



VC's VOICE



The new Chair of Council, Judge Nambitha Dambuzza, SC, took office in September



Eli-zé du Toit, 9, was excited to see part of the meteorite she found when it was unveiled at a media conference in September. The collaboration between Nelson Mandela, Wits and Rhodes universities to share the discovery made world headlines

Message from Acting Vice-Chancellor



In the absence of Vice-Chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa, who has been on sabbatical for four months this semester, I would like to take the opportunity offered by this edition of the VC's Voice to reflect on the year.

You will read in this issue that although Prof Muthwa is not on campus, she travelled on behalf of the University to West Africa earlier this year with colleagues. She also has visited the UK and China with a team to work on international partnerships and student recruitment, as well as to network with alumni.

These travels not only contribute towards collegial international and intellectual relations, but they also are an essential part of securing the sustainability of our University.

Many of you may be exhausted and looking forward to the summer break after what has been a busy year.

A national general election in May brought with it a new Government of National Unity and there have been changes in governance within the University. We bade farewell to Advocate Nozipho January-Bardill, former Chair of Council, and welcomed a new Chair, Judge Nambitha Dambuzza, SC.

Judge Dambuzza, a seasoned South African jurist with over 20 years of experience, currently

serves as a judge in the Supreme Court of Appeal.

More recently, our Student Representative Council elections also ushered in a change of leadership.

We are a community with differences and contestations that makes a university what it is. And we share a love for our work and the idea of Mandela University. This, in particular, comes through during crisis times. We always, collectively, continue to make the University function and deliver on its mandates. Much thanks for this ingenuity, commitment and endurance.

We are now in the last stretch of this year, with the finish line in sight.

Together, we can look back with gratitude on several highlights of the year.

The launch of the new Science Centre on the Ocean Sciences Campus, for example, was an exciting moment in expanding "science for society".

We launched the Campus Safety and Security Forum, highlighting how the safety and security of our staff and students is paramount.

We also launched our very own Mandela University Press, a first for the Eastern Cape in its focus on academic publishing.

Our collaboration with Rhodes and Wits universities to share the discovery of the Nqweba Meteorite in our backyard made news headlines around the world.

We have just also launched our Institutional Culture programme, which aims to cultivate a transformative, inclusive, and socially just environment, where staff may flourish.

Many colleagues have shone on the national and international stage, and there have been exciting engagements throughout the year that capture the identity of *Mandela*. The interplay between the University's academic and social project, driven by staff, students, collaborators and partners, has contributed to the steady growth in the institution's national and international reputation.

There is an expanding acknowledgement for the work that we do, the way in which we do it, and the kind of University we aspire to be. Let me therefore take this opportunity to thank you all for your hard and excellent work.

We will soon go on our annual December break. I wish you a safe, peaceful and restful holiday season.

Thank you, colleagues!

Professor André Keet

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE SIGNATURE PROGRAMMES:



Help us to build an inclusive institutional culture

Vice-Chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa is inviting every member of staff, and every student, to be part of an inclusive institutional culture at Nelson Mandela University.

"Taking on the responsibility to bear our name means that our articulation of the foundational scholarly mission of a public university is aligned to the distinct iconic ethos of Nelson Mandela, and more broadly, the vision and values of a free, equal, and democratic world that he stood for," Prof Muthwa said when launching the programme.

"It is my privilege and honour to invite all our stakeholders to journey with us as Nelson Mandela University sets out to cultivate a transformative, inclusive, and socially just institutional culture.

"We are excited to invite all staff and students to join us in fostering an inclusive institutional culture that reflects the values of the University and that of our iconic namesake, Nelson Mandela."

The University has six institutional culture "signature programmes", which started in August 2024 and will be running over the next few years.

The Institutional Culture and Equality Working Group is encouraging staff and students to take part in these programmes, so that their voices can be heard.

The idea is that staff will actively engage on, and make sense of, their lived experiences of our culture and then co-create and shape our desired culture together.

The six signature programmes are as follows:

1. **The Mandela in Us:** Create items and artefacts that symbolise Mandela's values to inspire staff and students.
2. **Hub'ing:** Form cross-department teams to work together and build an engaged work culture through the Hubs of Convergence.

