



# Engaged Scholarship Report 2024

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*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives  
through quality, impact, and care.*



UNIVERSITY OF THE  
FREE STATE  
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UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

# Engaged Scholarship Report 2024

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Compiled by:

Directorate of Community Engagement  
for the Senate Committee on Engaged Scholarship



# Executive Summary

*The University of the Free State (UFS) Engaged Scholarship Report 2024 reflects the UFS' deepening commitment to socially responsive academic practice, aligned with the institutional vision of being a research-led, regionally engaged, and globally competitive university.*

This report captures engaged scholarship across faculties and support units, structured around the three dimensions of the UFS Engaged Scholarship Model: Engaged Research, Engaged Teaching and Learning, and Engaged Citizenship.

Building on the foundation laid in 2023, the 2024 report demonstrates the following:

- Increased alignment of research outputs with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda 2063 and 2030, Africa Agenda 2063, National Development Plan – with all faculties contributing to knowledge production that addresses societal challenges.
- Increased alignment with the UFS research themes, namely Local and Regional Socio-Economic Development; Food Security and Land Reform; Health and Well-being; Social Justice and the Removal of Inequalities; New Scientific and Industrial Challenges; and Water and Water Quality.
- Expanded curricular (work integrated learning/WIL, which includes service-learning/SL) and co-curricular learning initiatives, particularly to equip graduates with employability skills and to foster a sense of student engaged citizenship.
- Enhanced institutional support for Engaged Scholarship through units such as the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), Directorate Research Development (DRD), Directorate Community Engagement, Division of Student Affairs (DSA), Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP), Institutional Advancement Office (IAO), UFS Library, and the Office for International Affairs.
- Strengthened strategic partnerships locally, nationally, on the continent, and internationally for knowledge creation to address societal challenges.

The university continues to position Engaged Scholarship as a transformative force in higher education, contributing to inclusive development, social justice, and the public good. This report also introduces a comparative analysis of 2023 and 2024 engagement data, highlighting areas of growth and identifying opportunities for further integration of engagement into the learning and research core. Appendices provide detailed, faculty-specific SDG-aligned research outputs.

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Message from

# Dr Molapo Qhobela

Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Strategic Initiatives, International and Institutional Affairs



The University of the Free State's Engaged Scholarship Report 2024 affirms our collective commitment to placing *societal impact* at the heart of the Academic Project. As we continue to realise the aspirations of Vision 130, this year's report demonstrates how deeply engagement has become embedded in our institutional fabric – evident in the way our faculties, support units, partners, and students co-create knowledge that matters to the public good.

The **inaugural Senate Conference on Engaged Scholarship**, held in March 2024, provided a crucial platform for conversation, reflection, and conceptual coherence. The conference sharpened our understanding of engaged scholarship as a scholarly, rigorous, and mutually beneficial endeavour – one that requires transdisciplinarity, co-creation, sustainability, and continuous social responsiveness. This conference laid the groundwork for strengthening our institutional imagination about what it means to be an engaged university in a rapidly changing world.

In 2024, our university strengthened its identity as a **research-led, regionally responsive, and globally connected institution**. The expansion and consolidation of SDG-aligned research across all faculties reflect the university's growing responsiveness to complex local, national, and global challenges. A notable development is the significant rise in research aligned with **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)**, with each faculty demonstrating increased collaboration across sectors, disciplines, and geographic borders to generate knowledge that advances inclusive development.

The year also marked a visible deepening of **engaged teaching and learning**, as faculties expanded service-learning, work-integrated learning, and experiential pedagogies that situate student learning within real-world contexts. These efforts are cultivating graduates who are thoughtful, socially conscious, and able to mobilise knowledge for impact. Initiatives such as the interdisciplinary clinical learning in Health Sciences, teacher practice in 120 schools, and Earth Unit sustainability projects demonstrate the vibrancy of our engaged teaching landscape.

Our commitment to **engaged citizenship** has similarly grown. Across the university, students and staff have contributed to transformative projects – from residential community gardens enhancing food security, to trauma-informed care workshops, to legal aid and policy engagement, as well as faith-based leadership development. These initiatives testify to the university's belief that knowledge must not only be generated, but lived, shared, and applied.



Strategic partnerships – national, continental, and international – continue to amplify our work and open pathways for knowledge exchange and shared learning. Collaborations with SANRAL, ZZ2, ETDPS-SETA, international universities, the iKudu Consortium, the Knowledge for Change (K4C) network, and many others have enabled high-impact projects that address urgent societal challenges, ranging from education and agricultural innovation to public health and community resilience. The Boyden Observatory and Science-for-the-Future initiatives stand out as science-engagement flagship examples of how engagement can drive scientific excellence and educational transformation through engaged scholarship.

This report's comparative analysis between 2023 and 2024 confirms what many of us have sensed: engaged scholarship is no longer peripheral at the UFS;

it has become a *defining expression of our institutional identity*. Our progress reflects the dedication of staff, students, and partners who embrace engagement as a scholarly, ethical, and transformative practice.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all who have contributed to the achievements documented here. Your commitment to excellence, care, innovation, and impact continues to shape a university that not merely observe societal challenges, but also actively participates in addressing them. As we look ahead, our charge mission is clear: *to deepen our partnerships, strengthen our scholarly contributions, and further mobilise knowledge in pursuit of a more just, inclusive, and sustainable society. Together, we reaffirm our commitment to Engaged Scholarship as a catalyst for meaningful change that is locally rooted, globally connected, and driven by the public good.*

Message from

# Bishop Billyboy Ramahlele

Director: Directorate Community Engagement



This 2024 Engaged Scholarship Report marks an important continuation of the work we began in 2023 to consolidate, organise, and make visible the full scope of the University of the Free State's commitment to engagement. As with last year's report, the process of gathering, integrating, and synthesising information reminded us that engaged scholarship lives across multiple platforms, systems, and units, each holding vital pieces of our institutional story. Through continued collaboration with DIRAP, Library and Information Services, and the many faculties and support units represented in this report, we have once again been able to bring together a comprehensive account of the university's engaged activities. We are grateful to all colleagues who contributed data, narratives, and insights, and to the Senate Committee on Engaged Scholarship for its guidance as we continue to strengthen the processes required for systematic tracking and evaluation.

This year's report reflects a noteworthy development, namely the deepening of engagement across the university's academic core, particularly as seen in the growth of SDG-aligned research outputs, the expansion of service-learning and work-integrated learning opportunities, and the significant participation of staff and students in impactful community-based projects and programmes.

The inaugural Senate Conference on Engaged Scholarship contributed greatly to establishing shared vocabulary, shared expectations, and shared understanding of engaged scholarship as rigorous, collaborative, thoughtful work that requires mutual benefit, transdisciplinarity, and long-term commitment. The diversity of projects captured in the 2024 report – from food security and health initiatives to sustainability, theology-in-practice, and educational transformation – reflects how deeply the socialisation of the Engaged Scholarship Strategy has taken root.

We continue to see growing enthusiasm among staff and students, as well as strengthened partnerships with local, national, continental, and international collaborators whose contributions enrich our work and expand our reach. As we move into the next cycle, our focus remains on improving the coherence of our systems, increasing institutional capacity for engagement, and ensuring that all elements of the Engaged Scholarship portfolio are fully represented in future reporting. We extend our sincere appreciation to each individual and unit whose contributions appear in these pages, and we look forward to continued collaboration as we advance engagement that is scholarly, inclusive, and transformative for the communities we serve.





# Introduction

*To understand the progress of where the UFS currently finds itself, the 2024 report includes a [video](#) on the history, onset, and evolution of community engagement at the University of the Free State over the past four decades. This includes the evolution of the notion of community outreach to community service, to community engagement, and finally to engaged scholarship.*

## Defining Engaged Scholarship

In enactment of its vision and values, the UFS contributes to knowledge through *Engaged Scholarship*, which refers to the utilisation of our academic, scholarly, and/or professional expertise, with an intentional public purpose and mutual benefit that has a direct or indirect impact on society. Engaged scholarship is also about the generation, integration, application, and dissemination of knowledge and can inform policy and practice in local, national, regional, and global contexts. Our model for Engaged Scholarship comprises three pillars, namely Engaged Research, Engaged Learning and Teaching, and Engaged Citizenship.

**Engaged research** involves research that has a direct and or indirect impact on society while advancing knowledge. *Societal impact* refers to the value that knowledge adds to society across various spheres, whether social, economic, or environmental. Societal impact reflects the direct or indirect relationship between the knowledge agenda, its process, and the improvement in the quality of people's lives, inclusive of innovation, technological advancements, improved sustainability, and policy developments. *Knowledge impact* refers to scientific advances in understanding, interpretation, methods, theory, application, and related advances that bring about positive change within and/or across disciplines and fields. Engaged research incorporates the discovery, innovation, integration, application, development, and mobilisation of knowledge for the benefit of society. Engaged research may also include creative outputs and other expressions or activities. Of essence is that engaged research must be *systematic and rigorous*. Results need to be disseminated in publications for debate and must be *critiqued by peers*.

**Engaged learning and teaching** includes, but is not limited to, learning and teaching activities that proactively and positively impact society and enhance student graduate attributes. The design and delivery of learning and teaching programmes and modules ideally need to be informed and responsive to societal needs. In engaged learning and teaching, students are broadly prepared with high-quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning to gain knowledge, skills, and values required for the development of personal, professional, social, and economic/employability graduate attributes. This implies creating a more resilient, blended, technology-enhanced pedagogical approach that will enable learning and teaching that meets 21st Century demands to engage thoughtfully with societal challenges and global issues, such as those targeted by the Sustainable Development Goals. Students thereby learn to think and act on issues of real importance – from local to global – mobilising multiple forms of knowledge to make the right decisions, becoming thoughtful and employable citizens who can compete in the global and local labour markets. The focus is on engagement on collaborative and/or peer learning platforms to gain a sense of existing social, political, economic, and ecological complex and dynamic challenges in society. To ingrain the principles of engaged scholarship, the university curricula must unify the learning of knowledge with concrete actions, so that the teaching model is anchored in real life to integrate theory and practice for the development of praxis.





