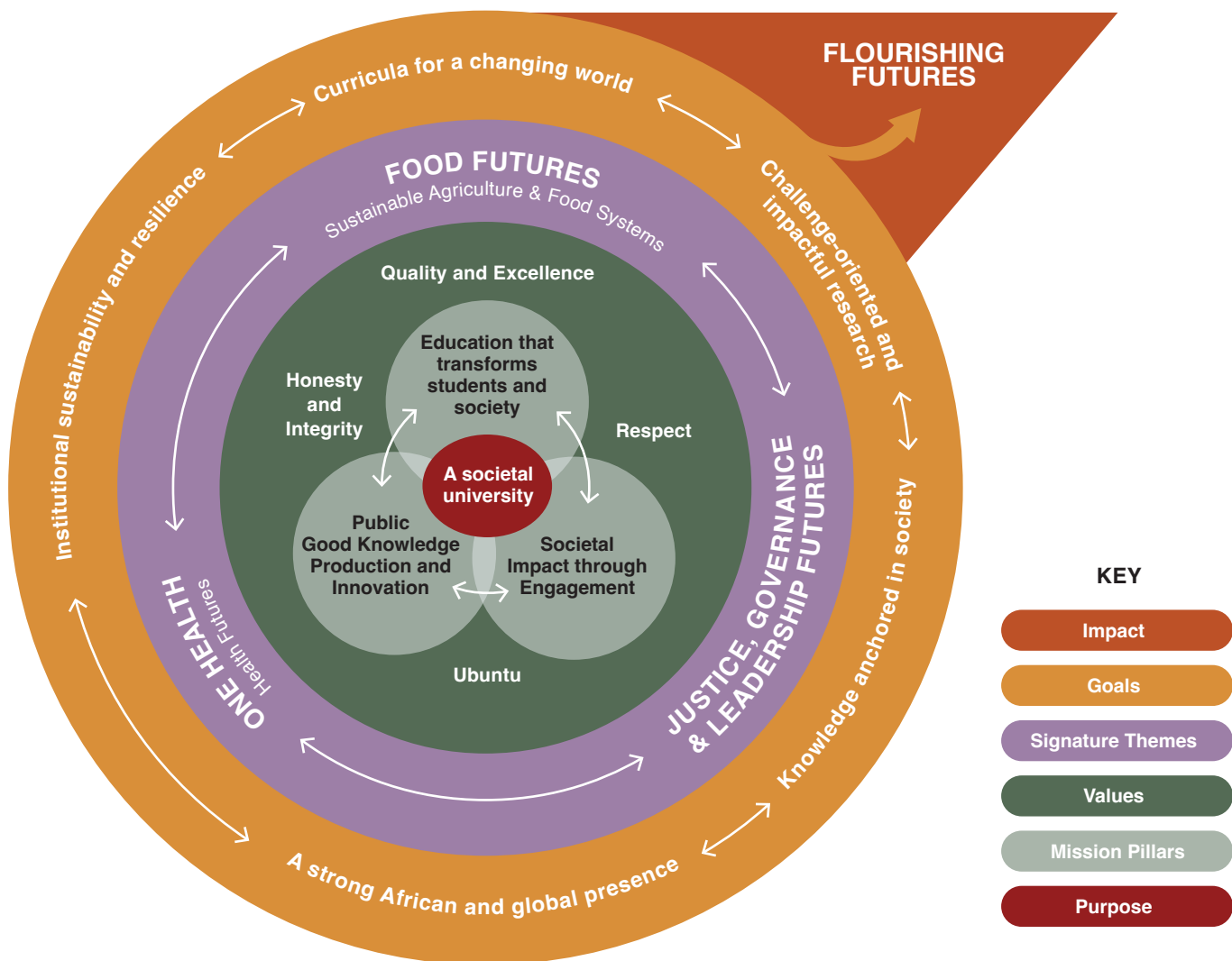
In its inaugural participation in the 2025 Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings, iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu emerged as a standout institution committed to global development. Ranked among the **Top 5 universities in South Africa, Top 12 in Africa**, and placed **401–600 globally**, Walter Sisulu demonstrated strong performance across several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The University ranked **68th globally for SDG 1: No Poverty**, placing it **3rd nationally and 5th in Africa** — a clear marker of its leadership in social impact and community upliftment. Walter Sisulu also ranked within the **101–200 global range for SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**, and **301–400 globally** for both **SDG 4: Quality Education** and **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**.

In the 2026 THE Sustainability Impact Ratings, Walter Sisulu significantly improved its overall standing, moving from the **401–600 global band** to the **301–400 global band**, and is now ranked 4th in South Africa. The University achieved global Top 100 positions in **SDG 1: No Poverty**, ranked **80th globally, 5th nationally and 12th in Africa**, and **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**, ranked **90th globally, 4th nationally and 8th in Africa**. Walter Sisulu also strengthened its performance in **SDG 4: Quality Education**, moving into the **101–200 global band**, with a **4th place national ranking and 10th place in Africa**. In addition, the University participated in **SDG 5: Gender Equality** and **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities** for the first time, achieving commendable global band positions.

These results reflect Walter Sisulu's deep commitment to advancing equity, education, health, decent work, social justice and inclusive development — both regionally and globally.



iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu Strategic Framework **Vision 2040+**



Walter Sisulu's Strategic Framework, depicted above, outlines the institution's framing of Vision 2040+, organised around six interconnected layers with various components.



- 1 At the core is the University's enduring **Purpose**, namely – A Societal University that advances knowledge, cultivates capable and purposeful graduates, and collaborates on solutions for a just, flourishing and sustainable South Africa, Africa, and the world.
- 2 In the second layer are interdependent and cross-reinforcing **Mission Pillars**, which set out the traditional core business of the University, restated.
- 3 Third, the **Values** set out the foundational principles underpinning our consciousness and conduct.
- 4 Fourth, there are three interrelated **Signature Themes**, which set out the areas where Walter Sisulu aims to lead intellectually, while impacting social, economic and cultural transformation and development, together with the sovereignties to be reclaimed and protected on these fronts.
- 5 Fifth, there are five **Strategic Goals**, which specify our methods of execution.
Tied to the goals are strategic objectives, enablers, and drivers, which elaborate on our execution actions.
- 6 Finally, emerging from the layers and components, there is the envisioned ultimate **Impact** – the end-state we want to see: **Flourishing Futures**.

The elements outlined above, interrelated and cross-reinforcing as depicted, ensure that the University operates cohesively rather than in isolated or disconnected parts, actions and initiatives.

This Strategic Framework has a long-term transformational focus. While its implementation will occur through successive planning cycles, the underlying structure provides stability, focus, disciplined decision-making and direction over decades. It enables the University to remain adaptable in a rapidly changing environment, while staying true to its core purpose.



1 Context and Rationale: *Why Vision 2040+?*

The Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework is first and foremost about Walter Sisulu reasserting the University's civilisational mission, signalling a break from the short-termism in planning characteristic of public institutions beholden to the rhythm of state-led planning. Civilisational transformation and development, as well as the attainment of desired end-states in societal transformation, must be recognised and treated as a long-term affair, especially by universities.

Our Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework is therefore not merely a routine extension of the current strategy cycle. It represents a generational repositioning of Walter Sisulu, which aims to establish the University as a key member of the community of institutions and related forces at the epicentre of active transformation. We stand at the convergence of several transitions, structural realities and pressures we are factoring into our foresight:

- Global polycrises that are reshaping knowledge, livelihoods, work, and governance.
- Africa's demographic surge, which demands skills, opportunities, and inclusion, to help address the perennially stubborn crises in the political economies of African states.
- Structural under-development and pressures impeding transformation in South Africa and the Eastern Cape, which require systemic intervention.
- Fiscal volatility, institutional risk and responsibility.
- Trust in and the legitimacy of the academy.

1.1. Global Polycrises and Technological Acceleration

Climate instability and ecological degradation, anxieties occasioned by an information technology-driven fourth industrial revolution and the epoch of artificial intelligence (AI), geopolitical fragmentation and economic volatility, widening inequality and social distrust, as well as rapid changes in labour markets, are converging to compound societal pressures and systemic disruptions, while reconfiguring our global operating environment. AI and machine learning are reshaping knowledge: work; occupations and employment patterns; human capabilities; education systems; productivity; the flow, utilisation, and management of information; creativity; and governance systems. There is a growing demand for cognitive agility and adaptive learning, complex problem-solving, systems thinking, ethical reasoning, digital fluency, and interdisciplinary skills.

At the same time, transitions towards sustainability require profound transformations in food systems, energy systems, social organisation and governance models, and public health frameworks. Universities can ill afford to operate as isolated knowledge producers; they must reframe their posture and actions as sites for engaged ethical inquiry, integrators of technology, practitioners of sustainable organisational practice, and champions of social purpose.

Universities must prepare graduates not only for current professions but also for careers that do not yet exist,



as well as for ethical and other dilemmas that are still emerging. Against this reality, technology is an embedded structural driver of transformation rather than merely an additional capability.

The pressing global question has shifted from “How do universities remain relevant?” to “How do universities deepen their relevance to actively confront systemic disruptions and shape equitable and sustainable futures in our changing world?”

Vision 2040+ addresses this important question for Walter Sisulu.

1.2. Africa’s Demographic Reconfiguration and Political Economy

Africa is the youngest continent in the world in terms of population age, with hundreds of millions of young people poised to enter the workforce over the next two decades. This demographic dividend presents both a historic opportunity and a challenge: It can only be realised if education systems, labour markets, governance structures, and innovation ecosystems are commensurately aligned and expanded to enable absorption and optimisation. This, however, also depends on the extent to which Africa effectively addresses structural impediments that constrain the growth and consolidation of stable polities and dynamic, inclusive economies.

Continental initiatives such as Agenda 2063 and the African Youth Charter advocate for increased access to education, skills development, youth entrepreneurship, technological inclusion, and climate resilience. However, structural features that define nation-states continue to compromise the pace of delivering on these goals.

In this context, universities in Africa must go beyond merely replicating supposedly universal institutional models that continue to fail to serve the needs of a post-colonial Africa, and its political and economic sovereignty, within a persisting order of global imbalance. They should act as sites for sustained enquiry and advocacy to resolve key challenges that

continue to dog post-colonial Africa, as well as engines of innovation grounded in local contexts, while remaining connected to global knowledge networks whose transformation they ought to influence. For Walter Sisulu, this means sharpening its capabilities to contribute significantly to addressing challenges of its local, regional, national and continental environments.

Vision 2040+ reaffirms Walter Sisulu’s commitment to being a locally and globally engaged African university, focused on shaping knowledge from within African realities.