3. **Masonge Siphuhlise Campaign:** Encourage staff and students to show care for the future by counting every cent and making every cent count.
4. **Umthombo:** Establish dedicated spaces on each campus to promote well-being, reflection and open communication.
5. **i-Human:** Involve staff and students in the digital transformation journey and in establishing a Virtual Academy.

6. **V2030 short learning journey:** Keep Vision 2030 leaders at all levels engaged in meaningful conversations to renew their sense of purpose.

Let's kickstart our institutional culture journey by re-pledging our Statement of Commitment to an Inclusive Institutional Culture. Take a picture of your team doing so!



Send your contributions to: institutionalculture@mandela.ac.za
Read the Statement of Commitment to an Inclusive Institutional Culture [here](#).

Historic Mandela University Press launch

Nelson Mandela University launched Mandela University Press in July 2024, along with its flagship book, titled *Achieving Nelson Mandela University?* edited by Vice-Chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa and historian Dr Denver Webb.

The Mandela University Press is the first university press in the Eastern Cape, adding to the other seven scholarly presses in the country, based within and outside universities.

The University has partnered with African Sun Media (ASM), which will provide the production services and capacity. The ASM services afford the pathway to publish under the Mandela University Press imprint, without incurring the costs of setting up the publishing house infrastructure.

The Press will build on the identity of the University and critically work with the idea of what it means to bear the name of former president, Nelson Mandela.



Moves to keep students and staff safe



With crime rife around South Africa, including on university campuses, Nelson Mandela University has enhanced its safety and security measures.

The institution's new Safety and Security Strategy 2024-2030 was presented to students, staff and the University community on 30 July at the Safety and Security Indaba held on Second Avenue Campus. The indaba came shortly after the launch of the University's Campus Community Safety Forum, an initiative which is inclusive of the South African Police Service (SAPS) and other key stakeholders.

Together, all stakeholders are working to help make campuses and their surroundings safer for all.

The draft strategy stems from a comprehensive report assessing emerging security risks within the sector and across all Mandela University campuses. It incorporates insights from benchmarking exercises and peer assessments with other universities in South Africa.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor: People and Operations, Luthando Jack, said the holistic and inclusive draft strategy would be owned by all stakeholders.

He called for an integrated approach to fighting crime, based on four pillars:

- Professional development and improved management of Protection Services staff
- Cutting-edge technology and physical infrastructure
- Communication and education
- Stakeholder management and engagement.

"We also cannot rely solely on the SAPS and other external service providers, but if we work with them we can then win the fight," said Jack.

Giving a keynote address at the Indaba, Eastern Cape MEC for Transport and Community Safety, Honourable Xolile Nqatha, applauded the University on its efforts.

"On behalf of Provincial Government and the newly established Eastern Cape Cabinet Committee on the Justice Crime Prevention and Security Cluster, I want to congratulate Nelson Mandela University on the successful launch of the Campus Community Safety Forum," he said.

"The University has lived up to the expectations set out by uTata Nelson Mandela who believed that: 'Safety and security don't just happen, they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear'."

In her address at the indaba, Vice-Chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa noted that safety and security were "fundamental pillars", based on the University's strategic plan, Vision 2030, which entails providing a safe and secure environment for all stakeholders.

"University residences house just over 10% of our students, with the majority living in private off-campus accommodation," she said. "The University believes it is responsible for the safety of all students, both on and off campus. Similarly, the University is committed to ensuring a safe and secure working environment for staff."

As centres for learning, teaching, research and work, for both students and staff, campuses are bustling hubs visited daily by several groups of stakeholders, and Prof Muthwa urged all to invest in a "culture of care and positive agency".



Celebrating Mandela Day 2024

Nelson Mandela University, alongside the Nelson Mandela Foundation, PE Community Chest, Zwide Development Forum, South African Police Service (SAPS) and Tangible Africa came together to mark Mandela Day in July.

Staff and students from various faculties and departments gathered at Zamukukhanya Public Primary School in Zwide to bring pharmaceutical, legal and psychosocial services to the community, as well as hands-on work such as cleaning the school yard and planting trees.

The Engagement Office (EO) visited the Ekuphumleni Elderly Home in Zwide, and also Dora Nginza Hospital, where they

interacted with the children and parents with several fun and educational activities.

Hosted by Tangible Africa, the [#Coding4Mandela](#) tournament attracted more than 30 000 learners from across Africa and Indonesia, while the Faculty of Science hosted an annual Nelson Mandela Day Symposium to launch National Science Week 2024.