**Academic engaged citizenship** encourages academics to be exceptional scholars and refers to all the professional work, skills, time, and involvement of academics in professional and societal bodies rendered for impact. To enable them to pursue initiatives, this may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Active participation and leadership in professional academic bodies and editorial boards, knowledge, and community organisations.
- Serving on expert panels, national, regional, or international committees and agencies concerned with one's discipline and/or scholarship.
- Providing expert support and advice to professional, knowledge, or community organisations.
- Advancing the value and impact of knowledge through reports, advocacy, and outreach to peers, partners, and the public (government, civil society, private sector, etc.).
- Communicating one's research and scholarship to the public.
- Consultancy work for policy development.
- Developing and encouraging the scholarship of engagement.
- Training provided to non-university organisations.

This report on Engaged Scholarship aims to emphasise the advancement of knowledge that has a positive impact on society. For this reason, our knowledge production, comprising teaching, learning, research, and innovation – will add to society across various spheres, including social, economic, and environmental. We use the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a primary lens for assessing such societal impact. Although not specifically indicated per faculty, Goal 17 (Partnerships) forms a foundational context in contributions to achieve the goals.



The report also depicts the dissemination of research and scholarship through platforms such as webinars, public lectures, media, and policy briefs and highlights academics serving on international professional platforms. The information is shared per faculty.

The University of the Free State (UFS) continues to embed engaged scholarship as a core institutional commitment, aligned with its vision of being a research-led, regionally responsive, and globally connected university. This report documents the university's engaged scholarship activities for the 2024 academic year, showcasing how faculties and support units contribute to societal transformation through research, teaching, and citizenship.

Engaged scholarship at the UFS is guided by a three-dimensional model that integrates the following:

- Engaged Research: Collaborative knowledge production that addresses societal needs.
- Engaged Teaching and Learning: Curricular and co-curricular initiatives that foster student agency and community responsiveness.
- Engaged Citizenship: Institutional, academic, and student contributions to the public good through partnerships and social responsiveness.

This report builds on the 2023 baseline, offering a structured account of faculty-specific engagement, strategic partnerships, and institutional support mechanisms. It also introduces a comparative lens, highlighting growth and shifts in engagement practices between 2023 and 2024.

The methodology underpinning this report includes data collection from faculties and support units, SDG-aligned research output mapping, and narrative synthesis to demonstrate impact. Appendices provide detailed evidence, including QR-linked data sets for transparency and accessibility (which will be added to the final report).





# Senate Conference on Engaged Scholarship



The University of the Free State (UFS) presented its inaugural *Senate Conference on Engaged Scholarship* on the Bloemfontein Campus from 11 to 12 March 2024.

The conference, themed *Making Change through Engaged Scholarship*, initiated an important suite of conversations aligned with the UFS' aspirations with [Vision 130](#).

The organisation of the conference, both conceptually and logistically, was led by [Prof Vasu Reddy](#), Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation at the UFS, supported by an organising committee consisting of various role players across the university.

The programme, which covered a wide range of topics by national and international speakers, included case studies of engaged scholarship from faculties, as well as breakaway sessions during which pertinent questions around engaged scholarship were discussed.

In his opening remarks, Prof Francis Petersen, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the UFS, said that universities in the higher education sector in South Africa, continentally, and globally are grappling with the key challenges of our time, including social justice, environmental degradation, and economic growth and



job creation. He said: “We encounter these challenges in a global context that is increasingly volatile, and in which universities must constantly innovate and adapt in order to remain vibrant, relevant, and impactful. This is a time for higher education that is demanding, fraught, and disruptive. The challenges are many and complicated. Engaged scholarship is crucial for universities, particularly those in the Global South, as it fosters community collaboration, addresses local challenges, and promotes sustainable development.

The conference proceedings showcased the UFS’ involvement in engaged scholarship. The presentations on Day 1 included a discussion on ‘Engaged Scholarship in a Time of Geopolitical Contestation: An African Perspective’ by Prof ‘Funmi Olonisakin from King’s College London, England; and ‘Knowledge Products and Scholarship Engagement: The Way Forward for Universities’ by Prof Eugene Cloete from Stellenbosch University. The day concluded with presentations of engaged scholarship case studies by faculties, as well as group discussions. A key element of the programme was the screening of a documentary film titled *One Day*, which accentuated the significance of engaged scholarship. Produced by Charlene Stanley from Storytown Productions, the film focused on the collapse of the tailings dam wall at the *Jagersfontein* Mine in September 2022 and the severe sludge damage to

houses, property, and the environment. In particular, the film highlighted how the university’s interventions made a difference to the community.

Day 2 started off with a presentation by Prof Kristina Josefsson from University West, Sweden, on ‘Work-Integrated Learning and Engaged Scholarship – Meetings of Knowledge to Create Positive Change’, followed by a presentation on ‘Rurality, Community and Engaged Scholarship’ by Prof Relebohile Moletsane from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As on the previous day, presentations of engaged scholarship case studies by faculties and group discussions rounded off the day.

Some of the issues that have been identified and need to be taken further in order to embed engaged scholarship within the UFS include the need to create a common understanding of engaged scholarship through careful interrogation of the terminology; the co-creation of knowledge, inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to solving problems; the impact of engaged scholarship on teaching, learning, and research interventions; and the sustainability of projects when the engaged scholars leave a community, and how to measure success or otherwise. The Senate Committee on Engaged Scholarship took the report on the conference to their faculties for the socialisation of engaged scholarship.







ECONOMIC AND  
MANAGEMENT  
SCIENCES

# Faculty Contributions

# Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences





## SDG-Aligned Research Outputs

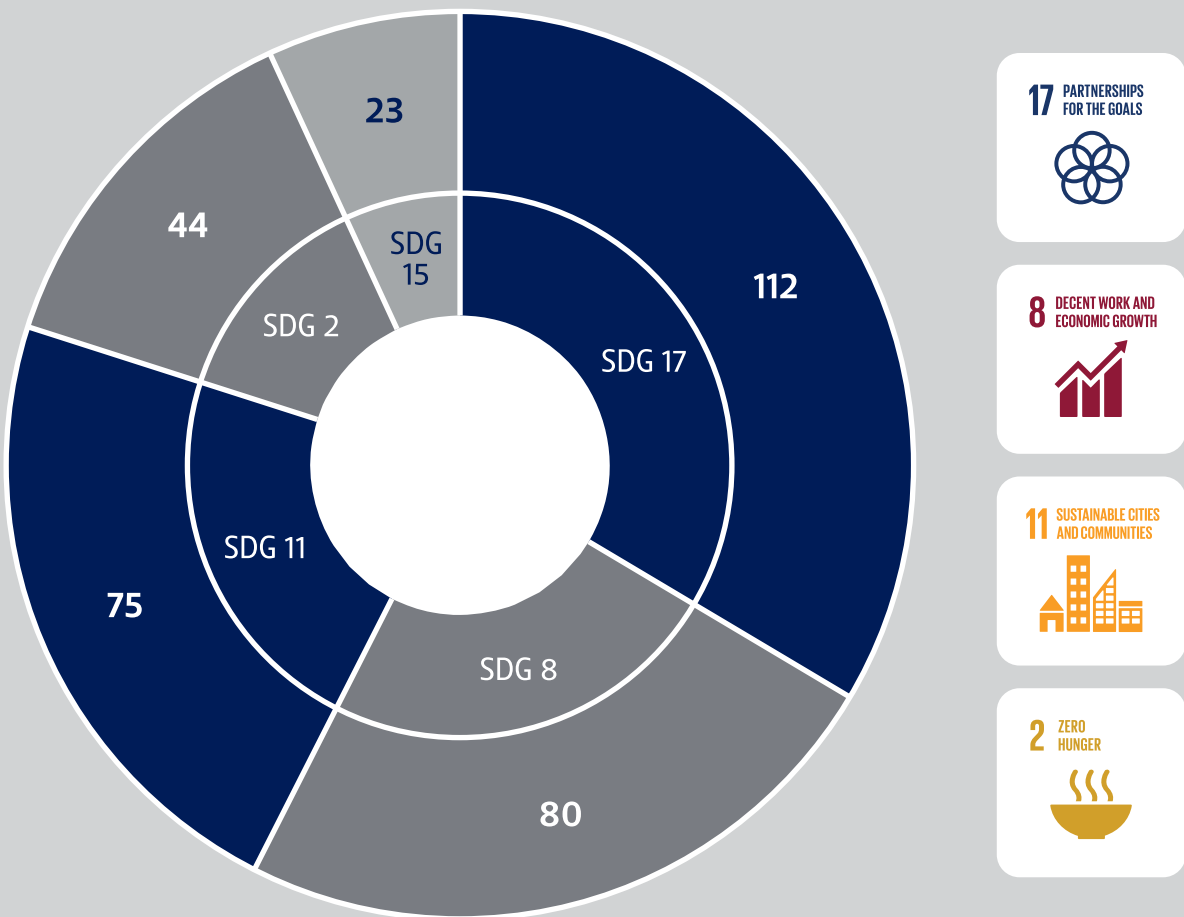


Figure: SDG-Aligned Research Outputs  
(Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences)



## Engaged Research

The Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) demonstrated a strong commitment to socially responsive research in 2024, with a significant number of outputs aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Research themes included inclusive economic development, public sector accountability, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship in underserved communities. Several projects were co-created with government departments, NGOs, and industry partners, ensuring relevance and impact.