1.3. South Africa and Eastern Cape Imperatives

Despite progress in democracy, South Africa continues to grapple with several critical challenges, with varying degrees of impact and severity across regions. For the Eastern Cape, these challenges run even deeper in several respects. These challenges, many of them already highlighted and having defied hopes raised in the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) and Eastern Cape Provincial Development Plan (PDP) 2030, include:

- Deep socio-economic inequality, with South Africa registering among the highest Gini coefficients globally, and income concentration worsening in the democratic era.
- Low rates of economic growth and persistent disparities in regional economic performance, with industrial concentration remaining uneven across regions.
- Fragile rural economies that have experienced a prolonged period of under-investment, and even disinvestment. In the Eastern Cape, with a strong rural identity, pre-1994 patterns of regional disparities in economic activity persist. Some examples include:
 - o Former quitrent farmland in the western and northeastern regions continues to lead in commercial agriculture due to pre-1994 investment in irrigation, infrastructure, and the capitalisation of white farmers; the eastern communal areas remain underdeveloped.



iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework

- o An industrial base historically concentrated in the two metros of the province, while rural regions, which account for the majority of the population, continue to lag in industrialisation and the requisite enabling infrastructure.

Walter Sisulu is mainly located in the underdeveloped regions of the province, and any rise or fall in its fortunes is linked to those of its rural socio-economic environment.

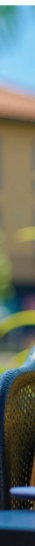
- Gaps in digital infrastructure and access, which further reinforce inequality and impede advancement in digitally enabled activity, including actions in the economy.
- A public sector stretching the fiscus to its limits while remaining constrained by weaknesses in key institutional capabilities and by inadequate strategic prioritisation of sectors critical to societal well-being.
- Persistently high unemployment rates that exacerbate poverty and related social crises, with higher stresses for the youth, and the Eastern Cape registering higher rates of deprivation than the national average and other provinces.
- Widespread mismatches between education and job opportunities.
- Increasing unemployment among graduates, which is a function of the poor performance of the economy as well as weak alignment between the post-school education and training (PSET) system and labour market demands. This indicates, among others, misalignment between:
 - o The supply of education and training and the demand in the economy
 - o Qualifications and the necessary competencies
 - o Research production and its application in development
 - o Policy goals and institutional capabilities
- Increasing vulnerabilities to climate change and related environmental challenges, more pronounced in provinces such as the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

And yet, the Eastern Cape is:

- A province of great historical significance, with a rich tradition of indigenous communities who led the early defence of the motherland through the so-called frontier wars, birthed the early African intelligentsia who rose to prominence across several nation-states in the Southern and East African regions, and raised leaders who were instrumental in ultimately leading South Africa to its liberated state.
- A province endowed with:
 - o Vast tracts of under-cultivated land, a lot of it in the care of communities receiving little to no assistance from the state and development agencies.
 - o Large amounts of livestock in the care of communities.
 - o The ocean, with rich marine life and resources, spreads over 800 km of coastal stretch, against a tradition of coastal communities often marginalised from benefiting from the natural resources in their locales.
 - o Several perennial rivers with immense potential to power a green revolution in farming and energy.
 - o A rich biodiversity asset and the widest range of biomes compared to all other regions of South Africa.
 - o A large, able-bodied and economically active population.

A decisive commitment from the state to focus strategic investments on productive capabilities to exploit the potential in these resources, including investments in the capabilities of institutions such as Walter Sisulu to support this cause, could significantly impact the fortunes of the province and nation, potentially transforming the Eastern Cape into the nation's food basket.

For universities, the pressures and imperatives summarised above present a profound challenge. For Walter Sisulu, with campuses situated within communities where higher education often serves as the primary pathway for graduates who stand to uplift families and communities, the University has an





important responsibility to sharpen its mission, focus and capabilities to shape quality local skill ecosystems, promote sustainable agriculture and food systems, bolster public health systems, enhance governance capacity and the capabilities of local and regional development and economic agents, and foster local innovation.

Vision 2040+ is anchored in this reality. It positions Walter Sisulu as:

- A regional anchor institution
- A catalyst for rural transformation
- A contributor to sustainable and resilient food systems
- A driver of innovation in health systems, and
- A catalyst for effective governance and ethical leadership capacity

1.4. Fiscal Volatility, Sustainability, and Institutional Responsibility

An increasingly stretched fiscal envelope triggers, among other things, contractions and recalibrations in the government's allocation of the public purse, exacerbating uncertainty and anxiety. Public funding for higher education, like funding for other competing needs, is thus becoming increasingly constrained and

unstable. In addition, pressures from student debt are intensifying, with the unemployment crisis implying that graduates who owe institutions are unable to meet their debt obligations, further straining the sustainability of institutions where students who come from income-stressed backgrounds predominate.

Yet, on the other hand, gradual improvements in outcomes from the basic schooling system translate into an ever-rising demand for spaces at higher education institutions that far outstrips their capacity to meet this demand. At the higher end of the credentialing pipeline, the competition for doctoral-level talent is also increasing. Amidst this reality, policymakers' agility in redesigning and legislating policy and regulatory frameworks to respond creatively to the challenges is found wanting. So too are the strategic responses of universities themselves, whose imagination of institutional architectures remains beholden to bricks-and-mortar constructs of the academy, still frozen in the era preceding the fourth industrial revolution.

Within Walter Sisulu, there is a significant challenge: a shrinking, undiversified income base that relies heavily on government subsidies and fees, combined with rising costs outpacing income growth and low reserves.



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The Council of Walter Sisulu, mindful of the obligations and responsibility of Walter Sisulu to come up with creative responses to these crises, has among others mandated the executive leadership of the institution to urgently formulate a plan that will migrate the University to enabling digital platforms which can address the compound challenge of access, cost-efficiencies and institutional resilience, while ensuring that Walter Sisulu delivers effectively on its core mission.

And so, among the enablers Vision 2040+ seeks to consolidate towards sustainability and resilience are modernising infrastructure, expanding and integrating digital systems, strengthening governance, intensifying our diversification of income streams, and maintaining public trust while driving transformation. In addition, we aim to strengthen co-enabling relationships with the state, communities, industry, and international partners.

1.5. Knowledge Legitimacy and Public Trust

Worldwide, educational institutions are experiencing a decline in public trust. Universities are now being evaluated not only on their academic standards but also on their relevance to society, ethical practices, and tangible impact. When access to education does not lead to success, it undermines credibility. Similarly, research that lacks practical application weakens its legitimacy, and failures in governance diminish public confidence.

In the context of African universities, there is an additional mission that must be embraced to avoid being seen merely as “a university in Africa”. Among the various crucial tasks is the need to reclaim epistemic sovereignty, which will help define an African university not bound by the colonial roots and sensibilities that generally characterise academic practices and knowledge projects within our institutions. Walter Sisulu aims to consciously and systematically break free from these limiting tethers.

1.6. Summary of the Strategic Review and Environmental Analysis

The Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework builds upon a thorough review of the University's previous Vision 2020–2030 Strategic Plan, accompanied by an extensive

assessment of both the internal and external environment. The strategy development process utilised institutional performance assessments, a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, a PESTEL (political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal) environmental scan, stakeholder consultations, and strategic planning workshops. This comprehensive approach ensures that the University's future direction is evidence-based, context-responsive, and well-positioned to tackle emerging opportunities and challenges.

Addressing both the design and content of the previous strategy, the review firstly drew attention to the need to revisit our goals, strategic objectives, and enabling drivers against a bolder articulation of purpose and long-term mission. This led to a consolidation of goals to five, from the previous nine, and 16 strategic objectives from the previous 43.

In terms of outputs and outcomes, the review confirmed that Walter Sisulu has made significant progress during the first five-year strategic cycle of the 2020–2030 decadal plan. Governance systems have matured, financial management has stabilised, digital infrastructure has expanded, student support has improved, research capacity has grown, and the University has strengthened its identity as an impactful African institution committed to transformation and community engagement. These achievements reflect increasing institutional resilience, despite operating within a complex and resource-constrained environment.

However, the review also identified key institutional challenges that require renewed strategic focus. These challenges include financial vulnerability due to dependence on government funding and on National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) support for students, ageing infrastructure, uneven digital transformation, fragmented institutional systems, low postgraduate enrolment and supervision capacity, limited research commercialisation, challenges with graduate employability, inconsistent work-integrated learning, and the need to enhance entrepreneurship, innovation, curriculum transformation, and evidence-informed decision-making across the institution.



The environmental analysis further revealed that higher education is experiencing profound change. Political and policy reforms, constrained public finances, technological disruption driven by AI and digital transformation, climate change, demographic shifts, evolving labour markets, increasing expectations for transformation and inclusion, and complex regulatory requirements are all reshaping the role and purpose of universities. These developments necessitate that institutions become more adaptive, digitally enabled, financially resilient, environmentally sustainable, and socially responsive, all while maintaining academic quality and public trust.

At the same time, the analysis highlighted significant opportunities for Walter Sisulu. These include expanding

postgraduate education and challenge-oriented research; leveraging AI and digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning, and institutional effectiveness; strengthening strategic partnerships with government, industry, and international collaborators; diversifying income through innovation, entrepreneurship, and philanthropy; advancing Africanisation and decolonisation; and positioning the University as a leading developmental partner for the Eastern Cape, South Africa, and the African continent.

1.6.1. Integrated SWOT–PESTEL Matrix

The Integrated SWOT–PESTEL analysis is summarised in the table below.

SWOT Dimension	Relevant PESTEL Drivers	Strategic Interpretation for iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu	Vision 2040+ Response
Strengths	Political: National emphasis on access, transformation, and support for historically disadvantaged institutions. Social: Growing expectations for inclusive education, community responsiveness, and public value. Technological: Expansion of digital learning, data systems, and AI-enabled education. Environmental: Increased focus on sustainability and climate-responsive institutions.	Walter Sisulu has a strong developmental identity, an extensive rural and community footprint, stabilised governance structures, improving student-support systems, growing research capability, and an expanding digital foundation. These assets position the University to respond meaningfully to regional and national priorities.	Build on the societal university model; deepen African-centred teaching and knowledge production; expand digitally enabled learning; strengthen student success; and use the Signature Themes to establish recognised areas of academic and societal leadership.
Weaknesses	Economic: Constrained public funding, rising operating costs and student debt, and limited income diversification. Technological: Fragmented systems, uneven digital access, and limited user capability. Legal: Increasing compliance, accreditation, data-governance, and research-ethics requirements. Social: Persistent inequalities, uneven transformation outcomes, and changing student-support needs.	Institutional performance remains constrained by financial vulnerability, infrastructure and maintenance backlogs, low postgraduate throughput, limited supervision capacity, fragmented data and administrative systems, weak innovation pathways, and uneven progress in equity and organisational transformation.	Strengthen institutional sustainability and resilience; align enrolment with academic and infrastructure capacity; modernise digital and administrative systems; grow postgraduate and research capability; enhance leadership and institutional culture; and improve integrated planning and evidence-based decision-making.



