Leveraging Quality Assurance Tools to Build Resilient and Inclusive Higher Education Systems in Africa: A Case Study of Covenant University

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Abstract

The advancement of African resilient education systems is crucial for ensuring continuous, inclusive, and quality lifelong learning. This study examines how Covenant University (Covenant) leverages quality assurance (QA) tools to build a resilient and inclusive higher education system. The Covenant Quality Assurance and Academic Standards Committee (QAASC) was established using a bottom-up approach, engaging key stakeholders such as students, staff, and faculty to develop robust and adaptive processes. Key QA instruments, such as graduate exit surveys, student evaluations of courses and course lecturers, faculty surveys, lecture attendance monitoring, and exam conduct assessments, provide critical feedback that informs strategic decision-making, enhances student/faculty engagement and fosters inclusivity. Results revealed an increase in student satisfaction rates from 86% to 88% in the pedagogical skills of lecturers and from 88% to 90% in clarity and quality of learning materials between the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 academic sessions. Faculty satisfaction levels also improved in areas such as campus infrastructure and programme engagement, although concerns persist regarding promotion processes and welfare provisions. This study highlights the transformative role of QA instruments in fostering resilience and inclusivity in higher education. It offers actionable insights for African institutions seeking to enhance educational quality and achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on inclusive and equitable quality education. The findings contribute to broader efforts in advancing institutional frameworks that support lifelong learning and systemic improvement across the continent.

Keywords: Quality Assurance and Academic Standards (QAAS); Quality Assurance Instrument; Internal Quality Assurance (IQA); Research Performance, Continuous Improvement

1.1 Introduction

Higher education is the cornerstone of Africa's socio-economic development, innovation, and leadership capacity (Ukhurebor et al., 2024; Kibona, 2023; Mbithi et al., 2021). African governments, non-governmental institutions and agencies have implemented various policies to enhance the Continent's higher education quality and standards. These efforts aim to develop Africa's human capital and foster sustainable development. Despite these efforts, many African higher education systems face persistent challenges, including insufficient funding, socio-economic disparities, inadequate curricula, weak quality assurance mechanisms, low research outputs, technological gaps, mismanagement, bad leadership, mismatched graduate skills with labour market demands, limited engagement between universities and industries, and infrastructural gaps (Mbithi et al., 2021; Zickafoose et al., 2024). Understanding and addressing the significant challenge is crucial for institutions to adequately cater to diverse student populations and societal needs.

African institutions are also grappling with the rapid evolution of global educational standards, often finding it difficult to keep pace with these changes. As a result, graduates of these institutions may not always be fully equipped to contribute adequately to national and regional development (Chankseliani et al., 2021; Mgaiwa, 2021). This evolving landscape calls for robust quality assurance (QA) mechanisms that maintain academic standards and ensure institutions are resilient and inclusive in their different educational strategies. Effective QA systems involve systematic processes of evaluation, monitoring, and feedback collection to enhance academic quality and improve educational outcomes (Welsh & Dey, 2002). The implementation of a well-structured QA framework ensures that institutions remain accountable, adaptable and committed to continuous improvement in response to the evolving needs of students, faculty, and society (Garwe, 2021). In this paper, QA tools refer to a broad range of evaluation methods, including student and faculty surveys and institutional compliance records, while QA instruments specifically denote structured surveys hosted on the CU portal to facilitate systematic data collection and analysis.

This paper examines how Covenant University has leveraged quality assurance tools and instruments to build a resilient and inclusive higher education system. As a leading institution in Nigeria with well-structured QA mechanisms, Covenant University serves as a valuable case study for understanding the practical application of QA frameworks in an African context. Through the implementation of various evaluation tools, Covenant has strengthened institutional policies, enhanced educational quality, and promoted inclusivity. The objective of this study is to highlight how QA instruments can foster continuous improvement, resilience, and inclusivity in higher education, offering lessons that can be applied across the African continent.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Quality assurance in higher education

Quality assurance (QA) in higher education is a fundamental mechanism for maintaining and improving academic standards and ensuring that institutions remain responsive to the needs of students, employers, and broader societal demands. Scholars have emphasised the necessity of robust QA systems, especially in the context of African higher education. Materu (2007) highlighted that QA systems in Sub-Saharan Africa had been primarily driven by external

quality assurance (EQA) mechanisms, mainly through national and international accreditation bodies and regulatory agencies. While these bodies set baseline standards, they often lack the capacity for continuous engagement with institutions, leading to a growing need for internal quality assurance (IQA) systems that enable institutions to monitor and enhance their processes autonomously (Martin, 2018).

The adoption of IQA frameworks across African higher education institutions has been instrumental in embedding quality management into daily institutional operations rather than limiting it to periodic accreditation exercises (Credo, & Mngarah, 2024). Covenant's QA procedures align with the quality assurance requirements set by Nigeria's National Universities Commission (NUC) to foster a culture of continuous improvement through active faculty, student, and stakeholder engagements (Asiyai, 2015).

1.2.2 The role of quality assurance in addressing challenges in African higher education

Despite improvements in ranking, African higher education still faces significant challenges, including underfunding, infrastructure deficits, and low research output relative to global standards (Cole, 2022). A persistent gap exists between graduate skills and labour market demands due to outdated curricula misaligned with technological advancements and industry needs (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Tomlinson, 2017).

A well-structured QA system, particularly through effective IQA mechanisms, ensures that educational programmes remain relevant, adaptive, and responsive to these challenges. The Input-Process-Output (IPO) framework offers a structured approach at evaluating academic programmes and institutional policies (Rana, 2009). Covenant monitors academic quality by assessing key components at different stages. Inputs include faculty qualifications, student preparedness, infrastructure, and institutional policies shaping educational outcomes. Processes involve curriculum design, teaching methods, assessments, and industry collaborations, which are continuously reviewed through peer evaluations and student feedback. Outputs focus on graduate competencies, research impact, and employability, measured via exit surveys and employers' feedback. By integrating this framework, Covenant enhances its QA mechanisms, enabling data-driven decision-making and sustained academic excellence. Engaging stakeholders ensures that programmes align with labour market demands and reduce skill gaps that hinder economic growth (Okolie et al., 2019).