Arts, Culture and Heritage rounded off July with a Mandela Month celebration concert, featuring a vibrant mix of song, poetry, dance and comedy.

Summer Graduation

The 2024 Summer Graduation ceremony will be held on Wednesday, 11 December.

No honorary doctorates will be presented at this ceremony.

The morning session, starting at 9.30am, will include the Faculties of Law; Engineering, the Built Environment and Technology; Humanities; Health Sciences and Science.

The afternoon session, starting at 12.30pm, will include the Faculties of Education and Business and Economic Sciences.

Undergraduate certificates, diplomas, degrees and postgraduate honours degrees will be followed by master's and doctoral degrees.

The Summer Graduation will only include undergraduate students who have been identified as graduates between 1 May 2024 and 15 October 2024. All other students who are to complete in the year 2024, after the November 2024 assessments, will be issued with a completion letter, after the finalisation of the November marks, for possible Autumn Graduation to be held during April 2025.

New DVC appointed

Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science, theoretical physicist Professor Azwinnidini Muronga, has been appointed as the institution's new Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Internationalisation.

"I am deeply honoured and grateful for the opportunity to serve. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the selection committee, the University leadership, and all stakeholders for their trust and confidence in my abilities to contribute to the future of this emerging

institution in research, innovation, and internationalisation," said Prof Muronga.

Prior to joining Mandela University in 2016, Prof Muronga was an Associate Professor of Physics and the founder and director of the University of Johannesburg (UJ) Soweto Science Centre (2010–2016).

Prof Muronga is a distinguished scholar with a robust research portfolio in theoretical physics, studying matter under extreme conditions at the intersection of nuclear physics, particle physics, astrophysics, and cosmology.



Building partnerships abroad

The Vice-Chancellor recently led high-level delegations from Nelson Mandela University into Africa and to the United Kingdom.

West Africa

The first trip was to West Africa in July to grow the University's African footprint and build academic partnerships in this region.

This was a significant step towards the mission of the University's African Partnerships and Collaborations Project, which aims to foster equal and symmetrical collaborations that drive mutual growth, innovation and knowledge exchange.

The delegation visited the University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, University of Cape Coast, and the University of Ghana.

This trip to Nigeria and Ghana was the second outreach of its kind, with previous visits to East Africa in 2022 to Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa described these visits as an aspirational intellectual thrust for Nelson Mandela University, emphasising the value of engaging with established intellectual powerhouses.

"We are humbled by the immense knowledge and experience we can gain from these partnerships, yet we are equally proud of the achievements and innovations we bring to the table," she said.

Cooperation at consular level in these three countries is expected to streamline the visa application process and enhance student mobility.

United Kingdom

Alumni and friends reconnected with representatives of Nelson Mandela University in London on 26 September to rekindle relationships, explore new partnerships and advance the work of the University.

Our global alumni are testimony to the ability of our graduates to achieve and succeed in leading cities and countries around the world.

Representatives from the South African High Commission in London, the Donald Woods Foundation, Action for Southern Africa, the Canon Collins Trust and a number of University supporters also joined the well-attended function.

Prof Muthwa proposed that with the support of alumni and friends, the University would like to establish a presence in London. This would provide a stronger university support system as well as ongoing capacity to engage with alumni, friends, and current and future funders.

Alumni and friends networked with each other, and agreed that a UK Alumni Chapter should be formalised.



National Science Week

Nelson Mandela University's Faculty of Science partnered with leading institutions to bring science to life from 3 to 4 October 2024, during the annual National Science Week (NSW) hosted at Healdtown Comprehensive School in Fort Beaufort, Eastern Cape. Led by the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA), under the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) to celebrate Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Innovation (STEMI), NSW seeks to empower learners, especially those coming from remote rural areas. This year's host school, Healdtown, has produced many leaders who played a leading role in the fight against all forms of injustice, including the University's namesake, Nelson Mandela (1937).



Vice-Chancellor's Cultural Evening

Legendary SA jazz saxophonist McCoy Mrubata headlined the Vice-Chancellor's Cultural Evening in the South Campus auditorium in August. The Cape Town-based Community Philharmonic Orchestra, the Nelson Mandela University Symphony Orchestra and the University's Jazz Ensemble performed in honour of Women's Month.