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SWOT Dimension	Relevant PESTEL Drivers	Strategic Interpretation for iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu	Vision 2040+ Response
Opportunities	Political: Policy support for transformation, decolonisation, African knowledge systems, and development of Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs). Economic: Potential for partnerships, third-stream income, philanthropy, commercialisation and short learning programmes. Social: Demand for entrepreneurship, employability, lifelong learning and inclusive development. Technological: 4&5IR, AI, data analytics, blended learning, virtual collaboration and automation. Environmental: Growing investment in sustainability, food security, public health and climate resilience.	Walter Sisulu can leverage its regional location, academic breadth and societal mandate to become a leading developmental partner. Opportunities exist to expand postgraduate education, industry collaboration, community-engaged research, entrepreneurship, digital education and sustainability-focused programmes.	Concentrate investment through Signature Themes: Food Futures; One Health; and Justice, Governance and Leadership Futures; strengthen entrepreneurship and graduate self-employment; expand national and global research partnerships; develop digitally enabled and flexible learning pathways; and pursue donor, government, industry, and philanthropic funding.
Threats	Economic: Fiscal instability, affordability pressures, delayed student funding, and increasing operating costs. Technological: Cybersecurity threats, digital exclusion, infrastructure failure, and rapid technological obsolescence. Political: Policy volatility, institutional instability, and changing public funding priorities. Social: Graduate unemployment, talent attrition, stakeholder mistrust, and resistance to change. Environmental: Climate-related disruption, water and energy insecurity, and infrastructure vulnerability. Legal: Rising regulatory and compliance burdens.	External volatility may undermine student access, financial sustainability, institutional stability, and public confidence. Walter Sisulu is also exposed to competition for skilled staff and postgraduate talent, reputational risk, digital disruption, and the consequences of inadequate infrastructure resilience.	Diversify income and build reserves; strengthen cyber resilience, data governance, and business continuity; improve talent attraction and retention; institutionalise risk and compliance management; deepen stakeholder communication and labour relations; and implement phased, climate-resilient infrastructure planning.

Collectively, these findings support a fundamental strategic refocusing rather than merely continuing on the previous 2020–2030 strategic path. Towards this end, Vision 2040+ introduces a renewed institutional purpose, outlines the iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu Graduate and Knowledge Project of the Future, organises institutional efforts around three interdisciplinary Signature Themes, consolidates the University's priorities into five integrated Strategic Goals, and strengthens the institutional enablers necessary for effective implementation. This strategy incorporates both lessons learned from the past and the demands of the future, positioning Walter Sisulu to achieve greater academic excellence, societal impact, institutional sustainability, and public value over the next 15 years.



1.7. Value Proposition in Sum

Vision 2040+ addresses an important insight that emerges across various global, continental, national, and provincial contexts: the decades ahead will likely favour institutional collaborators who

- Integrate institutional agendas and systems rather than function in isolation
- Align skills and other capabilities with a clear societal mission and distinct needs
- Translate research into actionable policy, innovation, and practice
- Are digitally fluent and incorporate AI ethically and inclusively
- Foster sustainable local and regional development, while engaging on a global scale
- Build trust through demonstrable public value

Vision 2040+ positions Walter Sisulu to be an institution that embodies these ambitions.





2 The Strategic Response: *From Diagnosis to Strategic Framework*

The structural realities described above require more than mere adaptation; they call for an intentional redesign of our institutions.

Vision 2040+ is Walter Sisulu's proactive response towards a deliberate repositioning. The Strategic Framework translates our analysis into an actionable design and system to create public value, consisting of the following six interconnected layers:





2.1. Our Core Purpose: A Societal University for Flourishing Futures

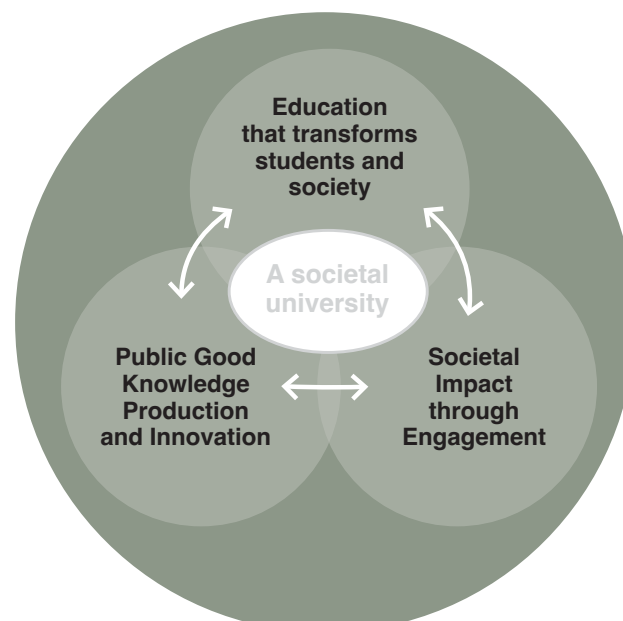
At the core of Vision 2040+ is a distinct institutional identity, that specifies what the University is fundamentally about: its core purpose and defining mission.



Vision 2040+ is based on an African-centred understanding of knowledge, development, and human flourishing. Walter Sisulu recognises Africanisation and decolonisation as essential to its institutional identity and knowledge project. This involves affirming African knowledge systems, languages, histories, lived experiences, intellectual traditions, and community contributions as valid and crucial sources of scholarship, innovation, and learning. At the same time, Walter Sisulu remains globally engaged, contributing to and drawing from international knowledge networks through relationships founded on reciprocity, respect for different ways of knowing, and intellectual openness.

2.2. Our Mission Pillars: Integrated Societal Functions

Walter Sisulu advances its societal purpose through three interdependent and mutually reinforcing mission pillars: education that transforms students and society, public good knowledge production and innovation, and societal impact through engagement.





Education that Transforms Students and Society

Education at Walter Sisulu aims to develop capable, ethical, adaptive, and technologically proficient graduates who are prepared to navigate complexity and make meaningful contributions to society.

Transforming education involves aligning curricula with emerging labour market trends, fostering digital and AI literacy, supporting sustainability transitions, and promoting interdisciplinary problem-solving. This transformation requires robust academic support systems that ensure not only access to education but also progression, completion, and success for graduates. It integrates work-integrated learning, entrepreneurial development, and civic responsibility as core elements of student development.

Importantly, teaching at Walter Sisulu is closely linked to research. Education is driven by inquiry, and scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) ensures that pedagogy is informed by research, reflective, and continually improved. Students increasingly play a role in knowledge creation rather than being mere passive recipients of information. This connection between teaching and research enhances academic quality and deepens intellectual development.

Furthermore, teaching is enriched through societal engagement. Community-based learning, service learning, and work-integrated learning immerse students in real-world contexts, fostering a bi-directional learning process. Communities, industries, and other institutional partners contribute to the curriculum's relevance, while students and academic researchers apply their disciplinary knowledge to real-life challenges. Consequently, education is socially anchored and contextually grounded.

Public Good Knowledge Production and Innovation

Research at Walter Sisulu is seen as important both in its form as inquiry driven by a curiosity to probe, test, and generate knowledge for its own sake, and inquiry with deliberate societal utility. The Walter Sisulu code, in both instances, advocates focus and rigour, respect for subject and partners, relevance and reciprocity in value-creation, as well as sound research and scholarly ethics. The production of knowledge must not only contribute to advancements in various disciplines, but also address pressing societal challenges, particularly those affecting the Eastern Cape and the broader African context. This research prioritises interdisciplinary collaboration, strengthens postgraduate development, and fosters innovation pathways that translate academic scholarship into policy, practice, and entrepreneurship.

Research does not take place in isolation; it thrives through engagement. At the intersection of research and community collaboration lies co-created knowledge. Communities, government, and industry partners play a crucial role in shaping research questions, while research outputs are crafted into practical solutions. This integration fosters innovation ecosystems capable of tackling complex development challenges in areas such as health systems, food security, governance reform, democratic practice, and caring social consciousness.

Simultaneously, research continuously informs teaching. New findings enhance curriculum relevance, improve postgraduate supervision, and support academic vitality. In this integrated system, research enriches learning, and in turn, learning sustains research.



Societal Impact Through Engagement

Engagement at Walter Sisulu is essential and goes beyond being merely symbolic; it is socially accountable and relevant to development.

Meaningful engagement involves building reciprocal partnerships with communities, public institutions, industry, and global collaborators. This includes participating in policy discussions, providing advisory services, initiating place-based initiatives, and developing collaborative projects aligned with regional and continental priorities.

Engagement enhances the relevance of research by ensuring that scholarly inquiry addresses real societal challenges. It also strengthens teaching by immersing students in authentic contexts where theory and practice intersect. Through this integration, knowledge flows in multiple directions, from the University to society and back again.

Ultimately, engagement sustains legitimacy, builds public trust, and reinforces Walter Sisulu's identity as a societal university, functioning as an integrated system focused on creating public value.

Integration as Operating Principle

An important defining feature of Vision 2040+ is the integration and symbiosis of the Mission Pillars and Signature Themes:

- Teaching and learning are supported by research.
- Research enriches teaching and learning, and is mandated by societal challenges.
- Societal engagement enhances the relevance of the curriculum and research, with partnerships and collaborations deepening research initiatives and creating opportunities for researchers and graduates.

Under Vision 2040+, Walter Sisulu does not simply focus on education, research, and engagement as individual spheres; it views them in a unified manner, working

towards flourishing futures through an integrated institutional design. Underpinning these should be enabling infrastructure and systems, including digital systems, that facilitate the optimal integration of the core mission, support operations, and enable seamless coordination across campuses.

Deliberate steps and mechanisms will be formalised and systematised to ensure that this integration becomes an operable feature of the Walter Sisulu academic project. These include:

- *Rolling Institutional Operating Plans* (IOPs) across portfolios and faculties will include structural mechanisms for integration in each of the following areas:
 - (i) **Curriculum governance** to ensure that research outputs systematically feed into curriculum review cycles;
 - (ii) **Academic incentives** which can reward staff for cross-mission work; for example, community-engaged research that loops back to, and informs teaching; and
 - (iii) **Student pathways** that formally embed service learning, research participation, and engagement opportunities in degree requirements.
- *Performance agreements* will articulate the integration of the mission pillars.

The iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu Graduate and Knowledge Project of the Future

Vision 2040+ recognises that the future relevance of universities will increasingly depend not only on the qualifications they provide or the research they conduct but also on the graduates they produce, the knowledge systems they develop, the institutions they create, and the societal futures they help shape.

Walter Sisulu's knowledge project is rooted in an African-centred understanding of development, human flourishing, and societal transformation. Africanisation and decolonisation are seen not as symbolic or peripheral



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commitments but as foundational principles that inform the University's curriculum, research, engagement, leadership, institutional culture, and broader intellectual identity. This includes validating African knowledge systems, languages, histories, intellectual traditions, lived experiences, and community realities as legitimate and essential sources of scholarship, innovation, and learning.

Transformation at Walter Sisulu is understood as an ongoing process encompassing institutional, intellectual, cultural, and societal changes aimed at promoting equity, inclusion, social justice, human dignity, and democratic participation. The University's transformation agenda goes beyond simply achieving demographic representation; it also includes transforming the curriculum, ensuring epistemic justice, fostering an inclusive institutional culture, promoting gender equity, supporting the development of students and staff, advancing technological inclusion, and removing structural barriers to opportunity and success. Guided by constitutional values and African humanist traditions, Walter Sisulu aims to create an institutional environment that is inclusive, supportive, critically engaged, and responsive to the historical and contemporary realities facing South African and African societies.

At the same time, Walter Sisulu acknowledges that higher education is entering a period of profound transition influenced by AI, digital transformation, ecological instability, changing labour markets, demographic shifts, and increasing societal complexity. In this context, the University aims to prepare graduates not only for current professions but also for uncertain and evolving futures that will require adaptability, ethical judgement, entrepreneurial skills, creativity, interdisciplinary thinking, and a commitment to continuous learning.

Walter Sisulu, therefore, strives to cultivate graduates who are:

- Intellectually agile and critically reflective
- Ethically grounded and socially conscious
- Entrepreneurial, innovative, and capable of creating livelihoods and opportunities
- Digitally fluent and able to navigate AI-enabled environments responsibly

- Rooted in African realities while globally engaged
- Committed to democratic values, sustainability, and social justice
- Proficient in collaborative problem-solving across disciplines, cultures, and sectors

The University also recognises that graduates' futures are closely tied to the strength of its research and postgraduate ecosystem. Therefore, Walter Sisulu positions postgraduate growth, challenge-oriented research, and innovation at the centre of its societal mission and long-term institutional sustainability. Building a robust postgraduate pipeline, enhancing supervision capability, expanding interdisciplinary research collaboration, and mobilising research funding are essential to strengthening the University's intellectual contributions and developmental impact.

Within Vision 2040+, curriculum transformation goes beyond simply renewing content. It involves rethinking pedagogies, learning environments, language practices, digital systems, research pathways, and community partnerships that promote relevance, inclusion, adaptability, and public value. Walter Sisulu's approach to transformation aims to integrate African-centred scholarship, future-oriented learning, technological fluency, ethical reasoning, challenge-driven inquiry, and meaningful societal engagement into a coherent institutional project.

The University recognises that knowledge gains legitimacy when it contributes meaningfully to society. Walter Sisulu advocates for a model of socially embedded scholarship, in which teaching and learning, research and innovation, and societal engagement are interconnected to pursue public value and flourishing futures. Communities, public institutions, industry, and civil society are viewed not merely as recipients of knowledge, but as essential collaborators in the creation, application, and transformation of knowledge.

This understanding of the Walter Sisulu graduate and the future knowledge project provides a solid foundation for the Signature Themes, Strategic Goals, institutional enablers, and implementation priorities outlined in Vision 2040+.



2.3. Values

The four Walter Sisulu values represent the foundational principles underpinning our choices and conduct.

Honesty and Integrity

Acting truthfully and ethically in all academic, research, and social dealings.

This means:

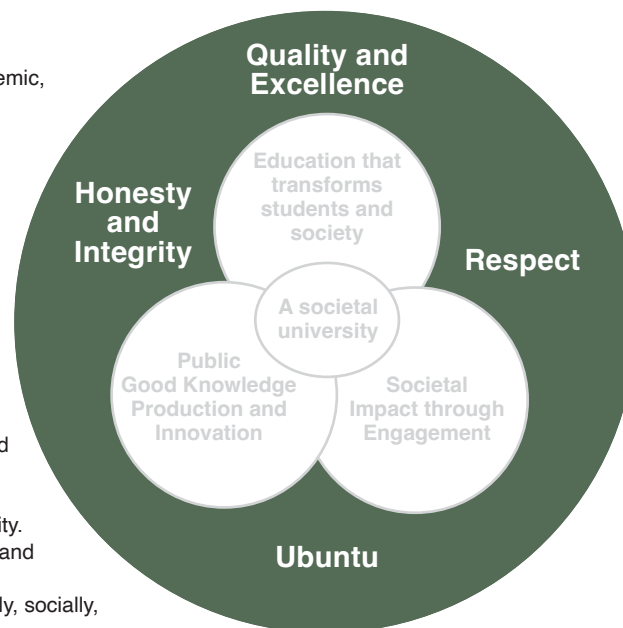
- Upholding academic honesty and resisting plagiarism or manipulation.
- Taking responsibility for our actions and owning our mistakes.
- Making decisions that reflect strong moral principles in both leadership and everyday conduct.

Ubuntu

Embodying compassion, community, and humanity. "I am because we are".

This reflects:

- A spirit of mutual care and responsibility.
- Building strong community ties within and beyond the university.
- Lifting others as we rise – academically, socially, and professionally.
- Prioritising empathy, humility, and shared success over competition.



Quality and Excellence

Striving for high standards in teaching, learning, and service.

This includes:

- Continual self-improvement and learning.
- Delivering quality results.
- Encouraging innovation and rewarding critical thinking.
- Holding ourselves accountable to measurable performance standards.

Respect

Valuing diverse views, cultures, and the dignity of every individual in the university community.

This means:

- Listening actively and engaging constructively, even in disagreement.
- Embracing cultural diversity and fostering inclusion.
- Valuing every individual's contribution and potential.
- Creating safe, supportive spaces where all can thrive.

2.4. Signature Themes: Strategic Differentiation and Societal Impact

Two motivations underpin the choice and framing of the three Signature Themes prioritised for staking out Walter Sisulu's differentiation in scholarship and value-add to public life:

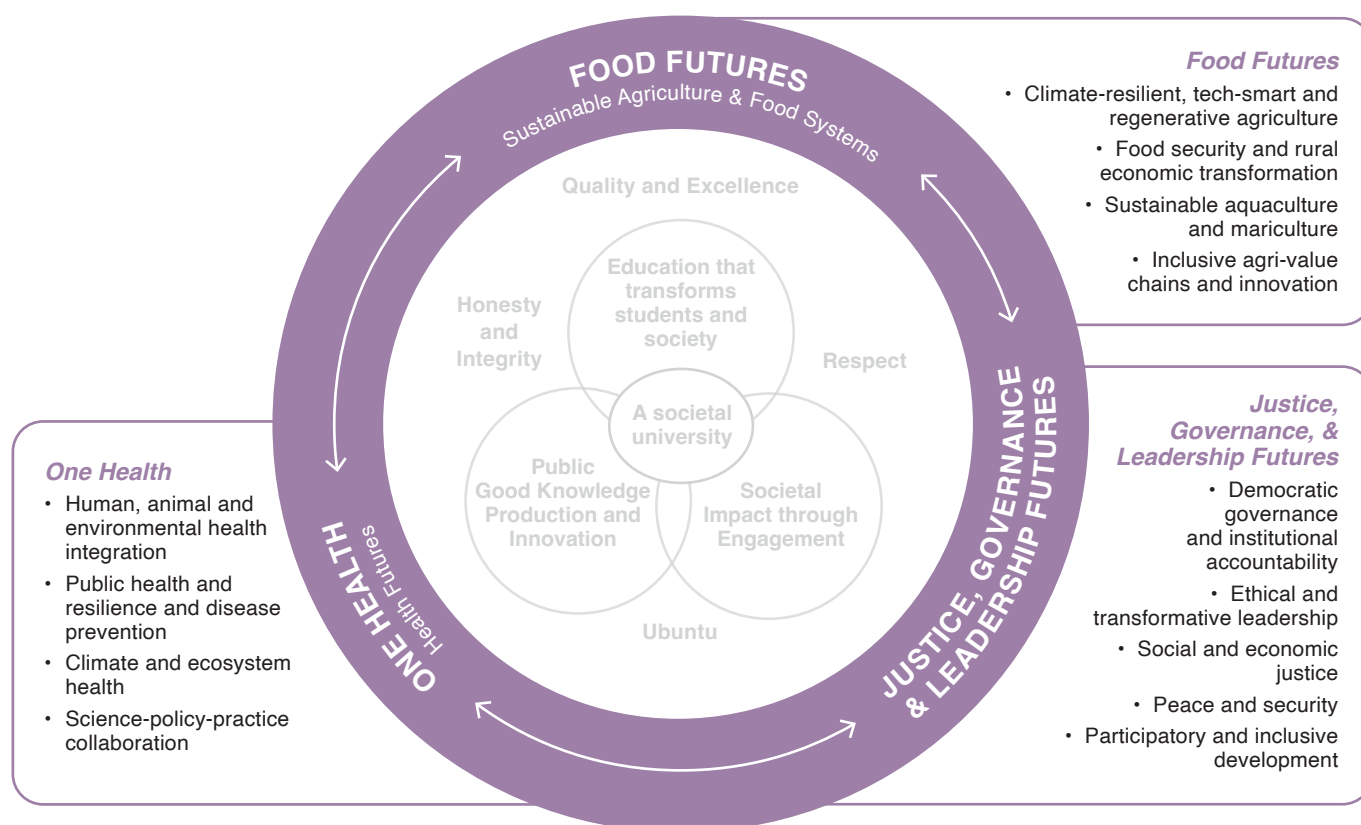
The first motivation is shaped by the structural realities outlined in Section 1, which present both challenges and opportunities that warrant a strategic response. The second motivation concerns the University's capabilities, including its reputation and strengths in specific areas, which are logical building blocks for the ambition set out in Vision 2040+.

It is important to understand that Walter Sisulu operates across seven faculties with over 150 well-established and accredited programmes. Consequently, a good number of the programmes on offer may not easily map onto the Signature Themes. This does not mean the Strategic Framework marginalises or deprioritises these programmes. While the Signature Themes represent Walter Sisulu's priority areas for intellectual differentiation and strategic investment, they do not define the totality of Walter Sisulu's academic offerings.