QA tools such as faculty and graduate exit surveys and student evaluations identify areas for improvement in teaching and content delivery, contributing to higher educational standards (Garwe, 2021). A collaborative QA model involving students, faculty, administrators, and graduates strengthens institutional resilience and adaptability (Ssebuwufu et al., 2012).

1.2.3 Inclusivity in African higher education

Inclusivity remains a critical issue in African higher education systems. Historically, many institutions have struggled to cater to the diverse needs of their student populations, especially in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, and disability (Liasidou, 2012). When properly implemented, QA mechanisms can play a crucial role in promoting inclusivity by identifying and eliminating barriers that hinder underrepresented groups from accessing quality education (Kayyali, 2024a)

Covenant University has actively promoted inclusivity through targeted policies such as special scholarships for indigent students, ensuring that financial constraints do not hinder access to

quality education (Covenant University, 2024a; Covenant University, 2024b; Covenant University, 2024c). Additionally, the university offers reduced tuition fees for international students, fostering regional cooperation and strengthening African higher education networks. These initiatives demonstrate Covenant's commitment to making higher education more accessible to diverse student populations.

1.2.4 Building resilience through QA mechanisms

Resilience is essential for African higher education systems, particularly in light of global challenges such as economic fluctuations, political instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Kayyali (2024b) discussed the importance of building resilience in higher education to withstand external shocks. Internal quality assurance mechanisms foster a culture of continuous improvement, making institutions more adaptable and responsive to external shocks. By embedding QA processes within daily operations, institutions can develop real-time monitoring systems that enhance decision-making and responsiveness (Yeboah & Boasiako, 2024). Covenant QAAS framework plays a pivotal role by ensuring that quality management is embedded in all aspects of the institution's operations, from academic programmes to administrative processes. Through data-driven approaches, QA tools enable the university to make informed decisions swiftly, ensuring continued responsiveness to both internal and external challenges (Javed & Alenezi, 2023).

1.2.5 The need for the existence of internal quality assurance (IQA) units like QAASC

Given the challenges facing African higher education institutions, the establishment of robust internal quality assurance units, such as Covenant University's Quality Assurance and Academic Standards Committee (QAASC), is crucial (QAASC, 2024). While external quality assurance bodies are essential in setting standards, they cannot engage in the continuous, day-to-day monitoring and improvement that IQA systems offer (Mbajiorgu, 2023). While external QA bodies establish national and regional standards, internal QA units (IQA) provide real-time monitoring and continuous improvement, ensuring institutions swiftly address gaps in teaching quality, research output, and administrative efficiency. This synergy between IQAs and external QA bodies creates a holistic and sustainable quality assurance system.

Effective IQA frameworks ensure that quality assurance becomes a dynamic, continuous process rather than a reactive exercise in preparation for external evaluations or accreditation. By embedding quality management in the daily activities of faculty, staff, and students, IQA systems promote a culture of accountability, inclusivity, and resilience within the institution.

Through its QAASC, Covenant has maintained high academic standards while fostering inclusivity and resilience. The university's use of QA tools shows how other African institutions can leverage IQA systems to enhance educational quality and institutional performance.

2.0 Methodology

This study employed a purposive sampling technique, targeting faculty members, students, and graduates to assess the impact of QA tools (Cohen et al., 2011). Quantitative data from QAASC surveys, institutional records and administrative compliance data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

2.1 Ethical Considerations

Survey participants were adult Covenant students, graduates, and faculty. They were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Participation was voluntary, and data were securely stored and utilised solely for research and management-informed decision-making.

2.2 Data Collection Instruments

To collect comprehensive data, the following instruments were used:

2.2.1 Students' evaluations of courses and course lecturers: Data were obtained from students' evaluations of courses and lecturers survey forms administered at the middle and end of each semester. These forms assess lecturers' course delivery and teaching effectiveness, course content clarity, course materials' relevance, and use of technology (e.g., Moodle Learning Management system, interactive smart boards, etc.). This provides insights into student satisfaction with lecturer engagement and academic outcomes.

2.2.2 Faculty sessional surveys (2022/2023 and 2023/2024): Faculty members participated in sessional surveys that aimed to measure satisfaction across multiple parameters over the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 academic sessions. Key areas evaluated included workload distribution, satisfaction with university programmes, career advancement opportunities, welfare packages and other benefits, campus infrastructure and available resources.

2.2.3 Graduate student exit survey (2023/2024): The exit survey gathered feedback from recent graduates on key areas, including their satisfaction with programme objectives and curriculum quality, the effectiveness of the programme in supporting learning and skill development, and insights on their internship experiences.

2.2.4 Postgraduate student exit survey (2023/2024): The survey assessed the satisfaction levels of recent postgraduate students regarding the overall quality of their academic programmes and their preparedness for the labour market.

2.2.5 Institutional records: Covenant's institutional records, encompassing student performance metrics, completion and attrition rates, and result processing compliance, were drawn from institutional records and other internal databases such as the university portal, Moodle analytics, and Scival insights.

2.2.5.1 Student performance metrics and on-time programme completion rates: This section utilises institutional data to evaluate student performance rates. The data collected, including the course performance rates for core and elective courses, were reviewed to assess student progression and identify potential bottleneck courses that may contribute to delays in graduation or higher attrition rates. On-time programme completion rates were measured to provide a clear picture of student performance. Factors influencing performance, such as teaching methods, students' attendance and others, were given special attention to pinpoint areas for improvement.

2.2.5.2 *Compliance with result processing protocol for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes*: This section utilised institutional data to evaluate the level of compliance to institutional result processing protocol with respect to the number of students with positive

revalidation outcomes and makeup examination granted for both undergraduate and postgraduate students within the last two academic sessions.

2.2.5.3 Compliance with examination protocols for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes: This section utilised the institutional data to evaluate the level of students' compliance with examination regulations within the last three academic sessions, focusing on the trend in the number of students with exam malpractice cases.