After an absence of several years, the annual cultural event – originally by invitation only - was open to all, free of charge. Presented by the Faculty of Humanities through the Department of Music and Performing Arts, the 2024 concert showcased the talents of staff and student rising stars.



Research Week an 'intellectual jamboree'

The programme for this year's Research Week, held from 9 to 13 September, read – in the words of Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor André Keet – "like a festival, an intellectual jamboree".

Nelson Mandela University's Research Week was themed "Advancing the International Decade of Science for Sustainable Development".

It focused on the evolving role of research in shaping South Africa's future by responding to grand societal challenges, including climate change, food security and health disparities.

"Our collaborative efforts extend beyond the advancement of science; they aim to create a more equitable and habitable world for all," said Prof Keet in his opening remarks.

"Staff and students, you are the heart of this University. Your dedication, curiosity, and passion for knowledge are what make our University a place of excellence."

To this end, the University's research agenda and themes align with the global UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while also addressing the unique challenges faced by the African continent in pursuit of Africa's Agenda 2063.

International teaching and learning conference

The Faculty of Humanities collaborated with the Dean of Learning and Teaching and the Faculty of Education in hosting the 2024 International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association Conference at the Boardwalk Convention Centre.

This was the first conference to be held in Africa since its inception in 2010. Held from 2 to 4 October, and themed “Universities as change agents in society: imagining social innovation for sustainable futures”, keynote speakers and delegates discussed sustainability in all its facets.

The four keynote speakers were:

- Public Service Commission Chairperson **Professor Somadoda Fikeni**, who focused on service to society in his opening address.
- Founder, President, and Chief Research Scientist of the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association, **Dr Patrick Blessinger**, who spoke on creating socially responsive educational institutions.
- Nelson Mandela University Honorary Doctorate in Information Technology, **Dr Nkemdilim Begho**, who spoke on how to harness digital solutions for social innovation and sustainable development in Africa.
- Executive Programme Director of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Executive Leadership Institute at Clark Atlanta University, **Dr Phyllis Worthy Dawkins**, who shared some of her extensive knowledge working in, and for, HBCUs in the United States.

Conference delegates came from five continents, and 12 countries, with a strong representation from Africa.



Nelson Mandela University Honorary Doctorate in Information Technology, Dr Nkemdilim Begho, presented one of four impactful keynote addresses

Institutional Public Lectures

Institutional Public Lectures (IPLs) foster a vibrant African intellectual culture by inviting diverse communities into the university space to engage with contributions by pre-eminent speakers.

Nelson Mandela University has had a full programme in 2024, with seven IPLs. The second semester was particularly busy, with five lectures including a notable Science IPL, the first of its kind, hosted on George Campus.

Phyllis Ntantala and Prudence Mabela

Nelson Mandela University and the University of Fort Hare jointly presented the IPL in honour of Phyllis Ntantala and Prudence Mabela, on 25 July on the Ocean Sciences Campus. Ghanaian feminist writer and blogger Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah, whose book, *The Sex Lives of African Women* was published in 2021, and civic activist and campaigner Koketso Moeti, were the speakers.

Govan Mbeki

The topic of the Govan Mbeki IPL on 6 August was: “Challenges to industrialisation in South Africa and Africa; how to overcome them?”. VW Group Africa chairperson and managing director Ms Martina Biene was the guest speaker, with Mr Lufefe Mkutu, former NYDA provincial manager, the respondent. ENCA senior producer Ms Slindile Xaba facilitated the IPL, which was held at the Business School.

Raymond Mhlaba Centre for Governance and Leadership

The Faculty of Humanities Ray Mhlaba Centre for Governance and Leadership, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, presented a post-election debate on 8 August 2024. Panellists Oyama Mabandla, Phapano Phasha, Advocate Muzi Sikhakhane, Dr Nthabiseng Moleko and Jacob Maroga discussed “The struggle for a prosperous South Africa in 2024 and beyond”. The Ray Mhlaba Institutional Public Lecture, held on 3 September, discussed “The land question in South Africa today”. Professor Richard Levin was keynote speaker, with Dr Mnqobi Ngubane as respondent.



Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi spoke at the annual Steve Biko IPL

Steve Bantu Biko

The 14th Annual Steve Biko IPL on 12 September was hosted by CANRAD in collaboration with the Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO) and Biko family. It commemorated the late anti-apartheid activist’s contributions to the liberation struggle and examined the deep-rooted issues that allowed such injustices to persist. Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi dissected the role of the South African legal system in Biko’s death.