A notable example includes collaborative research with the South African Revenue Service (SARS) on tax compliance behaviour, which informed policy recommendations. Another project, in partnership with local municipalities, focused on sustainable budgeting practices and community participation in financial planning.

In 2024, the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences produced **150 research outputs** with explicit alignment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The analysis reveals a strong emphasis on the following:

**SDG 17** (Partnerships for the Goals), the most frequently aligned goal, appearing in 112 outputs, reflecting the faculty's commitment to collaborative, cross-sectoral research.

**SDG 8** (Decent Work and Economic Growth) featured in 80 outputs, highlighting the faculty's focus on inclusive economic development, entrepreneurship, and labour market dynamics.

**SDG 11** (Sustainable Cities and Communities) with 75 outputs, indicating a strong research interest in urban governance, service delivery, and spatial justice.

**SDG 2** (Zero Hunger) and **SDG 6** (Clean Water and Sanitation) – each with 44 outputs, often linked to research on food systems, water governance, and environmental sustainability.

**SDG 15** (Life on Land) with 23 outputs, reflecting ecological and land-use research.

This distribution underscores the faculty's interdisciplinary approach and its responsiveness to both national development priorities and global sustainability challenges.



Access the 2024 research outputs for the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences [here](#)



## Engaged Teaching and Learning

EMS continued to integrate engagement into its teaching and learning practices through service-learning modules and experiential learning opportunities. The School of Financial Planning Law, for instance, facilitated student-led financial literacy workshops in local communities, while the Department of Public Administration embedded community-based case studies into its curriculum.

The faculty also contributed to the Active Community Citizens working through Engaged Scholarship for Sustainability (ACCESS) co-curricular programme, with student-student participation in a community-based participatory research project that addressed real-world challenges such as youth unemployment and informal sector development. This initiative enabled curricular and co-curricular connection, which not only enhanced student learning, but also contributed to 'student' community capacity-building.

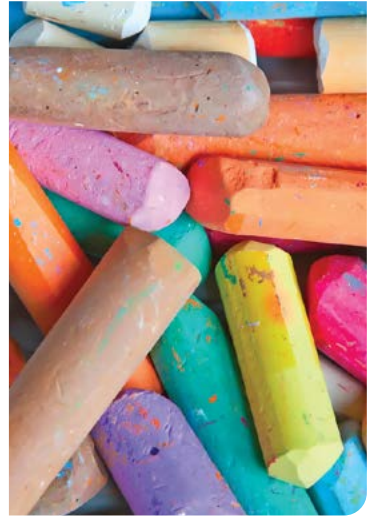
## Engaged Citizenship

Staff and students in EMS actively participated in initiatives that promote social justice and economic inclusion. The faculty hosted public dialogues on ethical leadership and economic transformation, and several academics served on advisory boards of local development agencies. The faculty's commitment to engaged citizenship was further reflected in its partnerships with entities such as the Free State Development Corporation and the National Youth Development Agency, where academic expertise supported policy development and programme evaluation.



# Faculty of Education





## SDG-Aligned Research Outputs

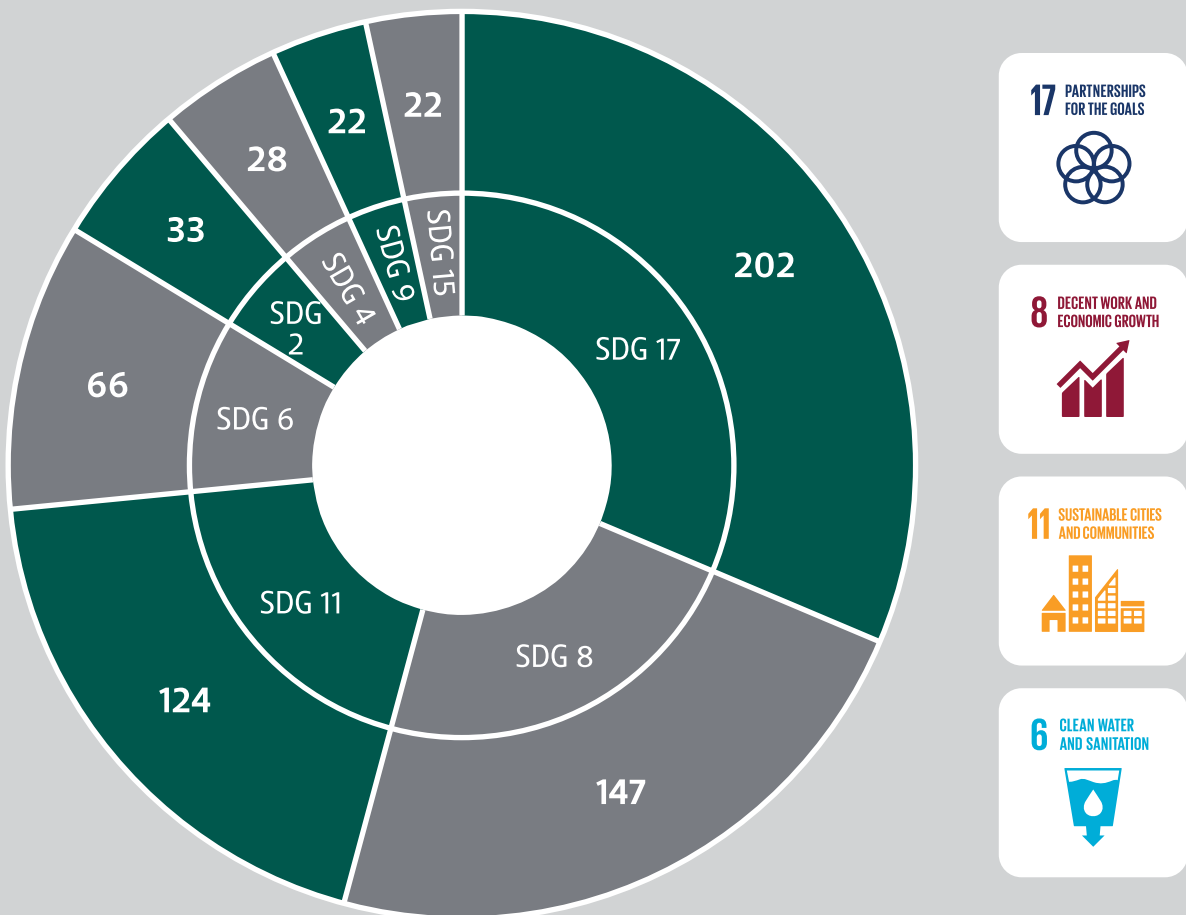


Figure: SDG-Aligned Research Outputs  
(Faculty of Education)











## Engaged Research

The Faculty of Education remains a leader in advancing Engaged Scholarship through its commitment to inclusive education, teacher professional development, and work integrated learning (WIL) via community-based *Teacher Practice*. Its initiatives aim to strengthen educational outcomes, reduce inequalities, and promote lifelong learning, aligning strongly with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Research in the Faculty of Education during 2024 focused on early childhood development, inclusive education, and teacher professional development. Studies on gross motor development and school readiness, strategies for supporting learners with diverse needs, and action research projects co-created with schools were key highlights.

In 2024, the Faculty of Education produced **202** research outputs. The analysis reveals a strong emphasis on:

-  **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)** – 202 outputs
-  **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)** – 147 outputs
-  **SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)** – 66 outputs
-  **SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)** – 124 outputs
-  **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)** – 33 outputs
-  **SDG 4 (Quality Education)** – 28 outputs
-  **SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)** – 22 outputs
-  **SDG 15 (Life on Land)** – 22 outputs

Other SDGs such as SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 5, SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 14, and SDG 16 were also represented, though to a lesser extent. This distribution reflects the faculty's strategic emphasis on inclusive education, equity, sustainability, and collaborative development through teaching and research.



Access the **2024 research outputs for the Faculty of Education** [here](#).

## Engaged Teaching and Learning

The Faculty of Education integrates WIL, which includes service-learning, into its teacher education programmes, enabling students to gain practical experience while contributing to community development. More than 1 800 students engaged in WIL teacher practice school-based projects, reaching 120 schools across the Free State and benefiting approximately 15 000 learners.

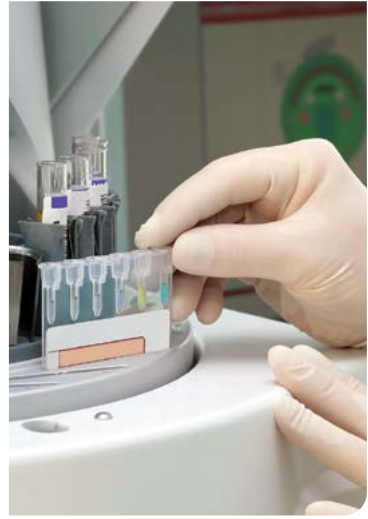
## Engaged Citizenship

The faculty fosters social responsibility through programmes and partnerships that address educational inequalities. A notable case study includes the SANRAL-supported Science for the Future (S4F) Early Childhood Development (ECD) support programme in rural schools, implemented in collaboration with the Department of Basic Education and local NGOs. The initiative provided teacher training, learning materials, and parent workshops to enhance early learning outcomes. More than 35 ECD practitioners and 500 parents participated, improving school readiness for 1 200 children. This project aligns with SDG 4 and SDG 10.