2.2.5.4 Institutional research performance metrics: Institutional research performance is assessed through various indicators, including the number of publications, publications in the top 1-10% of journals, citation impact, and the scope of collaborative and international partnerships. Data for this evaluation was sourced from Scival analytics, institutional repositories, and internal records. These metrics provide an in-depth understanding of Covenant's research output, its influence in various academic fields, and the strength of its partnerships within Nigeria and globally. This comprehensive assessment highlights the institution's contributions to the global academic community and the effectiveness of its research strategy.

2.2.5.5 Institutional regionalisation:

This section analysed data from institutional records to examine the number of international students and faculty at Covenant over the past three years. The analysis highlights trends in internationalisation by tracking the countries of origin of international students and faculty. This provided valuable insights into Covenant's success in expanding its global footprint and strengthening regional and international collaborations. The data also allow for an evaluation of the effectiveness of the university's initiatives to attract and retain a diverse international academic community while contributing to its broader mission of regionalisation and global engagement.

2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data from surveys and institutional records were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0 for descriptive and inferential statistics, while graphs were generated using R for data visualisation. Key metrics were subjected to trend analysis, including faculty and student satisfaction, compliance rates, and performance outcomes. The study also incorporated gender-disaggregated analysis to identify disparities in various institutional processes.

2.4 Limitations of the Study

Study limitations include the focus on a single institution, which restricts the generalisability of results across other African higher education institutions, and the use of self-reported survey data, which may be subjected to response bias, as participants might provide socially desirable answers rather than fully candid responses, potentially affecting the objectivity of the results.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 **Student Evaluations of Courses and Course Lecturers**: Figure 1 presents an overview of student evaluations regarding course delivery and lecturer engagement for the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 academic sessions.

Regarding pedagogical skills, student satisfaction with lecturers showed consistent improvement, rising from 86% in the First (Alpha) semester and 85% in the Second (Omega) semester of 2022/2023 to 88% in the Alpha semester of 2023/2024, while the Omega semester remained stable at 85%. This reflects improvements in teaching quality. Satisfaction with learning materials also increased, with clarity and quality ratings rising from 88% to 90% in the Alpha semester, while the Omega semester remained at 86% across both years, reflecting ongoing improvements in the materials provided to students.

Lecturers' compliance with timely tests and evaluations remained relatively stable across both academic years, with 85% satisfaction in the Alpha semester and 83% in the Omega semester of 2022/2023, followed by 85% and 82% in 2023/2024. This suggests timely evaluations at Covenant University. Students' assessments of lecturer creativity and innovation showed some variability between semesters. In the 2022/2023 academic year, satisfaction was notably high during the Alpha semester at 96% and Omega at 84%. For 2023/2024, satisfaction in Alpha was at 88%, with Omega improving to 85%, indicating a strong perception of creativity and innovation in the University.

Satisfaction with the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) remained stable at 87% in the Alpha semester across both years, while the Omega semester slightly declined from 84% in 2022/2023 to 82% in 2023/2024. This suggests continued effective use of the platform, with potential for further enhancements.

3.2 Faculty Sessional Surveys Results: The results from the faculty sessional surveys tracked year-over-year trends in faculty satisfaction across various parameters, highlighting significant improvements and few concerns.

3.2.1 Faculty satisfaction levels with university programmes (2022/2023 vs. 2023/2024): Figure 2 reveals significant faculty engagement and satisfaction shifts across key areas. Faculty participation in research activities rose from 81% in 2022/2023 to 95% in 2023/2024, reflecting the university's intensified focus on cultivating research excellence and broadening faculty involvement in scholarly pursuits. Several initiatives under the new strategic plan likely contributed to this, particularly those enhancing research accessibility and support. The Covenant University Centre for Research, Innovation, and Discovery (CUCRID) hosted a 2023/2024 research clinic series, utilising webinars to provide the university-wide dissemination of research policy. Additionally, revisions to the university's conference support policy provided more robust backing for faculty research dissemination efforts. These initiatives highlight the university's dedication to nurturing a supportive environment for academic advancement in research and pedagogy, driving greater faculty satisfaction with available research opportunities.

Satisfaction with the intellectual stimulation provided by academic work remained strong, increasing slightly from 91% to 92%. This indicates that faculty members continue to find their work environment mentally engaging and enriching. Collaboration among colleagues also improved, increasing satisfaction from 91% to 92%, highlighting enhanced collaboration and teamwork within departments. A marked improvement was observed in the utilisation of faculty expertise, with satisfaction rising from 85% to 92%. This suggests that departmental

roles are becoming better aligned with the skills and knowledge of faculty members, leading to more effective contributions to institutional goals.

Notably, satisfaction with work-life balance showed significant progress, increasing from 43% to 52%. This improvement signals that faculty members find better ways to manage professional responsibilities alongside personal time, reflecting more balanced workloads. However, the results indicate areas for improvement. Satisfaction with administrative support decreased slightly, dropping from 88% to 86%, suggesting the need for better support mechanisms. Mentorship opportunities also experienced a slight decrease, with satisfaction falling from 68% to 62%. This points to a gap in mentorship programmes, emphasising the need for enhanced structures to support faculty development.

Lastly, satisfaction with student interaction is sustained. There should be more opportunities to maintain a robust faculty-student engagement, which may require strategies to foster more meaningful interactions.

3.2.2 Faculty satisfaction levels on career advancement (2022/2023 vs. 2023/2024): Figure 3 shows the percentage changes in faculty satisfaction regarding career development across the two academic sessions. Satisfaction with faculty development opportunities increased from 60% to 68%, demonstrating progress in providing faculty members with professional growth and skill enhancement. Similarly, satisfaction with support for attending conferences rose from 40% to 51%, indicating that faculty now experience better access to academic exposure and networking opportunities. However, clarity regarding the promotion process experienced a decline, dropping from 54% to 43%. This emphasises the need for university management to enhance communication and transparency surrounding the promotion process to foster faculty confidence and satisfaction. Furthermore, satisfaction with the overall promotion process decreased from 42% to 40%, reinforcing the call for a more streamlined and comprehensible career progression framework. Addressing these areas could substantially boost faculty morale and engagement.