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Walter Sisulu will, in the medium-to-longer term, pursue three Signature Themes, which are intended to interlink, cross-influence, and encourage trans-disciplinarity: Food Futures; One Health; and Justice, Governance, and Leadership Futures.



As noted in the above design, the Signature Themes, while distinct within certain disciplinary clusters, are also intended to encourage transdisciplinary work and collaboration across themes. For example, the following systemic relationship: Sustainable food systems (Theme 1) depend on healthy ecological systems and disease-resilient rural communities (Theme 2, One Health); both require capable, ethical institutions, democratic governance, and participatory local development action to be sustained at scale (Theme 3). In other words, the Signature Themes should be understood and

developed as a unified, strategic, and interconnected framework for institutional as well as local, regional, and continental transformation and impact. The Signature Themes are also intended to advance African-centred scholarship and development pathways rooted in the realities, aspirations and futures of the continent. The Signature Themes will also serve as strategic platforms for concentrating postgraduate growth, attracting research funding, strengthening transdisciplinary scholarship, and building internationally recognised areas of research excellence.



Signature Theme 1 –

FOOD FUTURES: Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems

Food Futures positions Walter Sisulu as a leader in promoting food and nutritional sovereignty through resilient, inclusive, and climate-responsive food systems. This initiative directly addresses the structural challenges of the Eastern Cape, where rural livelihoods, land use, environmental vulnerability, and economic marginalisation intersect.

The theme incorporates agricultural sciences, agrarian studies, environmental management, rural development, economics, and enabling technologies from the engineering and other sciences, within a transdisciplinary framework. Its goal is to enhance agricultural productivity while also developing and strengthening entire food systems, from sustainable production and value chain development to enterprise formation, market access, and community resilience.

In doing so, it aligns academic excellence with the urgency of developmental needs.

Strategic Rationale

Food insecurity, climate change, land degradation, and rural poverty continue to be significant challenges in South Africa and throughout the African continent. These issues are particularly pronounced in predominantly rural provinces such as the Eastern Cape, where agricultural potential coexists with structural inequality and economic instability.

As a university situated within this context, Walter Sisulu has both a responsibility and an opportunity to make a difference. This theme allows Walter Sisulu the institution to:

- Contribute to food and nutritional sovereignty and resilience.
- Support climate-adaptive and tech-smart agricultural practices.
- Strengthen rural enterprises and encourage local economic participation.
- Inform policy and governance within agri-food systems.
- Align teaching and research with pressing national and continental priorities.

Signature Theme 2 –

ONE HEALTH: Human, Animal, and Ecological Health Futures

One Health builds upon Walter Sisulu's strengths, established brand and leading position in the medical and health sciences. The One Health theme extends this to an interdependent framework that conjoins the health futures of human, animal and environmental systems. In an era marked by climate instability, emerging and recurring infectious diseases, antimicrobial resistance, food insecurity, and ecological degradation, health cannot be effectively addressed through isolated disciplines.

This theme promotes a transdisciplinary and multisectoral approach that integrates health sciences, environmental studies, agriculture, veterinary science, data analytics, and the social sciences. It aims to generate solutions that function at local, national, continental, and global levels, while remaining firmly rooted in community realities throughout the Eastern Cape.

The focus is on shifting from fragmented responses to building systems-based resilience.

Strategic Rationale

Health challenges are becoming increasingly complex, interconnected, and global. The COVID-19 pandemic, changes in climate-related and other environmentally linked disease patterns, issues related to water and sanitation, and environmental degradation, have shown that human well-being is closely linked to ecosystem stability and institutional capacity.

Traditional sector-based approaches are no longer sufficient.

As a university with a strong reputation in the health sciences, community-based learning, and applied research, Walter Sisulu is in a unique position to lead integrated responses that:

- Strengthen primary and community health systems.



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- Address disease prevention and resilience at the intersection of human, animal, and environmental health.
- Improve health governance and policy implementation.
- Promote sustainable development through preventive and systems-based interventions.

This theme aligns local and regional needs with global scientific trends, especially as international funding increasingly favours interdisciplinary frameworks for health resilience.

Signature Theme 3 – **Justice, Governance, and Leadership Futures**

Walter Sisulu is committed to promoting ethical public leadership, institutional integrity, democratic resilience, and inclusive development by focusing on justice, governance, and leadership futures.

In a time characterised by governance instability, rising inequality, public distrust, and pressure on institutions, sustainable development relies not just on technical solutions but also on capable institutions and principled leadership. This approach explores foundational questions of power, accountability, justice, and democratic practices across local, regional, African and global contexts.

The theme integrates law, governance, public administration, leadership studies, education, and the economic and social sciences. The University aims to strengthen institutional capacity, foster ethical leadership, and promote just and sustainable societies.

Strategic Rationale

Persistent inequalities, governance deficits, corruption, failures in policy implementation, and leadership challenges continue to undermine social cohesion and development in many contexts.

Institutional weaknesses erode public trust, while leadership failures weaken policy outcomes. Ethical deficiencies compromise delivery and sustainability.

As a university with a strong transformation mandate and a history centred on access, equity, and social mobility, Walter Sisulu has a unique position to shape:

- Ethical leaders in both the public and private sectors
- Governance reforms informed by evidence
- Democratic participation and civic engagement
- Research and public dialogue focused on social justice
- Institutional resilience and accountability

The initiative on Justice, Governance, and Leadership Futures thus aims to strengthen both the intellectual and civic foundations of development.

Together, the three Signature Themes address key challenges and take advantage of strategic development opportunities in the Eastern Cape, while also positioning Walter Sisulu to contribute to national, continental, and global priorities.

2.5. Our Strategic Goals: Operationalising the Mission

If the mission pillars define what Walter Sisulu does, and the Signature Themes set out what Walter Sisulu will build as its distinctive areas of renown for scholarly primacy, as well as societal value-add and impact, the Strategic Goals define how the University delivers – coherently, systematically and measurably.¹

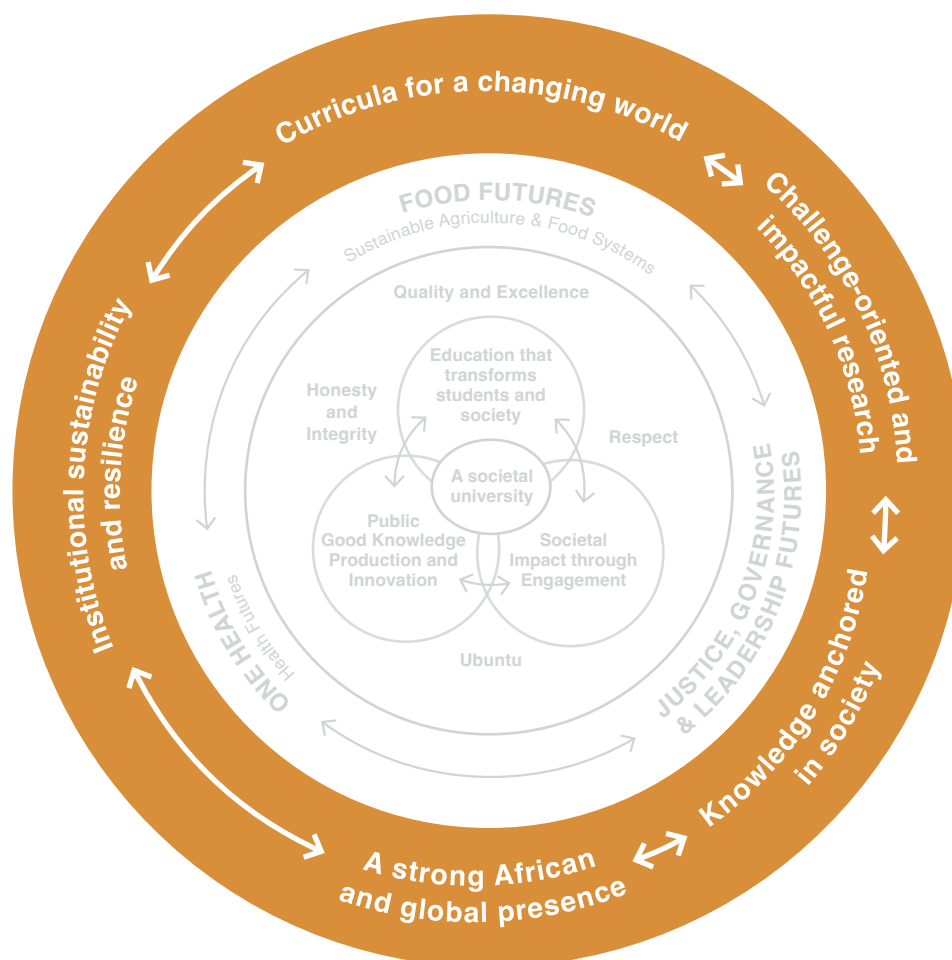
¹ Key Performance Indicators, baselines, and targets against which to track progress in implementing this Strategic Framework will be developed. Central to these will be a Strategic Scorecard – a set of headline metrics built around the Strategic Goals and their objectives – against which progress will be assessed across each five-year planning cycle. The Scorecard will also underpin the performance indicators set out in annual performance plans (APPs) and Institutional Operating Plans (IOPs).



Each of the five Strategic Goals strengthens the efficacy and impact, as well as the integration across the mission pillars and Signature Themes.

Articulated under each Strategic Goal are strategic objectives and drivers that will enable the attainment of those goals. Rolling implementation plans will prioritise and sequence the key actions required to advance each goal and objective, based on careful assessments of available resources, institutional capacity, and the commitments and capabilities of identified collaborators.

The five Strategic Goals, depicted in the outer circle of the diagram below, are as follows: Curricula for a Changing World, Challenge-Oriented and Impactful Research, Knowledge Anchored in Society, A Strong African and Global Presence, and Institutional Sustainability and Resilience.





Goal 1: Curricula for a Changing World

Walter Sisulu offers an inclusive, high-quality education that enhances access, supports student success, and produces graduates who are intellectually agile, ethically grounded, socially conscious, and practically skilled. At Walter Sisulu, teaching and learning go beyond simple knowledge transmission; they are transformative processes that foster critical inquiry, problem-solving abilities, civic responsibility, and adaptive leadership.