# Faculty of Health Sciences





## SDG-Aligned Research Outputs

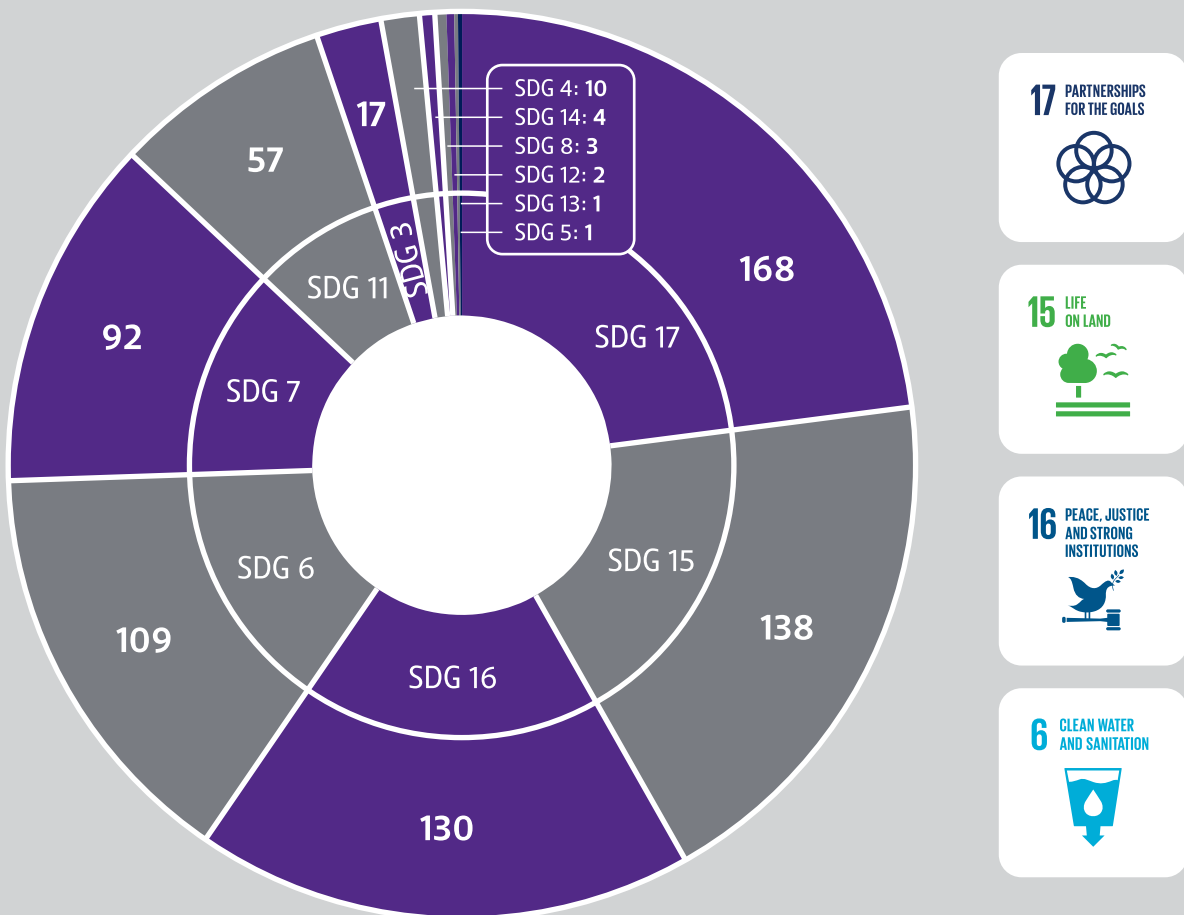


Figure: SDG-Aligned Research Outputs  
(Faculty of Health Sciences)



## Engaged Research

The Faculty of Health Sciences demonstrated a robust commitment to engaged research in 2024, producing **245 outputs**. The alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) analysis reveals a strong emphasis on the following:

- SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals): 168 outputs
- SDG 15 (Life on Land): 138 outputs
- SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions): 130 outputs
- SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation): 109 outputs
- SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy): 92 outputs
- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities): 57 outputs
- SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being): 17 outputs
- SDG 4 (Quality Education): 10 outputs
- SDG 14 (Life Below Water): 4 outputs
- SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): 3 outputs
- SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production): 2 outputs
- SDG 13 (Climate Action): 1 output
- SDG 5 (Gender Equality): 1 output

This distribution highlights the faculty's interdisciplinary research focus, with strong contributions to environmental health, public health systems, and collaborative partnerships. The prominence of SDG 17 reflects the faculty's extensive engagement with government agencies, NGOs, and international health bodies.



Access the 2024 research outputs for the Faculty of Health Sciences [here](#).

## Engaged Teaching and Learning

The Faculty of Health Sciences integrates community-based learning into its academic programmes, enabling students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world health contexts. In 2024, students participated in clinical interprofessional learning programmes, public health campaigns, and interdisciplinary service-learning community-based modules. These initiatives fostered student agency and contributed to improved health literacy and access to care in underserved communities.

## Engaged Citizenship

Staff and students in the faculty have actively contributed to health equity through clinical engagement, advocacy, and policy engagement. Collaboration with provincial health departments and NGOs supported vaccination drives, mental health awareness, and maternal health education. These efforts reflect the faculty's commitment to social justice and the public good.



# Faculty of The Humanities





## SDG-Aligned Research Outputs

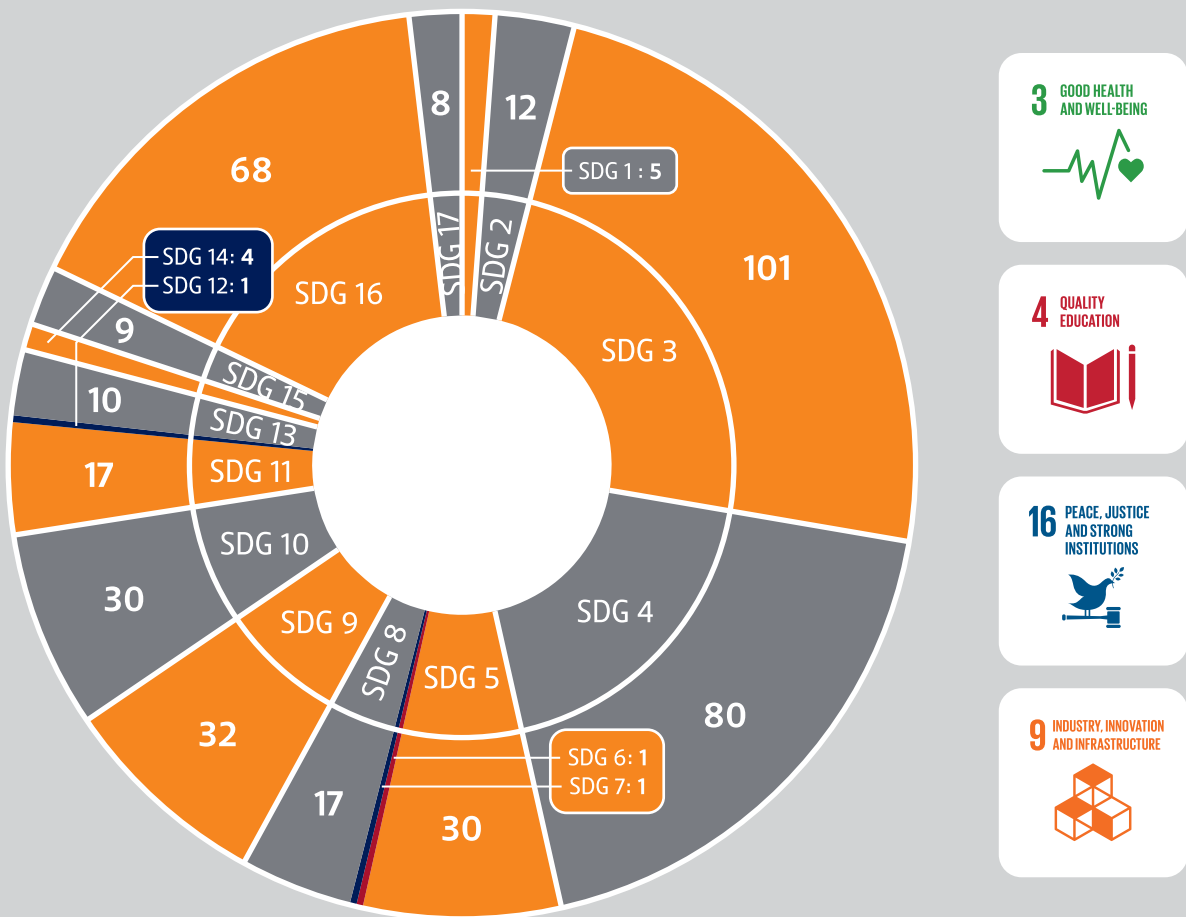



Figure: SDG-Aligned Research Outputs  
(Faculty of The Humanities)





## Engaged Research


In 2024, the Faculty of The Humanities produced **371** research outputs. When aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the most prominent alignments were with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), reflecting the faculty's commitment to social justice, educational transformation, and public health advocacy. Research themes included post-conflict reconciliation, inclusive education, mental health in underserved communities, and gender equity. Projects were often co-created with civil society organisations, government departments, and international partners, ensuring contextual relevance and societal impact.