3.2.3 Faculty satisfaction levels on welfare packages and other benefits (2022/2023 vs. 2023/2024): Figure 5 illustrates changes in faculty satisfaction with welfare packages and benefits across the two academic sessions. Satisfaction with salary and compensation packages dropped from 46% to 37%, highlighting a growing dissatisfaction with financial benefits. Issues with prompt salary payments contributed to this decline, as satisfaction in this area fell from 85% to 81%, signalling potential administrative challenges.

Conversely, satisfaction with the severance package rose significantly, from 9% to 32%, suggesting improved provisions for faculty exit benefits. Satisfaction with the gratuity package also increased from 12% to 22%, indicating enhancements in retirement-related benefits. Access to medical facilities saw a notable boost in satisfaction, rising from 24% to 49%, reflecting better campus healthcare services. However, satisfaction with health insurance saw only a slight increase from 5% to 8%, indicating that further improvement in healthcare coverage is still needed. Concerns about job security and stability were evident, as satisfaction declined from 69% to 57%, indicating increased uncertainty about job permanence. Satisfaction with workload remained steady at 43%, suggesting that faculty perceive no changes in work demands across the sessions.

3.2.4 Faculty satisfaction levels on campus infrastructure & resources (2022/2023 vs. 2023/2024): Figure 5 shows the percentage changes in faculty satisfaction levels on campus infrastructure and resources between the two academic sessions.

Satisfaction with the campus environment increased from 95% to 100%, signalling unanimous appreciation of the serene and conducive surroundings. Faculty accommodation saw a modest improvement, with satisfaction rising from 74% to 78%, reflecting better living arrangements on campus. However, satisfaction with internet access declined slightly, from 77% to 73%, possibly due to concerns about connectivity or speed. On a more positive note, satisfaction with campus electricity supply increased from 84% to 92%, indicating improved power reliability. Access to electronic databases and academic resources saw a significant boost, with satisfaction rising sharply from 73% to 95%, indicating enhanced access to research materials and digital tools.

3.3 Graduate Student Exit Survey (2023/2024): The 2023/2024 Graduate Exit Student Survey gathered comprehensive feedback from graduates, offering valuable insights into key aspects of their academic experience.

Graduates expressed high satisfaction with the clarity and relevance of programme objectives, with 87% agreeing that the objectives were well-defined and achievable. Satisfaction with the university's infrastructure was moderate at 77%, reflecting general approval and indicating areas for improvement in campus facilities. The curriculum content received positive feedback, with 83% of students satisfied with its alignment with programme objectives, showcasing its relevance and academic rigour. However, co-curricular and extracurricular activities showed a satisfaction rating of 71%, suggesting that while opportunities exist, engagement in these areas could be further encouraged. Graduates expressed strong appreciation for faculty contributions, with 88% of respondents satisfied with the faculty's efforts to help them achieve the programme objectives. This reflects the faculty's effectiveness in supporting student academic goals. In contrast, satisfaction with scholarships and grants was lower at 58%, indicating a need for increased financial aid opportunities. Nevertheless, 91% of students found the programme's educational value to be highly beneficial, showcasing its role in fostering academic growth. Satisfaction with departmental infrastructure was 71%, highlighting adequate resources and room for targeted improvements (Figure 6).

Regarding programme effectiveness, the survey results revealed that graduates were generally pleased with the programme's ability to develop essential skills. Administrative support received a satisfaction rating of 84%, indicating that the institution effectively facilitated the learning process. The development of planning abilities was rated highly, with 88% satisfaction, showcasing the programme's emphasis on strategic thinking. Similarly, 88% of graduates were satisfied with how the programme enhanced their analytical and problem-solving skills, highlighting its practical relevance. The programme's success in fostering independent thinking was also evident, with 88% of respondents expressing satisfaction. Teamwork abilities were another key area of success, with 85% of graduates satisfied with how the programme promoted collaborative learning. Additionally, 87% of students reported satisfaction with improved written and oral communication skills, underscoring the emphasis placed on effective communication throughout the programme (Figure 7).

Regarding the internship/SIWES experience, the survey captured graduates' high levels of satisfaction with various aspects of their internship, particularly in relation to professional development and the application of practical skills. A remarkable 91% of graduates reported satisfaction with the effectiveness of the internship in enhancing their professional growth, suggesting that the programme provided valuable opportunities for practical learning. Additionally, 83% of graduates were satisfied with how the internship bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and its real-world application, underscoring the relevance of the experience to their academic studies. The internship programme fostered teamwork, with 88%

of graduates expressing satisfaction with their ability to work effectively in teams. This reflects the programme's success in promoting collaboration and interpersonal skills. Graduates also appreciated developing time management skills, with 90% expressing satisfaction, pointing to the programme's role in building essential workplace competencies (Figure 8).

Moreover, 90% of graduates reported that the internship encourages independent thinking, highlighting its effectiveness in fostering self-sufficiency. The development of sound judgment skills was also rated highly, with 86% of respondents satisfied, indicating that students felt well-prepared to handle decision-making in professional settings. Ethical values were another focus area, with 90% of graduates satisfied with how the internship reinforced their understanding of professional ethics. Similarly, 90% were satisfied with the discipline instilled during their internship, showcasing its impact on promoting professionalism and responsibility (Figure 8).

Overall, these findings emphasise the significant positive impact of the internship/SIWES programme in equipping graduates with the practical skills, professional discipline, and ethical foundation essential for their future careers.

3.4 Postgraduate Students' Exit Survey (2023/2024): The postgraduate exit survey provided valuable insights into student satisfaction with overall academic programmes and their readiness for the labour market. As illustrated in (Figure 9a), 93% of graduates expressed various levels of satisfaction with their academic programmes, indicating a strong alignment between programme content and student expectations. Furthermore, 85% of graduates reported that their postgraduate studies effectively prepared them for the labour market, reflecting the programmes' success in equipping students with relevant career skills and competencies (Figure 9b). These findings highlight Covenant's postgraduate programmes' effectiveness in delivering academic rigour and career readiness.