The curriculum – its design, content, and process – is continually refined to respond to societal needs, technological advancements, changes in the labour market, and the University's Signature Themes. Walter Sisulu recognises that higher education is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by factors such as AI, automation, digital disruption, ecological change, and evolving work and social structures. In this context, transforming the curriculum extends beyond simply adapting to new technologies; it involves equipping students with the skills to think critically, act ethically, solve complex problems, collaborate across disciplines, and remain adaptable in the face of uncertainty and rapid change. The University aims to cultivate graduates who combine human judgement, creativity, innovation, civic responsibility, and technological proficiency as they navigate the futures they will inherit and help shape. Programmes are designed with a forward-looking perspective that addresses the Eastern Cape's structural challenges, South Africa's national priorities, Africa's interests and demographic changes, and global trends in AI, sustainability, and the knowledge economy.

Rooted in African realities and epistemologies, Walter Sisulu's academic offerings incorporate digital fluency, multilingualism, experiential learning, and ethical reasoning across all disciplines. With robust academic support systems, inclusive of digital integration, and a strong commitment to transformation and epistemic justice, the University enhances graduate outcomes and equips students for meaningful participation in society, the economy, and democratic life.

By 2040, Walter Sisulu graduates will be recognised not only for their employability and entrepreneurial capabilities, but also for their ability to think systemically, act ethically, innovate responsibly, and contribute to the creation of public value.

Walter Sisulu acknowledges that the future of work is becoming more uncertain, technologically disrupted, and defined by changing employment patterns. Therefore, the University aims to prepare graduates not just for traditional employment, but also for entrepreneurship, innovation, self-employment, social enterprises, and emerging livelihood opportunities. Graduate success is defined as the ability to adapt, create value, solve problems, and contribute meaningfully to society and the economy in various ways. Curriculum transformation at Walter Sisulu is therefore rooted in African realities while remaining globally engaged and responsive to emerging technological and societal shifts.

Strategic Objectives

To achieve this goal, Walter Sisulu will invest in and prioritise:

1. Transformative Curricula

- Advancing epistemic sovereignty and curriculum transformation through African-centred pedagogies, multilingualism, epistemic transdisciplinarity, and the critical engagement of African intellectual traditions, histories, and knowledge systems alongside global scholarship.
- Investing time, human and material resources in the design and continuous improvement of curricula across faculties and disciplines.
- Designing future-oriented curricula that incorporate critical pedagogy, African-centred epistemologies, ethical AI literacy, digital fluency, sustainability thinking, systems thinking, multilingualism, and inter- and transdisciplinary problem-solving across qualifications.



- Professionally developing faculty, including capabilities to mediate digitally enabled scholarly inquiry as well as teaching and learning.
- Aligning academic programmes with Signature Themes.
- Strengthening institutional capability for digitally enhanced and AI-enabled teaching, learning, assessment, research and academic support, while safeguarding ethical, human-centred and inclusive educational practices.

2. Access, Quality Student Experience and Outcomes

- Improving access to the university, against expanded and digitally enabled capabilities of the University.

- Ensuring a quality social and academic experience.
- Strengthening student success and retention.
- Advancing experiential and work-integrated learning.
- Enhancing entrepreneurial skills, fostering innovation literacy, preparing for self-employment, and creating adaptive career pathways that empower graduates to generate livelihoods, engage meaningfully in dynamic economies, and contribute to social transformation.
- Embedding entrepreneurship, self-employment readiness, digital fluency, AI literacy, and adaptive career capability across curricula and student-development pathways.





Goal 2: Challenge-Oriented and Impactful Research

Walter Sisulu is committed to advancing research and innovation that are purposeful, socially relevant, and grounded in the developmental realities of the Eastern Cape and the nation at large. The University also contributes to continental and global knowledge agendas. Research at Walter Sisulu is not merely an abstract academic exercise; it serves as a driver of public value, institutional credibility, and long-term transformation. Walter Sisulu recognises that strengthening postgraduate education and research capability is essential to building long-term institutional sustainability, intellectual leadership, and innovation capacity. Expanding postgraduate enrolment, improving completion rates, and developing a robust pipeline of emerging researchers are therefore central priorities in advancing the University's knowledge project and societal mission.

The University's research priorities are intentionally shaped by its Signature Themes, which promote interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration across faculties and with external partners. This approach allows Walter Sisulu to move beyond fragmented scholarship, towards challenge-oriented inquiry that addresses critical issues as summarised in the 'Context & Rationale' section. The aim is for scholarship to inform public policy, enhance professional practice, stimulate innovation ecosystems, and generate tangible societal benefits.

Special attention is given to the development of postgraduate students and early-career researchers, as well as to building a critical mass in priority research areas aligned with local and national development priorities, continental frameworks such as Agenda 2063, and globally subscribed frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

By investing in academic researchers' capabilities and adjunct researcher networks, expanding postgraduate pathways, strengthening industry- and community-linked research, and deepening global collaboration, Walter Sisulu enhances the visibility, credibility, and impact of its research portfolio.

By 2040, Walter Sisulu aims to be recognised as a leading developmental research university in Africa, distinguished by its place-based impact, contribution to public policy and sustainable development, and its ability to translate knowledge into transformative solutions.

Walter Sisulu's research project is also committed to strengthening African-centred scholarship and knowledge production that responds to local realities while contributing to continental and global intellectual advancement.

Strategic Objectives

To achieve this goal, Walter Sisulu will:

1. Build Critical Mass and Research Excellence

- Increase the proportion of PhD-qualified staff
- Strengthen research chairs and centres of excellence.
- Strengthen the postgraduate pipeline through increased enrolment and improved completion rates for master's and doctoral programmes.
- Promote inter- and transdisciplinary research.
- Strengthen robust ethics, data governance and open science practices.
- Expand the production of quality accredited outputs.
- Develop targeted postgraduate growth strategies in under-enrolled and high-priority fields, supported by improved supervision capacity, funding mobilisation, research chairs, partnerships, and structured postgraduate-support systems.
- Develop targeted postgraduate growth strategies aligned with the Signature Themes and national development needs.
- Strengthen supervision capacity, postgraduate support systems, and researcher development programmes to improve postgraduate success and research productivity.



- Expand structured pathways for honours, master's, and doctoral progression, with particular focus on historically underrepresented groups and emerging scholars.

2. Build Research Excellence in Signature Themes

- Invest in research capacity and promote postgraduate growth in Signature Themes.
- Advance research knowledge translation and innovation, in applications to policy, professional practice, community application and responsible commercialisation.
- Expand strategic partnerships and funding streams through national, continental, and global research collaborations, inclusive of industry and donors.
- Mobilise diversified research funding through

competitive grants, industry collaboration, donor partnerships, endowed chairs, innovation platforms, and participation in national, continental, and global research consortia.

- Enhance innovation ecosystems, promote entrepreneurial pathways, and ensure responsible commercialisation of research outputs that support local economic development and sustainable livelihoods.
- Promote research that advances epistemic justice, African-centred inquiry, indigenous knowledge systems, and locally grounded innovation.
- Strengthen innovation ecosystems that connect postgraduate research, applied scholarship, entrepreneurship, policy influence, and societal problem-solving.





Goal 3: Knowledge Anchored in Society

Walter Sisulu regards societal engagement as a fundamental function of the university enterprise, and a defining aspect of its institutional identity. Knowledge at Walter Sisulu is not created in isolation; it is developed, tested, and refined in collaboration with fellow scholars and other academic communities of practice, civil society, public institutions and industry to generate public value.

Engagement is intentionally organised around the Signature Themes and integrated across teaching and research. Through reciprocal and sustained partnerships, Walter Sisulu promotes issue and place-based inquiry and development in the Eastern Cape, while contributing to national, continental, and global discussions and knowledge frameworks on sustainability, health resilience, democracy and governance reform, and inclusive growth.

The University advocates for community-engaged learning, applied scholarship, participatory research, and structured knowledge translation. Students gain experience in real-world contexts; researchers collaborate with stakeholders to create solutions; and communities contribute their lived experiences to academic inquiry. Our engagement is thus not merely an outreach function, but a pathway through which knowledge becomes socially meaningful, economically empowering, and democratically relevant.

Strategic Objectives

To achieve this goal, Walter Sisulu will:

1. Institutionalise Engagement as an Academic Imperative

- Embed community engagement, policy collaboration, and industry partnerships within faculty plans, curriculum, and research frameworks.

By 2040, Walter Sisulu aims to be recognised as a developmental anchor institution – trusted by communities, valued by policymakers, and respected as a university where scholarship and societal commitment are inseparable.

- Expand community-engaged teaching and learning by integrating service learning, work-integrated learning, and place-based projects across programmes to enhance graduate capabilities and foster civic responsibility.
- Promote innovation within communities, develop local enterprises, and support participatory economic initiatives that align with the Signature Themes.
- Improve mechanisms for systematic institutional learning from engagement.

2. Advance Co-Created Knowledge and Participatory Innovation

- Strengthen collaborative partnerships with communities and stakeholders in co-setting research agendas and implementation.
- Strengthen reciprocal knowledge partnerships with communities, recognising lived experience and indigenous knowledge as important contributors to knowledge production and development practice.

3. Strengthen Policy and Practice Interfaces as Regional Development Partner

- Collaborate on development initiatives addressing Signature Theme priorities.
- Improve mechanisms for translating research into policy influence and practice, with robust frameworks for assessing public value and developmental outcomes.



Goal 4: A Strong African and Global Presence

Walter Sisulu aims to establish a strong, credible, and distinctive presence within both African and global knowledge networks. As a societal university rooted in the Eastern Cape and dedicated to continental transformation, Walter Sisulu promotes scholarship that is both locally grounded and globally engaged.

Alongside a deliberate emphasis on its African identity and prioritisation of its Signature Themes, the University collaborates with partners on knowledge and research initiatives that advance continental and global agendas, such as Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals, and emerging frameworks for AI and sustainability.

Through partnerships, joint research initiatives, and international staff and student exchanges, Walter Sisulu enhances its research visibility, attracts postgraduate students, and improves its institutional reputation. Digital platforms and AI-enabled collaborations further extend the University's reach, facilitating participation in transnational research consortia and knowledge ecosystems.

Strategic Objectives

To achieve this goal, Walter Sisulu will:

1. Deepen Continental and Global Research Partnerships

- Expand joint research programmes, co-publications, and multi-institutional consortia aligned with the Signature Themes.
- Position the Signature Themes in global policy and knowledge fora, ensuring that Walter Sisulu scholarship informs and is informed by continental and international dialogues, as well as research outputs and outcomes.

By the year 2040, Walter Sisulu aims to be recognised as a respected African university of global standing, valued for its developmental scholarship, its ethical stance in global discussions, and its contributions to advancing just and sustainable futures.

2. Strengthen and Expand Academic Mobility and Exchange

- Increase structured opportunities for staff and student mobility, joint supervision, and collaborative doctoral programmes.
- Leverage digital platforms, AI-enabled collaboration, and blended learning models to engage in global knowledge networks.
- Attract international students and postgraduate talent, along with niche programmes and research clusters that attract interest from across the continent and the globe.