 **SDG 1 (No Poverty):** 5 outputs


 **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger):** 12 outputs

 **SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being):** 101 outputs


 **SDG 4 (Quality Education):** 80 outputs


 **SDG 5 (Gender Equality):** 30 outputs


 **SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation):** 1 output

 **SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy):** 1 output

 **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth):** 17 outputs

 **SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure):** 32 outputs


 **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities):** 30 outputs

 **SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities):** 17 outputs


 **SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production):** 1 output

 **SDG 13 (Climate Action):** 10 outputs

 **SDG 14 (Life Below Water):** 4 outputs

 **SDG 15 (Life on Land):** 9 outputs

 **SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions):** 68 outputs

 **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals):** 8 outputs



Access the 2024 research outputs for the Faculty of The Humanities [here](#).



## Engaged Teaching and Learning

The Faculty of The Humanities integrated engaged learning and teaching through service-learning modules, community-based projects, and interdisciplinary coursework. In the flagship Soutpan partnership, students participated in initiatives such as oral history documentation in rural areas, language revitalisation programmes, and community theatre productions addressing social issues. These activities fostered graduate attributes of critical thinking, cultural awareness, and social responsibility among students, while contributing to community development.

## Engaged Citizenship

Staff and students in the Faculty of The Humanities actively contributed to public discourse and community empowerment. The faculty hosted public seminars on human rights, facilitated workshops on trauma-informed care, and supported advocacy campaigns for the prevention of gender-based violence. Collaboration with NGOs and local government structures enabled the faculty to extend its academic expertise into meaningful societal engagement.



# Faculty of Law





## SDG-Aligned Research Outputs

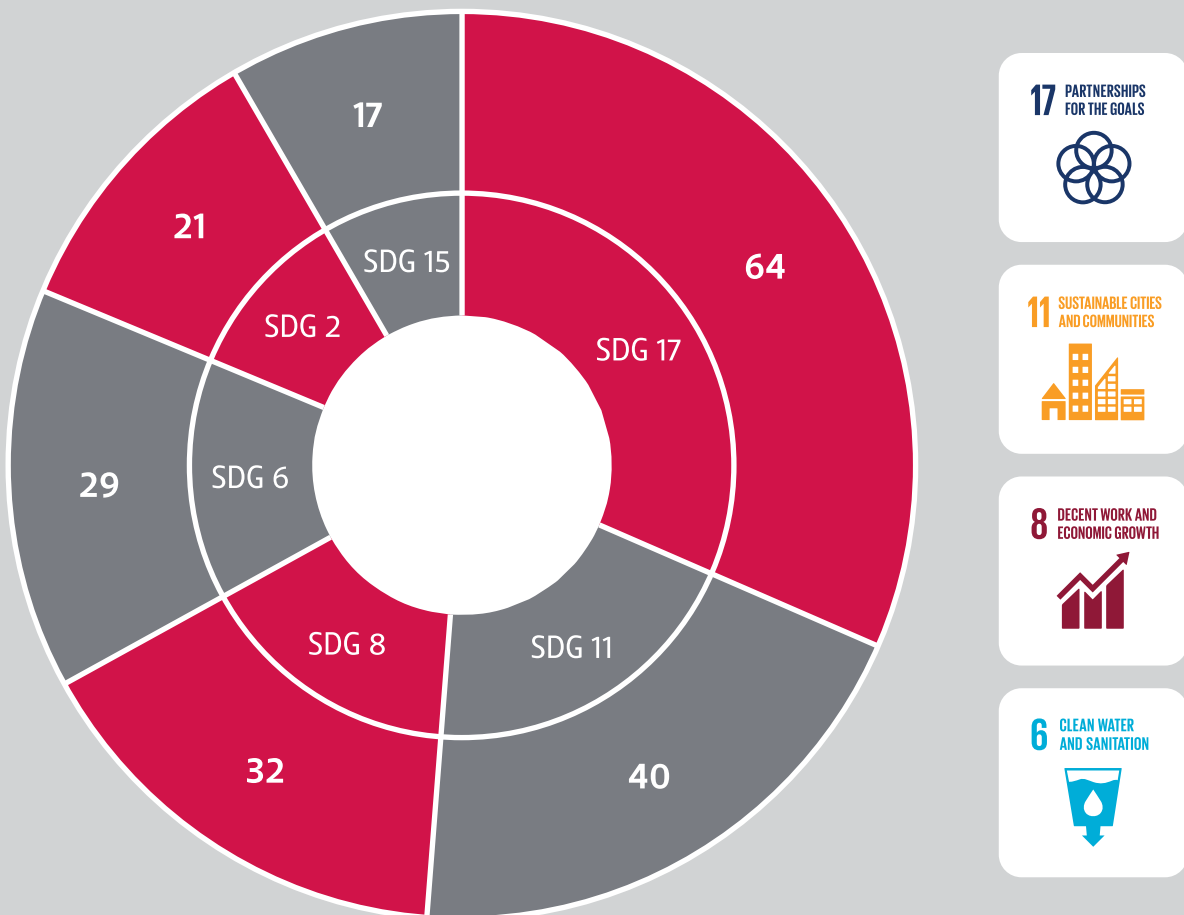




Figure: SDG-Aligned Research Outputs  
(Faculty of Law)





## Engaged Research


In 2024, the Faculty of Law produced **74** research outputs. The most prominent alignments with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were the following:


 **SDG 17** – Partnerships for the Goals: 64 outputs

 **SDG 11** – Sustainable Cities and Communities: 40 outputs

 **SDG 8** – Decent Work and Economic Growth: 32 outputs

 **SDG 6** – Clean Water and Sanitation: 29 outputs

 **SDG 2** – Zero Hunger: 21 outputs

 **SDG 15** – Life on Land: 17 outputs

Other SDGs represented include SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 4 (Quality Education).

This distribution reflects the faculty's strong focus on legal frameworks for sustainable development, human rights, governance, and environmental justice. Research themes included the following:

- Anti-corruption and financial transparency
- Customary law reform and gender justice
- Legal responses to climate change and digital transformation
- Rights-based approaches to housing, education, and public health
- Legal implications of artificial intelligence and data protection

Many projects were co-developed with civil society organisations, legal practitioners, and international institutions, contributing to policy reform and legal literacy.



Access the 2024 research outputs for the Faculty of Law [here](#).



## Engaged Teaching and Learning

The Faculty of Law continued to embed engagement into its curriculum through clinical legal education, moot court simulations, internships, mentoring, and community-based legal literacy programmes. Students participated in legal aid clinics, providing pro bono services to underserved communities, and contributed to policy dialogues on constitutional rights and access to justice. Innovative teaching approaches, including alternative assessments and digital platforms (Collaborative Online International Learning/COIL), were adopted to enhance inclusivity, cultural awareness, global citizenship, and social responsiveness.

## Engaged Citizenship

Staff and students actively contributed to public legal education, advocacy, and policy reform. The faculty hosted seminars on land reform, human rights, disability and digital governance, and collaborated with government departments and NGOs to strengthen legal protection for vulnerable populations. These efforts underscore the faculty's commitment to justice, equity, and democratic participation.

Faculty of

Natural and Agricultural  
Sciences (NAS)





## SDG-Aligned Research Outputs

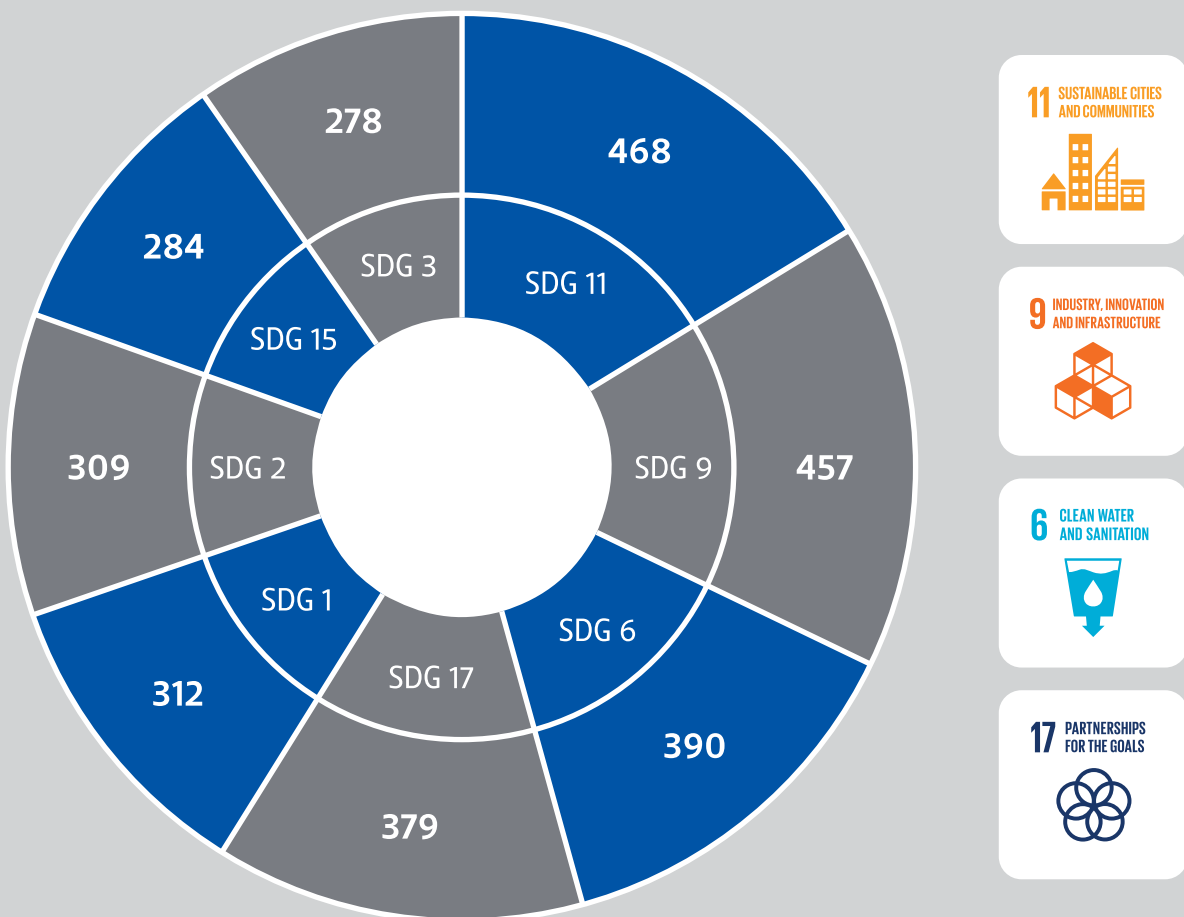










Figure: SDG-Aligned Research Outputs  
(Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences)



## Engaged Research

NAS contributed **831** unique research outputs in 2024. Aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), these outputs span environmental sciences, agriculture, biotechnology, chemistry, physics, and computational modelling.