3.5 Institutional Records: Covenant's institutional data, encompassing portal records, Moodle system analytics, and Scival insights, were rigorously analysed to assess compliance with academic processes, evaluate student performance, track programme accreditation status, and measure research performance. This comprehensive review revealed key areas for academic enhancement and highlighted significant trends in research output, collaboration, and overall scholarly impact, providing a strategic roadmap for institutional growth and development.

3.5.1 Student performance metrics: The course performance trends for the 2021/2022, 2022/2023, and 2023/2024 academic sessions were analysed, with courses classified based on percentage performance rates into four categories: 90% and above, 80-89%, 70-79%, and below 70%. In the 2021/2022 session, 1,230 courses achieved performance rates greater than 90%, 204 courses fell within the 80-89% range, 56 courses recorded performance rates between 70-79%, and 74 courses had rates below 70% (Figure 10).

During the 2022/2023 session, the number of courses with performance rates above 90% decreased to 1,129, while 187 courses were in the 80-89% range. Additionally, 76 courses scored between 70-79%, and 76 courses recorded performance rates below 70%. In the 2023/2024 session, 1,182 courses recorded performance rates above 90%, with 182 courses falling into the 80-89% range. Meanwhile, 79 courses had performance rates between 70-79%, and 99 courses scored below 70% (Figure 10).

Courses that recorded performance rates below 70% were rigorously reviewed, and the issues identified were promptly addressed. Targeted interventions included implementing enhanced

student support programmes, tailored academic resources, and improved teaching strategies. These measures aimed to boost course performance and ensure student outcomes aligned with the institution's quality standards. Notably, the 2023/2024 academic session of Covenant has the highest first-class convocation set of 339 students since the inception of the university (Covenant University, 2024d).

3.5.2 Student on-time completion rates for undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) programmes

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of on-time completion rates for undergraduate and postgraduate students over the last two to three academic sessions, focusing on trends and disparities. At the undergraduate level, the on-time completion rates for 4-year programmes have shown variability. The 2018/2019 cohort, which graduated in the 2021/2022 session, had a completion rate of 72%. This rate dropped to 66% for the 2019/2020 cohort, which completed their studies in the 2022/2023 session, but slightly increased to 68% for the 2020/2021 cohort, who graduated in 2023/2024. For 5-year undergraduate programmes, the rates were lower but also exhibited fluctuation. The 2018/2019 cohort graduated with an on-time completion rate of 55% in the 2022/2023 session, while the 2019/2020 cohort showed an improvement, with 66% of students completing their programmes on time in the 2023/2024 session (Table 1).

At the postgraduate level, a notable gender-based disparity was observed in the 2-year on-time completion rates for Master's programmes. During the 2021/2022 academic session, female students achieved a significantly higher on-time completion rate of 87%, in contrast to their male counterparts, who had a rate of 55%. This trend continued into the following academic session, 2022/2023, although both male and female completion rates declined. Female students' completion rate dropped to 61%, while the rate for male students decreased significantly to 43%. Despite these declines, female students consistently outperformed male students regarding on-time graduation across both academic sessions (Table 2).

For PhD students, 3-year completion rates were analysed across academic sessions. In the 2021/2022 session, male PhD students had an on-time completion rate of 17%, while female students performed marginally better at 19%. However, in the 2022/2023 session, no male PhD student completed on time. Female PhD students, on the other hand, experienced a modest improvement, reaching an 11% on-time completion rate in the same period (Table 2).

The data highlights persistent gender disparities, particularly at the postgraduate level, where female students consistently achieve higher on-time completion rates than their male peers. Nonetheless, the overall downward trend in postgraduate completion rates remains a major concern, particularly for male PhD students. These results suggest a range of obstacles may affect student success, including programme duration, access to resources, and personal or academic difficulties.

However, the 2023/2024 academic session shows progress, with improved on-time completion rates for undergraduate students. This positive development indicates the university's efforts to enhance support for student success yield results. Sustaining and building on this progress will be crucial moving forward. Ensuring consistent academic support, addressing any remaining barriers, and enhancing resources for postgraduate students, particularly male PhD candidates, will improve overall completion rates and foster equity across all academic programmes.

3.5.3 Compliance with result processing protocol for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes

An evaluation of result revalidation and makeup exam requests for the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 academic sessions reveals specific trends. There were 264, 166 and 240 positive revalidation requests in the undergraduate programme in 2021/2022, 2022/2023, and 2023/2024 academic sessions. As well as 4,895 makeup examination requests in 2022/2023, of which 243 were approved. This increased slightly in 2023/2024, with 4,998 requests and 260 approvals, reflecting a small rise in approval rates from 4.96% in 2022/2023 to 5.20% in 2023/2024 (Table 3).

For the postgraduate programme, revalidation requests were minimal. One student submitted a revalidation request in 2022/2023, followed by three requests in 2023/2024. However, none of these requests was approved, underscoring the institution's strict adherence to result-processing protocols and rigorous evaluation standards. In contrast, three postgraduate makeup exam requests were submitted and approved in 2023/2024, suggesting increased flexibility in addressing legitimate academic needs while preserving consistency and accuracy in result processing (Table 3).

These observations reflect a carefully balanced approach within the institution: while strict standards are maintained for revalidation requests to uphold academic integrity, Covenant demonstrates flexibility in makeup exam approvals to support academic progression. The rigorous institution result-processing protocols include meticulous script marking using approved marking guides, independent verification by an additional faculty member by cross-checking marked scripts using marking guides, and recorded results. This thorough process minimises potential errors in marking and ensures accuracy in results, reinforcing the institution's dedication to quality and transparency in academic assessment.