Faculty of Science

The Faculty of Science hosted a well-attended IPL on George Campus on 25 September. The former Director General of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Dr Albert van Jaarsveld, presented a keynote address on systems approaches to fast-track sustainable wellbeing, with Mandela University’s NRSM scholar Dr Rhoda Malgas and PhD student Nelsiwe Mpapane as respondents.



Dr Thobekani Lose



Prof Pumla Dineo Gqola



Emeritus Professor
Rossouw von Solms



Prof Uchenna Okeja



Dr Lynn Biggs

Staff shine on national and international stage

Emeritus Professor **Rossouw von Solms** from the School of ICT has been honoured with an International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) Fellowship.

The IFIP has awarded this fellowship to **Prof Von Solms** not only in recognition of his standing and expertise in the field of information and cyber security, but also for his contributions, including in working groups and technical committees, to the IFIP over almost 30 years.

Prof Von Solms is only the third South African to receive this IFIP Fellowship award.

The IFIP is the leading multinational, apolitical organisation in Information and Communications Technologies and Sciences and is recognised by the United Nations and other world bodies.

Dr Thobekani Lose, head and researcher for the Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator (CfERI) at Nelson Mandela University, has received an Honorary Fellowship at the Centre for Business and Economic Research (CBER) in London. Dr Lose was one of three selected

from 31 applicants based on their outstanding contribution in the field of entrepreneurship education and business research.

Professor Uchenna Okeja from the Faculty of Humanities has been elected to the membership of the American Antiquarian Society (AAS). He joins a select group that includes 14 US presidents and more than 75 Pulitzer Prize winners, all celebrated for their achievements in academia or public service.

Executive Dean of Law **Dr Lynn Biggs** has been appointed to the South African Legal Practice Council (LPC). The LPC is a national, statutory body for regulatory affairs of the legal profession and exercises jurisdiction over all legal practitioners (attorneys and advocates) and candidate legal practitioners. Dr Biggs is one of 23 representatives who this year took office for a term of three years, commencing on 1 November.

AFEMI Chair **Professor Pumla Dineo Gqola** was awarded the inaugural Canex Prize for Publishing in Africa for her book, *Female Fear Factory: Unravelling Patriarchy's Culture of Violence*, in October, the third major award for this book.

Excellence Awards celebrate staff and students

The University recognised its top students, and academic, professional, administrative and service staff at our annual Excellence Awards in October.

The categories were research, teaching, engagement, innovation, creative outputs and institutional support.

The annual event now combines the Academic Awards with the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards, showcasing 76 accolades in total: 24 student academic accomplishments and 52 Vice-Chancellor's excellence awards.

Merging recognition for students, and academic and support staff emphasised the collaborative nature of the University project, said Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor André Keet in his welcome at the Boardwalk Convention Centre.

"This approach aligns with our aspiration to be an inclusive, transformative, engaged, and responsive university, demonstrating our shared purpose through tangible practices," said Prof Keet.

"At Nelson Mandela University, we firmly believe that there is no inherent tension between pursuing excellence and promoting equity and diversity. In fact, we contend that our pursuit of an engaged, transformative, and responsive university enhances the intellectual project."

Furthermore, staff and students were interdependent on each other, he said, and it was inspiring for both to share their celebrations and reasons for excellence.

Notable awards included:

- **Researcher of the Year:** SA Research Chair in Marine Spatial Planning Professor Mandy Lombard
- **Teacher of the Year:** Dr Lucky Maluleke, Faculty of Education
- **Emerging Researcher for 2024:** Dr Neliswa Mama, Department of Chemistry
- **Emerging Teacher for 2024:** Philanathi Mabena, Physiology lecturer



Clockwise from top left: Dr Lucky Maluleke, Prof Mandy Lombard, Philanathi Mabena and Dr Neliswa Mama

When celebrating excellence, said Prof Keet, it was important to be mindful not only of self-perception, but also of how others experience the work produced at Nelson Mandela University.

"That is, we pursue a critical understanding of excellence as a multifaceted concept that involves a combination of intellectual rigour, critical thinking, and a commitment to social justice," he said.

"It is about more than just achieving high standards of performance. It is about using one's intellectual abilities and talents to challenge injustice, promote equity, and contribute to a better world."