Most frequently aligned SDGs include the following:

-  **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** – 468 outputs
-  **SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure** – 457 outputs
-  **SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation** – 390 outputs
-  **SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals** – 379 outputs
-  **SDG 1: No Poverty** – 312 outputs
-  **SDG 2: Zero Hunger** – 309 outputs
-  **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being** – 284 outputs
-  **SDG 15: Life on Land** – 278 outputs

These outputs reflect NAS' commitment to addressing global challenges through local relevance, including innovations in climate-smart agriculture, biodiversity conservation, water purification, and nanomaterials for health and environmental applications.



Access the 2024 research outputs for the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences [here](#).

### *NAS Research Conference*

NAS launched the Green Futures Hub and Complex Systems Hub, promoting transdisciplinary research for sustainability and resilience.

### *Sydenham Experimental Farm Redesign*

NAS transformed this space into a training facility for emerging farmers, supporting Agri-BEE and land reform goals.

## 2024 Highlights

NAS has built strong community partnerships, including collaborations with municipalities, conservation agencies, and cooperatives. Projects included Soil health education and regenerative agriculture outreach; Indigenous knowledge integration in plant science; and Climate risk assessments and disaster preparedness. These initiatives promote sustainable livelihoods and ecological resilience.

## Engaged Learning and Teaching

**The Earth Unit (EU)**, housed in the Department of Architecture, is a representative partner of the UNESCO Chair in Earth Architecture. Originally established as the Unit for Earth Construction (UEC) in 1996, the EU expanded its focus in 2012 to include broader sustainability themes. It has led community-based projects in Rosendal, Lebone Village, and Mangaung, integrating environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

The EU contributed to international scientific committees and UNESCO forums, including the following:

- VERSUS Sustainable Architecture Congress (2014–2018)
- XIIth World Congress on Earthen Architecture (TERRA 2016–2020)

Led by Associate Professor Gerhard Bosman, the EU promoted earth architecture as a tool for local economic development, cultural preservation, and ecological resilience.

## Engaged Citizenship

NAS integrates engaged learning through service-learning modules that connect students with real-world challenges.

Notably:

- Agricultural Extension and Rural Development: Students engage with farming communities to promote sustainable practices.
- Environmental Management and Soil Science: Modules include wetland restoration and fire-risk mapping.
- Biotechnology and Chemistry: Students participate in community-based water testing and nanomaterial applications for health.

These modules foster social responsibility and deepen students' understanding of science in service of society.



# Faculty of Theology and Religion





## SDG-Aligned Research Outputs

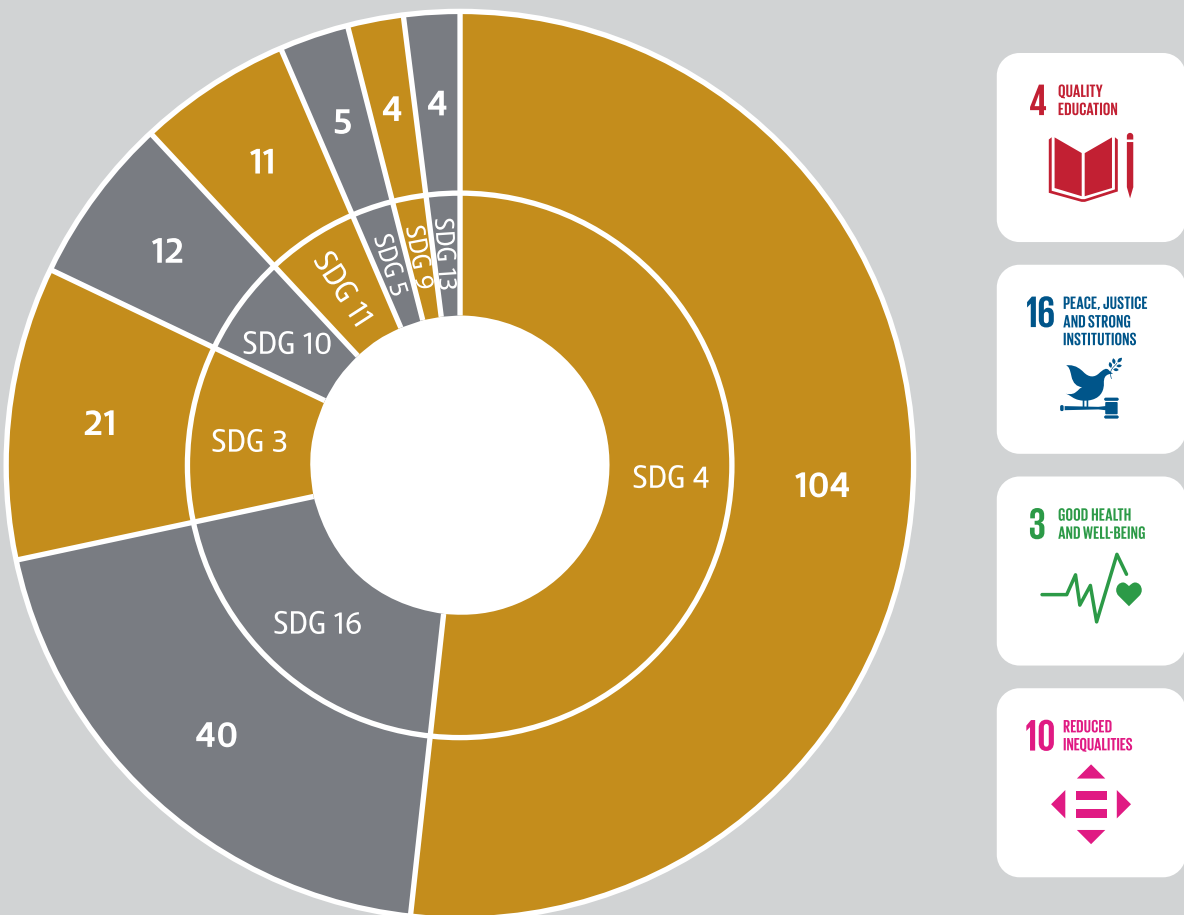



Figure: SDG-Aligned Research Outputs  
(Faculty of Theology and Religion)



## Engaged Research

The Faculty of Theology and Religion contributed **207** unique research outputs in 2024. These outputs span biblical studies, practical theology, ecclesiology, ethics, and religion-and-society intersections across Southern Africa and beyond.

Most frequently aligned SDGs included the following:

-  **SDG 4: Quality Education** – 104 outputs
-  **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions** – 40 outputs
-  **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being** – 21 outputs
-  **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities** – 12 outputs
-  **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** – 11 outputs
-  **SDG 5: Gender Equality** – 5 outputs
-  **SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure** – 4 outputs
-  **SDG 13: Climate Action** – 4 outputs

These outputs reflect the faculty's engagement with social justice, education, community well-being, and ecological responsibility through theological scholarship.



Access the 2024 research outputs for the Faculty of Theology and Religion [here](#).

## Engaged Research

- Ecological hermeneutics and Psalms (*Acta Theologica* 44(1); Supp 37) linking biblical scholarship with climate and biodiversity ethics (SDG 13, 15).
- Public theology and community transformation: township congregations and active citizenship; decolonising theological education (*Missionalia; Religions*) (SDG 1, 4, 10, 11).

## Engaged Teaching and Learning

In 2024, Theology and Religion continued to embed engaged learning through formal service-learning and practice-based pedagogy anchored in real community contexts.

- TMIS 2614 – Grounding of Mission and Mission in Practice (second year, first semester): 78 students engaged; approximately 50 community participants; congregation-based praxis and pastor workshops in Bloemfontein (topics included fatherhood and ethical leadership).



- Practical Missiology and Practical Theology modules: Integrated community-based ministry projects, enabling students to apply theological concepts in real-world congregational and social settings.
- Credit-bearing short learning programme TPCL 1514 completed to strengthen service-learning student experiences.

These initiatives align with the UFS Engaged Scholarship model, emphasising reciprocal learning, contextual responsiveness, and societal impact.

## Engaged Citizenship

In 2024, the Faculty of Theology and Religion advanced engaged citizenship through initiatives that strengthened ethical leadership, congregational vitality, and social cohesion. In the flagship Shepherd Centre, faculty members facilitated workshops for pastors and faith leaders, including sessions on fatherhood (Men of Honour, October 2024) and ethical leadership practices (May 2024). These engagements supported local congregations in addressing societal challenges such as gender-based violence, poverty, and youth vulnerability.