3.5.4 Students' compliance with examination protocols for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes

Recent analyses of examination malpractice cases indicate a promising downward trend, reflecting the effectiveness of the university's interventions and quality assurance measures. For undergraduate students, the 2021/2022 academic session recorded 26 reported cases of malpractice, which slightly increased to 28 in 2022/2023. However, the 2023/2024 session saw a significant decrease, with cases dropping to 23, marking a notable 17.86% reduction from the previous year. In postgraduate studies, four cases of misconduct, encompassing exam malpractice and violations of other university regulations, were reported in 2022/2023. This figure fell to just one disciplinary case in the 2023/2024 session, highlighting a positive trend.

These reductions can be attributed to the university's strengthened examination management system, which includes enhanced student awareness programmes, effective invigilation practices, and rigorous examination monitoring. Ongoing tracking and reporting of malpractice cases will further support efforts to uphold and improve academic integrity across the university. These incidents underscore the necessity of maintaining vigilance and strictly enforcing academic integrity policies to preserve the credibility and standards of the university's examination processes.

3.7 **University Research Performance Matrix (2019–2024)**: Figure 11 illustrates Covenant research performance from 2019 to 2024, based on Scival data, highlighting growth in research output, international collaborations, academic partnerships, and overall scholarly impact.

The percentage of publications involving international collaboration steadily increased from 40.9% in 2019 to 57.9% in 2024, demonstrating a marked enhancement in global research

partnerships. This upward trend reflects Covenant's strategic efforts to strengthen international collaborations, supported by the university's expanded publication and research activities. After a dip in international collaborations in 2020, the numbers began to rise consistently from 2021 onwards, attributed to the quality of faculty research, revised conference policies, and enhanced networking as pandemic-related restrictions eased.

Academic cooperation within the institution has remained relatively stable, ranging between 0.1% and 0.5% from 2019 to 2024. After an initial decline between 2019 and 2020, a gradual recovery followed, with some variation influenced by post-pandemic dynamics. This relatively low internal collaboration highlights potential areas for fostering stronger academic partnerships within the university, particularly as factors such as economic shifts and limited corporate engagement may have impacted internal research activity. In addition, a revamped multi-disciplinary cluster system by the institution will boost the internal dynamics.

The university's overall scholarly output has declined, dropping publications from 1,523 in 2019 to 474 in 2024. This trend may reflect shifts in faculty focus, resource allocation, and publishing cycles, with possible contributing factors including faculty attrition, amended publication policies, and a competitive landscape for postgraduate programmes. While scholarly output initially dropped between 2019 and 2020, a slight recovery occurred before continuing to decline, suggesting the need for targeted measures to stimulate research productivity.

Citations for Covenant publications declined from 14,770 in 2019 to 258 in 2024. This reduction could indicate changes in research visibility and impact as the university shifts its focus from high publication volume to quality-focused outputs. Covenant's entry into the Times Higher Education World University Rankings in 2019 led to an emphasis on meeting publication targets, initially through lower-tier journals (Q3-Q4). However, recent efforts have been directed towards prioritising higher quantile (Q1 and Q2) publication outlets to improve research quality, impacting the citation trend and reflecting the university's evolving publication strategy.

Despite the decrease in publication volume, the percentage of Covenant articles published in top-tier journals has grown, reaching 14.6% in 2023 before adjusting to 11.6% in 2024 as of September. This shift reflects Covenant's emphasis on quality, bolstered by orientation programmes that encourage high-calibre research. Initial growth in high-impact publications was seen in 2019 and 2020, followed by a dip from 2020 to 2022. Improvements in recent years are linked to research funding, promotion incentives, and a strategic redirection towards Clarivate-indexed journals with high-impact factors, indicating sustained efforts to improve publication quality.

The number of researchers contributing to publications has declined from 1,350 in 2019 to 638 in 2024. This decrease may be due to faculty turnover, retirement, and other issues. A slight rise in contributing authors was obtained in 2021, followed by a decline, suggesting ongoing challenges in maintaining a robust research community with prevailing factors such as evolving university policies, research motivations, and quality standards, with further attention required to encourage broader faculty engagement in research initiatives.

3.8 Institutional Regionalisation

Year-on-year trends in international faculty and student demographics reveal the institution's growing global engagement and robust internationalisation efforts. In the 2022/2023 academic

session, the international student population totalled 45, with ten new enrolments. By the 2023/2024 session, the total number of international students slightly declined to 40, though the institution still achieved ten new enrolments. Despite the reduction in overall numbers, the percentage of new enrolments relative to the total rose from 22% to 25%, underscoring the impact of strengthened recruitment initiatives. Most international students are from Africa, with a smaller yet notable group from Europe, reflecting focused regional partnerships (Figure 12).

The International Office and Linkages (IOL) further enhanced its impact by expanding engagement with International Visiting Scholars (IVS). In the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 sessions, 43 International Visiting Scholars were engaged. Like the international student demographics, the visiting scholars were predominantly from Africa and Europe, underscoring the institution's commitment to regional partnerships and international collaborations (Figure 13). Additionally, IOL facilitated multiple student exchange programmes and organised visits from research scholars through externally funded projects, further broadening the institution's global academic network

This steady growth in internationalisation is largely driven by the university's robust internationalisation policy, strategic management decisions, well-equipped research facilities, and a supportive academic environment. Scholarship opportunities provided by initiatives such as the Covenant Applied Informatics and Communication Africa Centre of Excellence (CApIC-ACE), the David Oyedepo Foundation, and others have also significantly attracted international talents. (Covenant University, 2024a, b, c). These factors have created an appealing setting for international students and scholars, reinforcing the institution's expanding global footprint, particularly within Africa and Europe.