3. Increase Institutional Visibility and Reputation

- Strengthen branding, research dissemination, and participation in rankings and benchmarking exercises that align with Walter Sisulu's developmental mission.



Goal 5: Institutional Sustainability and Resilience

Walter Sisulu is dedicated to improving its attraction and stewardship of financial and other material resources, strengthening the integrity of its governance and operating systems, improving overall organisational culture and, ultimately, sustainability and resilience.

In a time marked by financial instability, socio-political uncertainties, technological disruption, and changing societal expectations, Walter Sisulu's leadership is committed to building and strengthening the University to ensure its long-term sustainability and continued viability as a going concern. This means ensuring that financial resources, infrastructure, operating systems, personnel, and governance frameworks are suitable for a dynamic and uncertain environment.

Strategic Objectives

To achieve this goal, Walter Sisulu will:

1. Enhance Leadership, People Development and Institutional Culture

- Foster a culture of integrity, care and quality performance across all constituents of the University.
- Ensure effective oversight by the Council and Senate, with a consolidation of relevant policies and other instrumentalities for effective and efficient functioning of these leadership structures.
- Consolidate structures for co-operative governance and institutional cohesion, inclusive of student and labour organisation leaders
- Strengthen the operating effectiveness and efficiency of leaders of the core business of the University across all levels, including leadership dedicated to the Signature Themes.
- Ensure development of the competencies and skills, inclusive of change management, that are critical to navigating organisational transition and growth.

By 2040, Walter Sisulu aims to be a sustainable, ethically governed and efficiently run, operationally agile, and resilient university. It will also be distinguished by a culture that balances performance with care, excellence with integrity, and ambition with responsibility.

2. Improve Infrastructure Availability, Utilisation and Care

- Align infrastructure investments with priorities of the strategic refocus, inclusive of investments in digital infrastructure, smart campus development, and remote learning and accessibility

3. Enhance Financial Sustainability and Resilience

- Increase third-stream income, engage donors, secure research funding, and build strategic partnerships while improving financial controls and long-term planning. The societal university model uniquely positions Walter Sisulu to access internationally funded multi-institutional research consortia (via the Signature Themes), philanthropic investment in rural development initiatives, government partnerships and funded programmes, and technology-enabled scale efficiencies.

4. Improve and Consolidate Institutional Operating Systems

- Enhance digital platforms for academic administration and operations support systems, inclusive of finance, people management systems, information and communications management, planning and decision systems, risk management, and facilities management.



5. Align Enrolment, Infrastructure, and Institutional Capacity

- Ensure that enrolment planning aligns with academic capacity, infrastructure availability, programme demand, financial sustainability, and national priorities, with particular focus on postgraduate growth, health sciences, and areas of strategic differentiation.

6. Strengthen Institutional Communication, Labour Relations, and Brand Alignment

- Foster constructive labour relations, enhance internal communication, and ensure the full institutional rollout of the Walter Sisulu brand identity to strengthen institutional cohesion, trust, and shared ownership of Vision 2040+.

2.6. Vision

An African-centred university shaping flourishing, sustainable futures through knowledge, innovation, and public developmental action.

This Vision articulates Walter Sisulu's long-term aspirations and strategic direction, and serves as a unifying framework for the University's Purpose, Mission Pillars, Signature Themes, and Strategic Goals and Objectives. It positions Walter Sisulu as an African-centred institution deeply rooted in the realities, knowledge systems, and developmental priorities of the Eastern Cape, South Africa, and the African continent, while also engaging with global perspectives.

The Vision asserts that Walter Sisulu's role goes beyond merely granting qualifications. Through education, research, innovation, and engaged scholarship, the University aims to create conditions where individuals, communities, institutions, and regions can thrive.

The focus on flourishing and sustainable futures underscores a commitment to human dignity, social justice, economic participation, environmental responsibility, and institutional resilience. Knowledge, innovation, and active public development are the core means by which the University intends to achieve this ambition.

2.7. Institutional Enablers and Systemic Capabilities

In Section 2.5, Our Strategic Goals: Operationalising the Mission, the key drivers and enablers for each Strategic Goal of the Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework are set out. In addition, four broader, overarching institutional enabling domains are also being prioritised.

(i) Democratic and Accountable Governance

Effective governance is essential for institutional legitimacy, strategic alignment, and long-term sustainability. Therefore, Walter Sisulu aims to enhance its governance systems to ensure they are ethical, transparent, responsive, and capable of supporting institutional transformation in a complex and rapidly changing environment.

The University will improve governance and leadership through the following measures:

- Fostering institutional cohesion and participation through inclusive and collaborative governance.
- Clarifying roles and accountability within and between the Council, Senate, Executive Management, faculties, and other governance and leadership structures.
- Promoting ethical leadership and responsible stewardship.
- Ensuring transparent oversight and compliance systems.
- Strengthening policy and regulatory frameworks.
- Advancing digitally enabled governance, planning, monitoring, and reporting systems.

(ii) Sustainable and Developmental Resourcing

Long-term institutional resilience relies on effective financial management, diversified revenue sources, and strategic resource mobilisation. In an environment of fiscal uncertainty, infrastructure challenges, increasing enrolment demands, and limited public funding, Walter Sisulu recognises the need to enhance its financial sustainability while staying true to its developmental mission. Important enablers for achieving long-term



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sustainability have already been outlined under Strategic Goal 5. These enablers provide the foundation for achieving Goals 1 to 4. In addition, the disciplined and systematic implementation of a Financial Sustainability Strategy (available as a separate reference document) is essential to support these objectives.

(iii) Digital, Physical, and Knowledge Infrastructure

Institutional effectiveness increasingly relies on an integrated infrastructure that is technologically responsive, sustainable, and future-oriented. Walter Sisulu recognises digital, physical, and knowledge infrastructure as essential components of its academic and developmental mission.

The University's Infrastructure Strategy will prioritise:

- AI-ready digital ecosystems and intelligent institutional systems.
- Secure, resilient, and integrated information and communication technology (ICT) platforms.
- Digitally enabled teaching, learning, research, and administration.
- Modern facilities for teaching, learning, research, and student support.
- Sustainable and environmentally responsible campus development.
- Reliable energy, connectivity, and data infrastructure.
- Strengthened libraries, repositories, research systems, and institutional intelligence platforms.

At Walter Sisulu, digital transformation is viewed not merely as a support function but as a strategic enabler of academic innovation, operational agility, research collaboration, evidence-informed planning, and enhanced experiences for both students and staff.

(iv) Institutional Integration, Legitimacy, and Public Trust

As a societal university, Walter Sisulu's effectiveness relies not only on its performance as an institution but also on the confidence and trust of students, staff, communities, government, industry, and the broader society.

Walter Sisulu will ensure it develops and functions as a cohesive integrated entity, enhancing public trust and institutional legitimacy through, among others:

- Ethical conduct and accountable leadership as a cultural habit across the Walter Sisulu community.
- Promoting the developmental value of praxis to enhance the relevance of scholarship, research, and innovation in policy, professional practice, and community life.
- Inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration in strategy and programming.
- Evidence-informed decision-making.
- Transparent communication and reporting.
- Delivering tangible societal impact and public value.
- Responsible research and governance of AI.
- An inclusive institutional culture and stakeholder engagement.
- Consistent alignment among institutional values and practices.
- Adaptive leadership and organisational learning.
- A consistent Walter Sisulu institutional identity across campuses, systems, communication platforms, partnerships, and stakeholder engagement processes.

Public trust is built on integrity, responsiveness, consistency, and meaningful contributions to society. A trusted institution is better positioned to attract partnerships, mobilise resources, strengthen collaboration, and maintain long-term influence and impact.



2.8. Impact: Flourishing Futures

Vision 2040+ is ultimately about transformation and impact. It is about the kind of change Walter Sisulu seeks to facilitate in the world through its identity, choices, partnerships and daily work. The Strategic Framework affirms that Walter Sisulu is not only a site of teaching, research and innovation, but a societal university committed to shaping more just, sustainable and flourishing futures.

For Walter Sisulu, this means enabling individuals and communities to improve their means of survival and build better futures. It means helping create the conditions under which people, institutions and places can thrive.

The intended impact will be evident in the following:

- (i) **Graduates who develop into ethical, capable citizens** who can competently shape their own futures through professional practice, entrepreneurship, innovation, civic leadership, and socially productive enterprise. These are graduates who will also lead in complexity, generate knowledge that matters, and act with others to address pressing developmental challenges.
- (ii) **Transformed livelihoods** in communities with which we partner, with increasing participation in meaningful work and a broad range of social and economic endeavours.
- (iii) **Reduced food and nutrition insecurity and economic vulnerability** in areas where we co-facilitate development action, especially within the Food Futures theme.
- (iv) **Improved indicators of health resilience and overall well-being** in the communities we serve and work with.
- (v) **Strengthened institutional capacity** in institutions supported through the University's development initiatives, including government, community organisations, and collaborating institutions across the PSET sector.
- (vi) **Contributions to African and global knowledge** and other developmental endeavours.

Measures will be established to track progress towards, and assess the impact of, these intended outcomes.

Walter Sisulu's impact will not come from disconnected excellence, but from the deliberate alignment of its mission, strategy, people, systems, and partnerships. It will be realised through the integration of teaching and learning, research and innovation, and societal engagement to deepen relevance and strengthen public value. This will be reinforced by building distinctive strength around the University's Signature Themes, while ensuring that institutional culture, governance, digital capability, and resourcing enable sustained delivery.

As a university rooted in the Eastern Cape and connected to wider African and global futures, Walter Sisulu embraces a responsibility that is both local and far-reaching.

The Vision 2040+ Strategic Framework provides the pathway through which this responsibility will be translated into action.