Strategic partnerships with NETACT and ACRP amplified the faculty's societal impact by providing accreditation, research opportunities, and professional development for religious leaders. Collectively, these initiatives fostered active citizenship and community resilience, aligning with SDGs 4, 10, 11, and 16.







# Support Services

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# Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

## Engaged Research

In 2024, CTL contributed several research outputs aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflecting its commitment to inclusive, transformative academic practices. Key themes included the following:

- **Academic Literacies and Identity:** Titles such as ‘Positionality stories as acts of walking away’ and ‘The liminal space: academic literacies practitioners’ construction of professional identity’ explore critical pedagogy and professional identity in higher education.
- **Student Empowerment and Inclusion:** Research on ‘Empowering marginalised students in access programmes’ and ‘Self-esteem and media usage as predictors of loneliness’ align with SDGs 6, 7, and 9, highlighting CTL’s focus on student well-being and equity.

- **Technology and Ethics in Learning:** The study 'Unsilencing the Student Voice: Detecting and Addressing ChatGPT-Generated Texts' reflects CTL's engagement with ethical challenges in digital learning environments.

Most frequently aligned SDGs include SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals; SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation; SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy; SDG 2 – Zero Hunger; and SDG 4 – Quality Education.

A total of **11 research outputs** were mapped, showcasing CTL's interdisciplinary and socially responsive scholarship.

 **Access the 2024 SDG-aligned research outputs for the Centre for Teaching and Learning [here](#).**

## Engaged Learning and Teaching

CTL hosted the Annual UFS Learning and Teaching Conference 2024 (16–19 September), themed 'Enhancing Quality Blended Learning and Teaching within the UFS Context'.

The conference featured keynote speakers from the University of Virginia (Prof Dorothe Bach and Prof Elizabeth Dickens) on 'Context and Collective Agency: Fostering Curricular Innovation'.

Parallel presentations focused on Student engagement and motivation; Curriculum redesign; Innovations in assessment and technology; Work-integrated learning; and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

*CTL's staff and student support programmes in 2024 included:*

- First-Year Transition Programmes (UFSS)
- Academic Literacies Development (WriteSite)
- Tutorial Support (A\_STEP)
- Academic Advising
- Digital Skills Training (AI, media literacy, digital citizenship)
- Graduate Positioning Support (GPS@UFS) – a one-stop digital support system

These initiatives have supported more than 30 000 undergraduates and 1 500 academic staff, contributing to improved student success and reduced achievement gaps.

## Engaged Citizenship

CTL's work extends beyond the classroom, fostering social responsibility and inclusive development through the following:

- Equity-focused interventions that address disparities in student achievement (e.g., 4% decrease in racial achievement gap from 2013 to 2023).
- Embedding community engagement as a graduate attribute through curriculum renewal, SoTL, and inclusive pedagogy.
- Collaboration with national and international partners to promote knowledge generation and educational transformation.





# Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP)

## Engaged Research

In 2024, DIRAP contributed research outputs that reflect a strategic commitment to institutional transformation, inclusive education, and evidence-based planning. Key themes include the following:

**Decolonisation and Pedagogy:** 'Pedagogical Relations as a Decolonisation Tool in African Higher Education' aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

**Student Development and Career Pathways:** 'Can Agricultural Extension Inspire South African Students to Pursue Careers in Agriculture?' aligns with SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

**Belonging and Institutional Climate:** 'Religion, Religious Climate, and Students' Sense of Belonging in a South African University'

aligns with SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy).

Governance and Reform: 'The Evolution of University Governance at Nelson Mandela University' aligns with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), SDG 1 (No Poverty), and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger).

These **four outputs** demonstrate DIRAP's role in shaping inclusive, collaborative academic environments and addressing both social and environmental dimensions of the student experience.

In 2024, DIRAP played a pivotal role in supporting evidence-based decision-making and institutional transformation through engaged research. Key initiatives included the following:

- Development of the UFS Engagement Dashboard, integrating SDG-aligned research metrics.
- Longitudinal studies on student success and equity, informing institutional planning.
- Collaborative research with national bodies (e.g., CHE, DHET) on higher education transformation.

DIRAP's research outputs aligned strongly with SDG 4 (Quality Education); SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities); and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). These outputs reflect DIRAP's commitment to data-informed transformation and inclusive academic development.



Access the 2024 SDG-aligned research outputs for DIRAP [here](#).

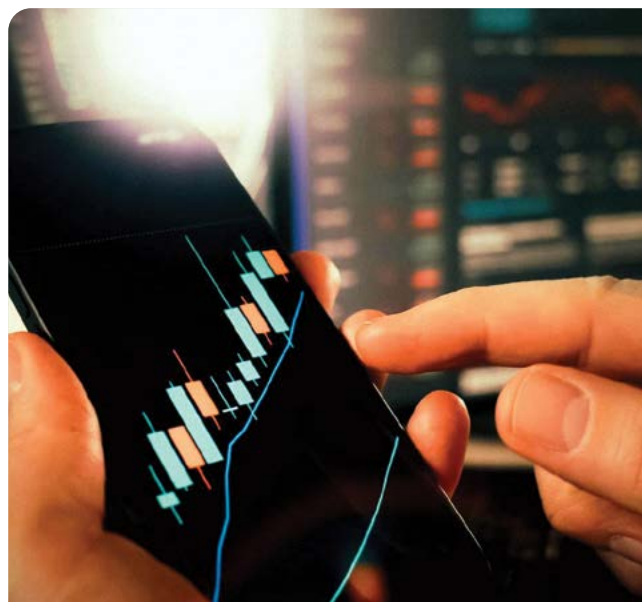
## Engaged Learning and Teaching

DIRAP supported engaged teaching through the following:

- Curriculum analytics and programme reviews that embed community responsiveness.
- Institutional support for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) initiatives.
- Development of tools for tracking student engagement and success across faculties.
- These efforts contributed to improved curriculum design, enhanced student support, and alignment with national development priorities.

## Engaged Citizenship

DIRAP advanced engaged citizenship by facilitating institutional participation in national transformation frameworks; hosting workshops on data ethics, social justice, and inclusive planning; and supporting community-university partnerships through data sharing and impact evaluation. These initiatives positioned DIRAP as a strategic enabler of socially responsive planning and institutional accountability.





# Student Affairs

## Engaged Research

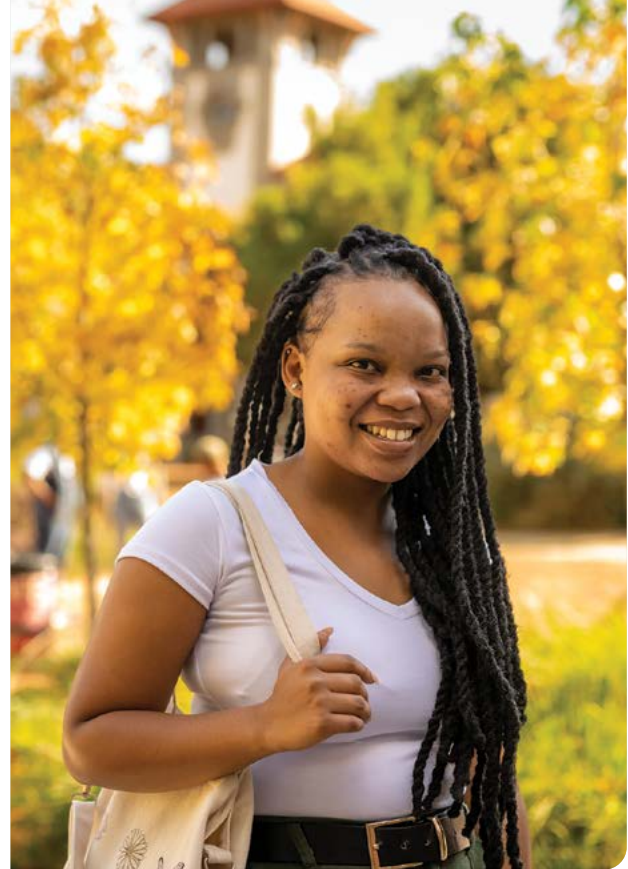
In 2024, the Division of Student Affairs contributed to engaged scholarship through research focused on student inclusion, well-being, and academic success. **Three key research outputs** were aligned with multiple SDGs and reflected the graduate attribute of community engagement:

- Reflective perspectives of residence heads' experiences and responses during COVID-19 at a Free State university, South Africa, aligning with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).
- Accommodating marginalised students in higher education: a structural theory approach aligning with SDG 4, SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10, and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).
- Impact of cooperative learning and a teacher-directed approach on the reading achievement of socio-economically disadvantaged students, contributing to SDG 1 (No Poverty), as well as SDGs 4 and 10.

The Student Affairs Colloquium 2024 further provided a platform for critical dialogue and brought together practitioners, researchers, and student leaders to co-create solutions to address SDGs 2, 3, and 10.



Access the 2024 SDG-aligned research outputs for Student Affairs [here](#).



## Engaged Learning and Teaching

Student Affairs established the *Co-Curricular Hub*, which offers programmes mapped against the UFS' graduate attributes:

- Leadership development (FutureLEAD Challenge, Student Governance Induction)
- Career readiness (Career Services, Career Development Programme)
- Wellness and resilience (GROW, REBT, Self-esteem workshops)
- Disability support (CUADS)
- Peer mentoring, community engagement, and marketing and communication (Kovsie ACT, KovsieX)

One of the flagship programmes of the Engaged Scholarship Office – ACCESS – supports the development of graduate attributes such as social responsibility, leadership, and social innovation.