Figure 1: Student Evaluations of Course Delivery and Engagement by Session
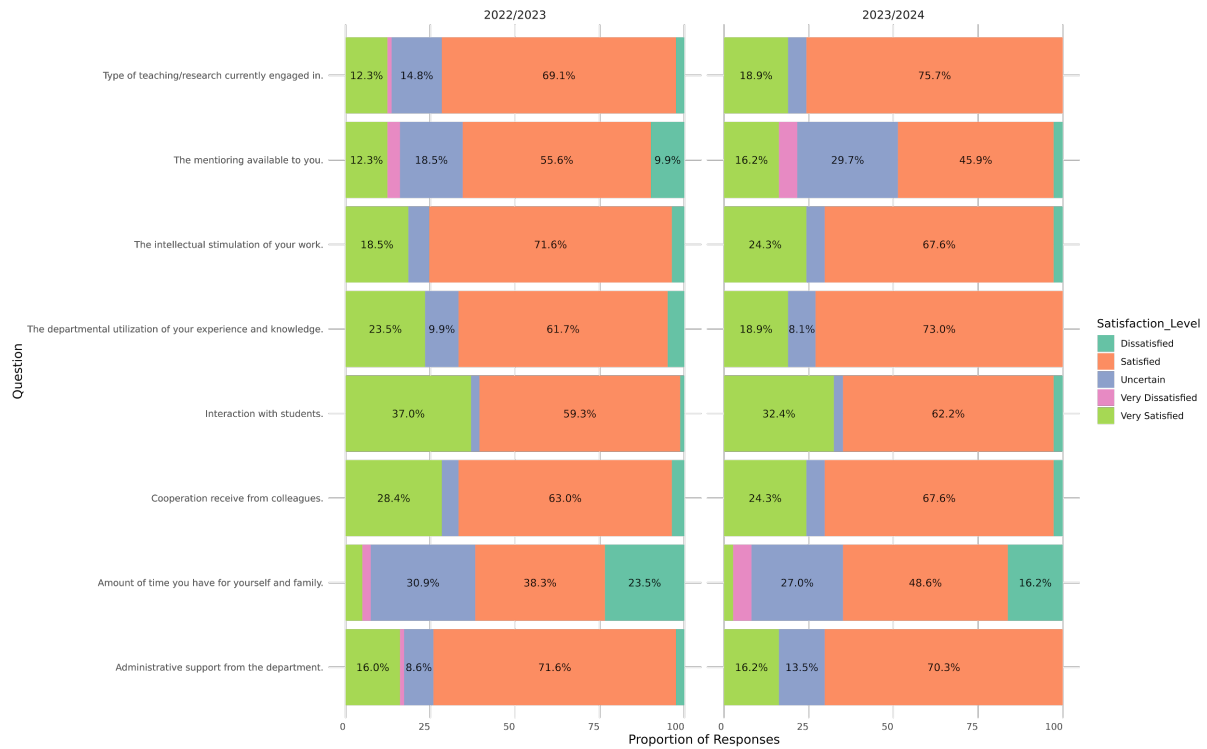
Figure 2: Trends in Percentage Faculty Satisfaction Levels with University Programmes
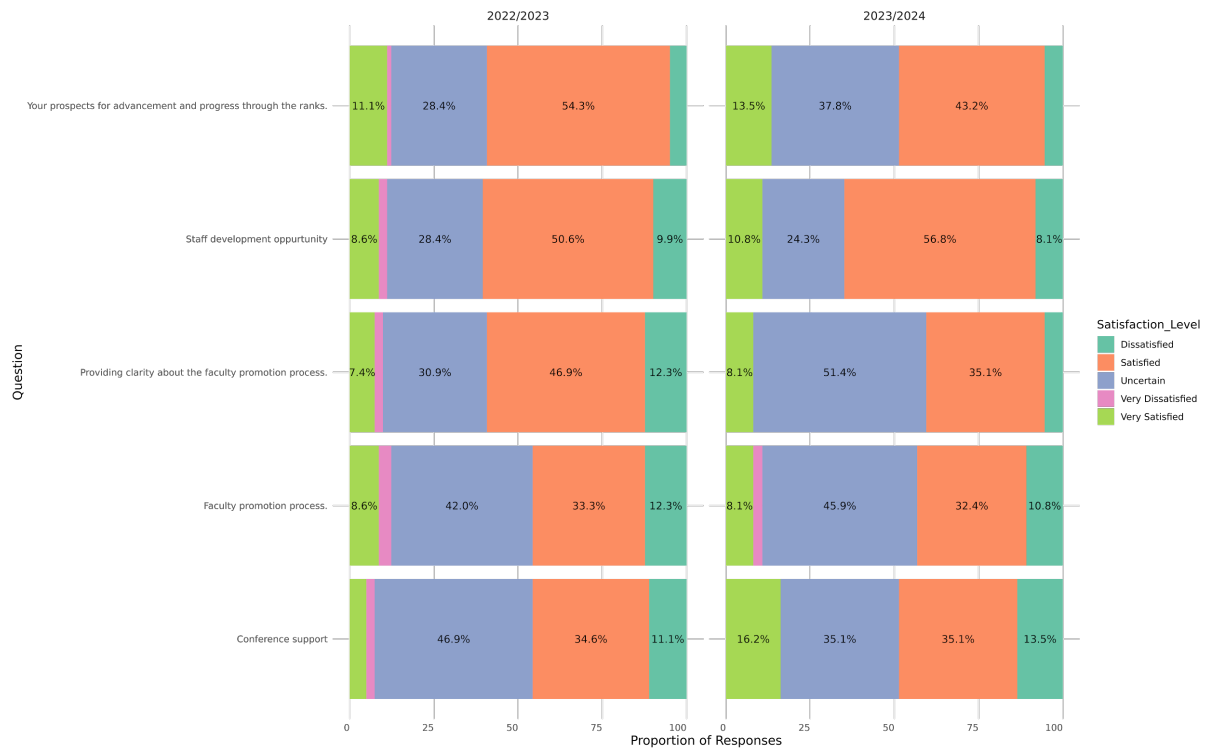