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Strategic Framework





3 A Strategic Path to Implementation

Three phases are mapped out for the implementation of the refocused Strategic Framework, with the key actions summarised below:

1 Approval, Reorientation, and Establishment – July to November 2026 –

- a) Council approves refocused Strategic Framework at **July 2026** meeting. Ad Hoc Committee, to be established in August 2026, will afford engagement between quarterly Council meetings as implementation planning unfolds. *This is to enhance agility and minimise dissonances that can delay implementation.*
- b) Portfolio, divisional and Faculty leaders – DVCs, Executive Deans, Registrar, and Executive Directors lead participatory development of sub-strategies and plans aligned to the refocused Strategic Framework.
 - Sub-strategies and plans are presented to Council for approval through Committees.
 - Critical musts will be (i) an institutional **Operating Model** aligned to Vision 2040+, (ii) a **Financial Sustainability Strategy**, and (iii) a **Digital Transformation Strategy & Plan**, to incorporate an AI Centre and anchor a digitally enabled *University of the Future*.
- c) Resource institutional capability, with task teams, plus reference and advisory groups to support feasibility analyses and detailed planning for selected flagships and projects flowing from strategic framework and plans; recommended through EMC, Senate, and Council.
 - Mobilise resources and collaborators for implementation.
 - Priority initiatives will include existing projects to be consolidated, plus select new initiatives (a number are in the pipeline or at conceptualisation and planning).
- d) Target development and setting, and KPIs for strategy-term, plus development of 2027 APP and IIP/IOP for approval at November Council meeting.
 - Generation of targets and KPIs will involve units, divisions, and faculties, to be consolidated at Vice-Chancellor's Strategy Integration directorate, which will also be responsible for planning support, implementation monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.



2 Continued Establishment & Implementation – 2027 to 2028 –

- (i) Implementation of statutorily required actions and plans – APPs, plus internal implementation-support plans (IIPs) and actions.
- (ii) Continued resource and collaborator networks mobilisation.
 - Implementation of new and existing consolidated initiatives per refocused Strategy – manifesting and aligned to Signature Themes and strategic goals.
- (iii) Implementation of monitoring and reporting – to include Internal Audit and vetted quarterly reporting to EMC and Council.



3 Continued Implementation & Consolidation – 2029, 2030, and beyond

- Continued implementation of initiatives and flagships per refocused Strategy and plans.
- Continued institutional recalibrations, implementation, monitoring, and reporting of APPs and IIPs/IOPs, with significant evaluation exercise in 2030.





4 Risks and Mitigation

Two broad categories of risk could impede the achievement of the Vision 2040+ ambitions: risks arising from the external and institutional operating environment, and risks arising from internal capabilities, culture, and behaviours. While these categories are interrelated, they highlight distinct areas of vulnerability that require deliberate mitigation. The most significant risks within these categories are outlined below.

External and Institutional Environment Risks

Fiscal and financial pressures

- The challenge of a deepening fiscal strain and competing priorities on the part of the state increases the difficulty of drawing on state resources for necessary developments. At the same time, however, there is the common occurrence of institutions and organisations losing out on securing funding due to institutional weaknesses in developing strategic partnerships and compelling cases for support.
 - At the institutional level, there is the challenge of compromised sustainability due to high student debt, with minimal endowment reserves to cushion the strain. Inefficiencies in the functioning of agencies such as the NSFAS can also add additional stress to the university's financial position.
 - There may also be a relative lack of dexterity and entrepreneurial sophistication to take optimal advantage of Convocation and its influence, as well as establish beneficial partnerships and craft propositions that can enhance our ability to lean on others' strategic strengths, mobilise resources, and de-risk our exposure and vulnerability, towards strengthening our financial sustainability and institutional resilience.
- ✓ Continued close liaison and lobbying of NSFAS and the Department of Higher Education is important to not only guarantee due entitlements, but also to tap into discretionary funding where we can present compelling cases for support.
 - ✓ Walter Sisulu will also engage Convocation to strengthen our alumni's advocacy on behalf of the university, in terms of influencing policy positions of, and resource allocations by the state in our favour, as well as mobilising other potential funders who can help improve our endowments and financial position.
 - ✓ Walter Sisulu will strengthen its capabilities for project design, the development of quality proposals, and robust project implementation systems. These capabilities will build confidence among development partners, investors, and funders – both in Walter Sisulu's ability to deliver on the support it receives and in its readiness to lead initiatives rather than only participate in them. Catalytic flagships, programmes and projects developed in line with or furthering the Signature Themes will be prioritised.
 - ✓ The Signature Themes also present a unique opportunity for attracting resources through project funding for international and continental collaborations, government programmes, and contributions from philanthropies supporting rural development and initiatives along the Signature Themes.



Infrastructure and enabling systems

- Inadequate infrastructure – whether for the academic core mission, for student life, or for the digitally enabled teaching and learning that increasingly underpins both – can compromise the quality of the student experience and heighten frustration and tension within the student body.
 - Inefficient systems and tools not in keeping with technological innovation and the evolving design of modern institutions and organisations can undermine the delivery of, and support for, the core business of the institution. Such inadequacies can also affect the reputation and the levels of trust we want to establish with collaborators, publics, and investors.
- ✓ A comprehensive, phased *Infrastructure Strategy*, and related sub-plans, aligned with the refocused strategy framework, will provide a clear view of the evolution of Walter Sisulu's infrastructural capabilities over time, towards desired levels of quality provisioning. The plans will, of necessity, also signal planned actions to mobilise funding, inclusive of creatively leveraging collaborator resources across a range of partnership arrangements. The plans will be clearly communicated to all stakeholders to establish realistic shared expectations and hold implementers accountable.

Political and institutional environment

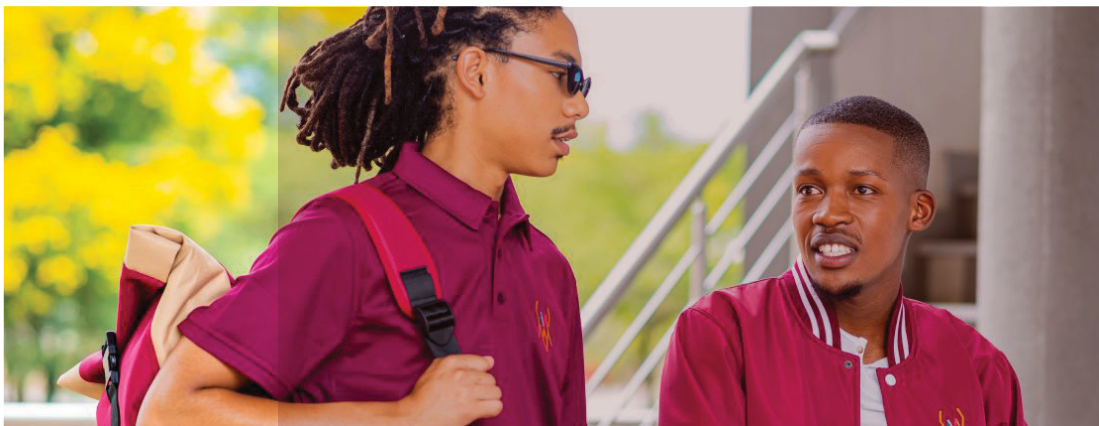
- Externally, the dependability of collaborators and partners outside of the university, and related sustainability of joint initiatives, can be undermined by a range of institutional perturbations, including changes in leadership, changes in priorities, and changes in resource allocations for collaborative projects.
 - Internally, political differences, competition and partisan interests can exacerbate disagreements across constituents of the Walter Sisulu community, which can undermine cohesion and stability. An injudicious exercise of power by leaders across management, students, and organised labour would also be risky.
- ✓ Negotiations and agreements with state collaborators and others should be insistent on clear articulations and remedies to minimise vulnerabilities to default.
- ✓ Proactive mechanisms for facilitating structured dialoguing among key constituent members of the Walter Sisulu community will be consolidated.
- ✓ Reorientation and development exercises will also be facilitated to build and inculcate a shared enhanced understanding of the meaning of leadership expected within Walter Sisulu. This will also entail deepening a progressive, non-sectarian and constructive politics across competitor organisations and camps.
- ✓ Capacity-building in conflict resolution will also be consolidated.
- ✓ Oversight and inclusive accountability structures will also be enhanced.



Organisational Capability, Culture, and Behavioural Risks

People capabilities and institutional culture

- There may be varying degrees of capability to animate, build, and lead in strategic initiatives and actions along the Signature Themes, which, if not addressed systematically, may create an unevenness in the success rate of driving key initiatives. There may also be capacity challenges that need to be addressed in various support divisions and units.
 - A siloed institutional culture, as well as a lack of experience in the design and co-implementation of transdisciplinary and other integrated initiatives and actions across portfolios and faculties, may compromise success in the development of initiatives, programmes and projects along the Signature Themes. Integration weaknesses in institutional culture and systems can also threaten the efficacy of the core three-pillar mission – teaching and learning, research and innovation, and societal engagement.
 - The challenge of attracting and retaining the calibre of academic talent necessary to deliver on the Signature Themes is a significant risk. Transdisciplinary, community-engaged, and Signature Theme-oriented scholarship is not the operating mode of most university academics in South Africa – it requires a particular profile of scholar-leader and researcher, who tend to be in high demand globally.
- ✓ The conceptual design of the Signature Themes is such that they actually facilitate integration. Leadership for strategy intelligence and integration (see Section 5 below), located in the Vice-Chancellor's office, should, among others, establish not only a point of coordination, but also structured instrumentalities to facilitate collaboration and integration.
 - ✓ Staffing and academic development strategies to attract and retain Signature Theme leaders and anchors should be developed, with an appropriate incentive regime. The talent development strategy should also aim to build the critical mass of researchers needed for each Signature Theme. Special effort should be made to mobilise dedicated financial resources to anchor the leadership and teams working on the Signature Themes, with externally funded chairs, external partner contributions, etc.
 - ✓ Capacity-development exercises will also be undertaken to entrench an active culture and skills for collaborative work across disciplines and organisational functions.





5 Coordination and Oversight

At the centre of providing strategic direction and coordinating the implementation of Walter Sisulu Vision 2040+ is the Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor will establish a dedicated strategy intelligence and integration capacity to work with portfolio and divisional leaders, as well as faculty leaders, to facilitate the cascading and incorporation of the institutional strategy through sub-strategies and relevant plans, including consolidated institutional plans such as annual performance plans (APPs) and IOPs.

The implementation of Vision 2040+ will be supported and enabled through a coherent ecosystem of aligned institutional frameworks, strategies, plans, and governance instruments that collectively translate the Strategic Framework into operational action. These supporting instruments include, among others, the Digitalisation Strategy, Transformation Framework, Institutional Quality Assurance Framework, Internationalisation Strategy, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Programme, Learning and Teaching Plan, Research and Postgraduate Support Plan, Talent Management Strategy, Infrastructure Development and Maintenance Plan, Ethics Governance Framework, Data Management Framework, and Student Success Framework. Together, these instruments provide the operational, academic, governance, and developmental mechanisms required to advance institutional integration, ensure accountability, strengthen implementation coherence, and support the realisation of Walter Sisulu's Vision 2040+ ambitions.

Vision 2040+ represents a commitment by Walter Sisulu to be recognised not only for the qualifications it awards, but also for the graduates it develops, the knowledge it creates, the communities it strengthens, and the futures it helps to shape across the Eastern Cape, South Africa, the African continent, and the world.



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