The ACCESS action learning group used the participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) approach, with weekly assessments and reflections compiled into a portfolio of evidence, while the ACCESS Student Engaged Citizenship Programme engaged more than 600 students in community engagement off the campus and inside institutional events, with certification recognising their skills development. The ACCESS First-Year Community Engagement Festival

introduced new students to community engagement principles early in their academic journey, reinforcing the graduate attribute of community engagement.

## Engaged Citizenship

Student Affairs fostered citizenship and social responsibility through the following:

- *Community Gardens Project*: 28 gardens feeding ~540 students weekly (SDG 2)
- *Critical Dialogue Series*: Addressing governance, diversity, and social justice (SDG 2, SDG 3)
- *Lekgotla Men's Well-being Programme*: Mental health, financial literacy, leadership (SDG 3)
- *Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE)*: Supporting student-led business development (SDGs 8 and 12)
- *The #KoviesCare GBV campaign*, in collaboration with multiple university offices, hosted impactful events such as the Womxn's Memorial Wall and Wear a Doek Day, promoting awareness and empowerment (SDG 5, SDG 16).
- CUADS played a key role in inclusive engagement, participating in Wear a Doek Day and leading Universal Access workshops to promote disability inclusion and reasonable accommodation (SDG 10).

These initiatives reflect Student Affairs' commitment to holistic development, social justice, and inclusive engagement aligned with UFS Vision 130.



# Library and Information Services



## Engaged Research

In 2024, the UFS Library and Information Services contributed to engaged scholarship through research outputs addressing digital access, information literacy, and inclusive education. *Two notable studies* included:

- 'Awareness and Usage of Educational Video Streaming Databases by Lecturers at the University of the Free State, South Africa' (SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals, SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, and SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy).
- 'Information Literacy as a Prerequisite for Library Training in South African Academic Libraries' (SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals, SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG 2: Zero Hunger).



Access the 2024 SDG-aligned research outputs for Library and Information Services [here](#).

## Engaged Learning and Teaching

Library and Information Services continued to embed information literacy into the curriculum, supporting students in developing critical research skills. Workshops and training sessions empowered students to navigate academic databases, evaluate sources, and contribute meaningfully to scholarly discourse. These efforts align with the graduate attribute of community engagement by fostering responsible knowledge creation and dissemination.



Engaged learning and teaching initiatives included the School Library Management and Administration Short Learning Programme, which train educators and community leaders to establish and manage school libraries, supporting SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 17 (Partnerships).

## Engaged Citizenship

Library and Information Services hosted multiple public engagement events in 2024, including book launches such as *King Mzilikazi KaMashobane* by Nthebe Molope, which promoted historical awareness and cultural preservation.

## Expanded Academic Publishing Support

In 2024, the UFS Library and Information Services significantly advanced its support for academic publishing, with a strong emphasis on open access and equitable knowledge dissemination. Through targeted workshops and consultations, the library empowered researchers and postgraduate students to navigate the publishing landscape, identify reputable journals, and enhance their scholarly visibility. Support included guidance on ORCID registration, understanding publishing costs, and post-publication impact strategies.

The Open Access Publications Fund (OAPF) provided financial assistance for article processing charges (APCs), enabling UFS researchers to publish in accredited open access journals. This initiative directly supports SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by fostering collaborative and inclusive research dissemination.

Additionally, Library and Information Services participated in Read and Publish agreements with leading academic publishers, including Cambridge University Press, SAGE, Emerald, Wiley, and the Royal Society of Chemistry. These agreements allowed UFS authors to publish open access without incurring APCs, removing financial barriers and promoting global access to UFS research outputs.

These efforts reflect the library's commitment to the function of engaged scholarship, ensuring that UFS scholars contribute meaningfully to local and global knowledge ecosystems.







# Strategic Partnerships

*The UFS' engaged scholarship is strengthened through strategic partnerships that span both national and international spheres. These collaborations support co-created research, capacity building, and knowledge exchange aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*



# National Partnerships

Key national partnerships included:

- ZZ2: Advancing agricultural innovation and sustainability.
- SANRAL: Supporting infrastructure-related engaged learning and teaching, engaged research, and academic engaged citizenship.
- ETDG-SETA: Facilitating education and training development initiatives.
- ARC-DoA-UFS Chairs: Strengthening agricultural research and policy development.

These partnerships contribute to, among others, SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Strategic national partnerships have significantly enhanced the societal relevance of UFS research in 2024, translating academic enquiry into real-world impact. Co-created, SDG-aligned outputs have addressed urgent challenges such as improving early childhood development through community-led gross motor assessments, advancing inclusive education via multilingual pedagogy models in under-resourced schools, and strengthening food security through agroecological innovations in drought-affected regions.



Additional projects have informed local government planning on informal settlement upgrading, supported youth employability through entrepreneurship research, and shaped public health responses to maternal care gaps in rural clinics. These high-impact outputs, developed in collaboration with national partners, demonstrate how engaged research can directly influence policy, practice, and well-being.

# International Partnerships



The UFS continues to expand its global footprint through

- the USD–UFS Environmental Symposium, promoting transdisciplinary dialogue on sustainability;
- the iKudu Consortium, fostering inclusive internationalisation and curriculum transformation; and
- participation in the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Network under the UNESCO Chair in Community–Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education.

These international collaborations align with SDG 4, SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 17.

# Strategic Focus



The university's international cooperation strategy prioritises

- equitable partnerships that promote mutual benefit;
- capacity building through joint research and mobility; and
- policy influences via regional and global networks.

The UFS maintains active links with institutions across Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, contributing to a globally engaged academic community. These partnerships (SDG 17) support transdisciplinary research, curriculum transformation, and inclusive internationalisation aligned with the SDGs.



# Institutional Flagship Partnerships

## Boyden Observatory: A Legacy of Astrophysical Discovery and Community Engagement

The Boyden Observatory, located near Maselspoort outside Bloemfontein, is one of South Africa's premier astronomical heritage sites and continues to serve as a centre for global astrophysics research. Established in 1889 by Harvard College Observatory in Peru and relocated to Bloemfontein in 1927, Boyden has been associated with major scientific advances, including the identification of Saturn's moon Phoebe, early deep-sky photographic catalogues, and the discovery of the Shapley Supercluster.

Much of Boyden's early scientific output relied on the work of Harvard's women astronomers – Henrietta Leavitt, Annie Jump Cannon, Williamina Fleming, Antonia Maury, and Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin – whose analyses of Boyden's photographic plates shaped modern astronomy. The observatory's historical archive comprises more than 200 000 plates that have now been digitised for international use.

Since being gifted to the University of the Free State in 1976, Boyden has continued to expand its scientific role, housing five active international telescopes and supporting advanced research led by the UFS Department of Physics. The observatory is also a major science engagement platform, annually attracting approximately 17 000 learners and community visitors through school programmes, planetarium sessions, and public stargazing events. Boyden's recognition under UNESCO and the International Astronomical Union's Outstanding Astronomical Heritage Programme underscores its enduring global significance.



[Click here to view the original article.](#)



## Science-for-the-Future (S4F) – Strengthening Mathematics and Science Education

Science-for-the-Future (S4F) is a strategic initiative housed in the UFS Faculty of Education that aims to improve Mathematics and Science education, with specific emphasis on rural and underserved communities. The programme operates in partnership with the Department of Basic Education, Boyden Observatory, and the Naval Hill Planetarium, and serves as a national model for hands-on, concept-driven STEM learning.

The South African National Roads Agency (SANRAL) has renewed and expanded its funding agreement with the UFS, increasing the number of participating universities in the initiative from six to nine. This expansion enhances the Universities Collaboration Initiative, a national platform for strengthening teacher development and STEM capacity.

S4F addresses systemic challenges, including resource constraints, teacher knowledge gaps, and language barriers through two flagship interventions:

Family Math, which empowers parents to support mathematics learning at home using everyday materials; and

Key Concepts in Science, which provides interactive conceptual science training for teachers and learners.

Between 2018 and 2024, more than 426 000 participants benefited from S4F-supported outreach



and professional development. The initiative contributes to UFS Vision 130 by promoting research-led teaching, community-engaged scholarship, and digital integration in science education, thereby strengthening South Africa's future STEM pipeline.



[Click here to view the original article.](#)

# Conclusion

*The comparative analysis between the 2023 and 2024 engagement data reveals a marked growth in the University of the Free State's commitment to Engaged Scholarship.*

In 2024, all faculties demonstrated increased alignment of research outputs with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with notable surges in SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). The Faculty of Education, for instance, produced 202 SDG-aligned outputs in 2024 – an increase from the previous year – reflecting a deepened focus on inclusive education and strategic collaboration.

Across the institution, the integration of engagement into research, teaching, and citizenship has become more embedded. Service-learning modules, co-curricular programmes, and community-based research have expanded significantly, equipping students with employability skills and fostering a culture of social responsibility. Support units such as CTL, DIRAP, and Student Affairs have played a pivotal role in enabling this transformation, contributing to inclusive development and academic success.

Strategic partnerships – both national and international – have amplified the university's societal impact. Collaborations with SANRAL, Z22, and the iKudu Consortium have translated academic enquiry into real-world solutions, addressing challenges in education, health, agriculture, and governance. The Boyden Observatory and Science-for-the-Future initiatives exemplify how engaged scholarship can inspire excellence and transform lives.

Overall, the 2024 report affirms that the UFS is not only advancing knowledge but also mobilising it for the public good. The data demonstrates a university that is increasingly responsive to societal needs, committed to inclusive development, and positioned as a leader in engaged scholarship within South Africa and beyond.





# Engaged Scholarship Report 2024