Figure 3: Trends in Percentage Faculty Satisfaction Levels on Career Advancement

Figure 4: Trends in Percentage Faculty Satisfaction Levels on Welfare Package and other Benefits
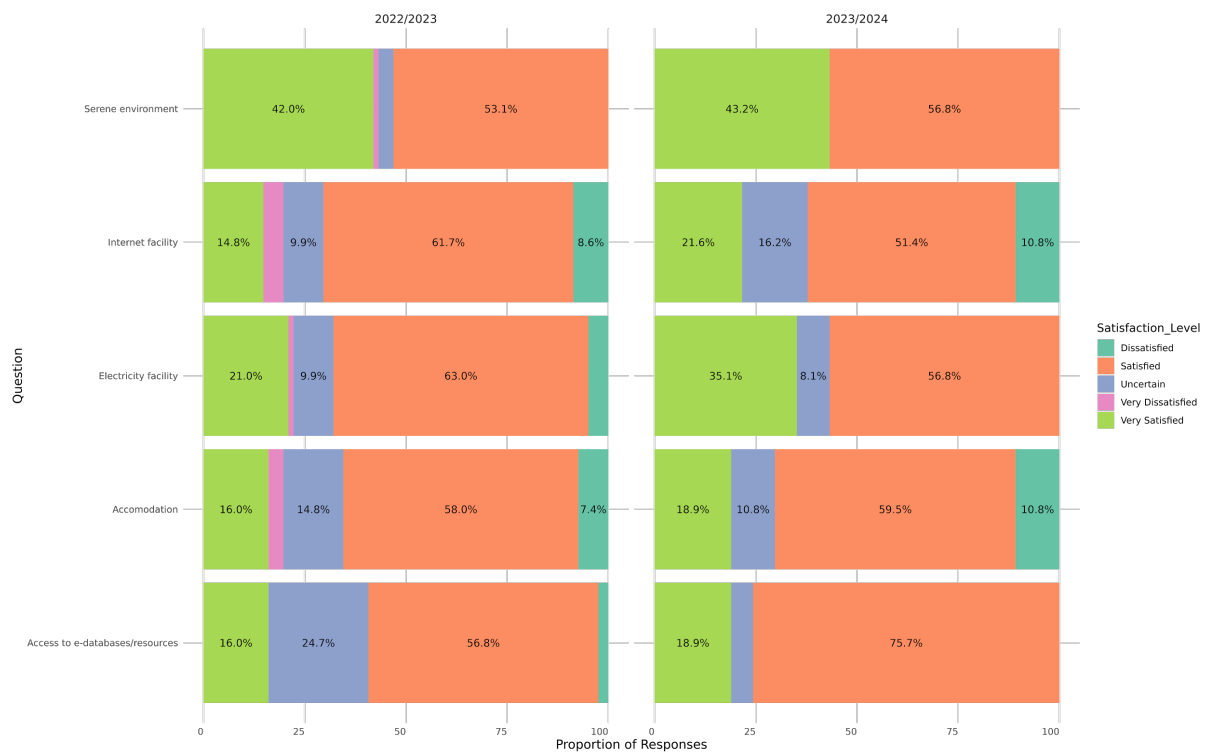

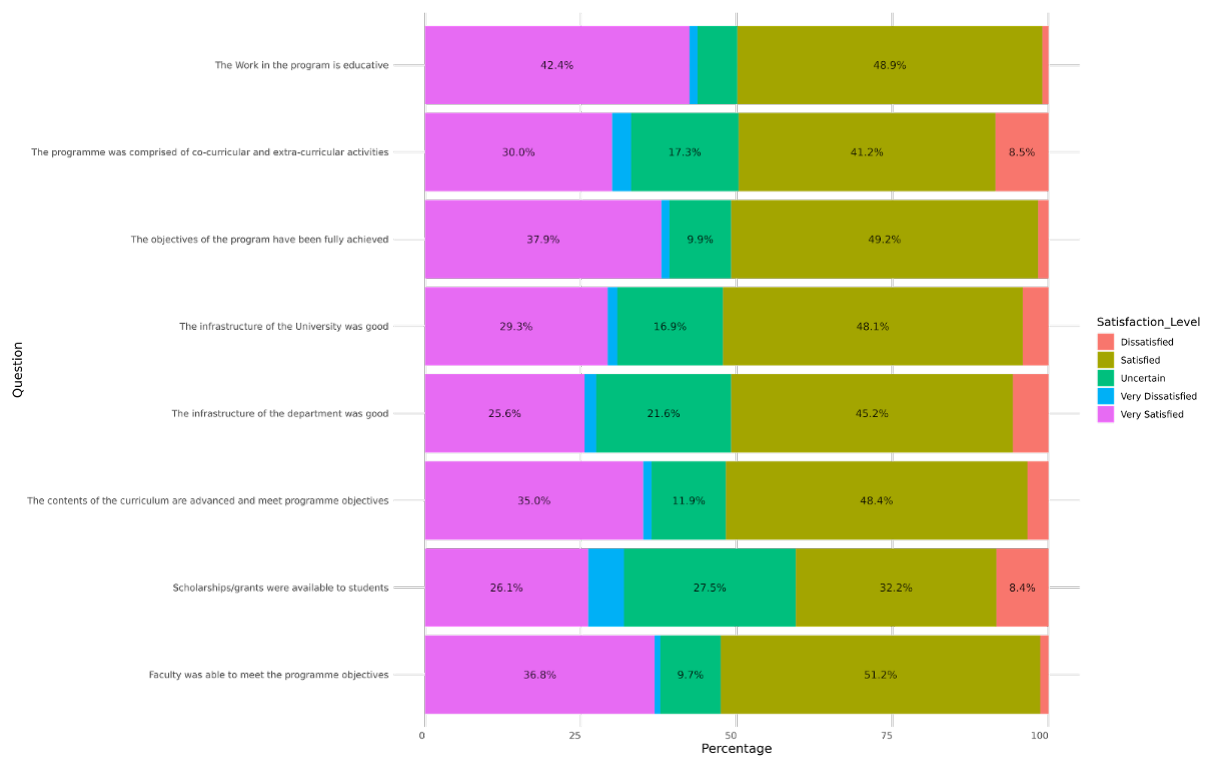**Figure 5: Trends in Percentage Faculty Satisfaction Levels on Campus Infrastructure & Resources**

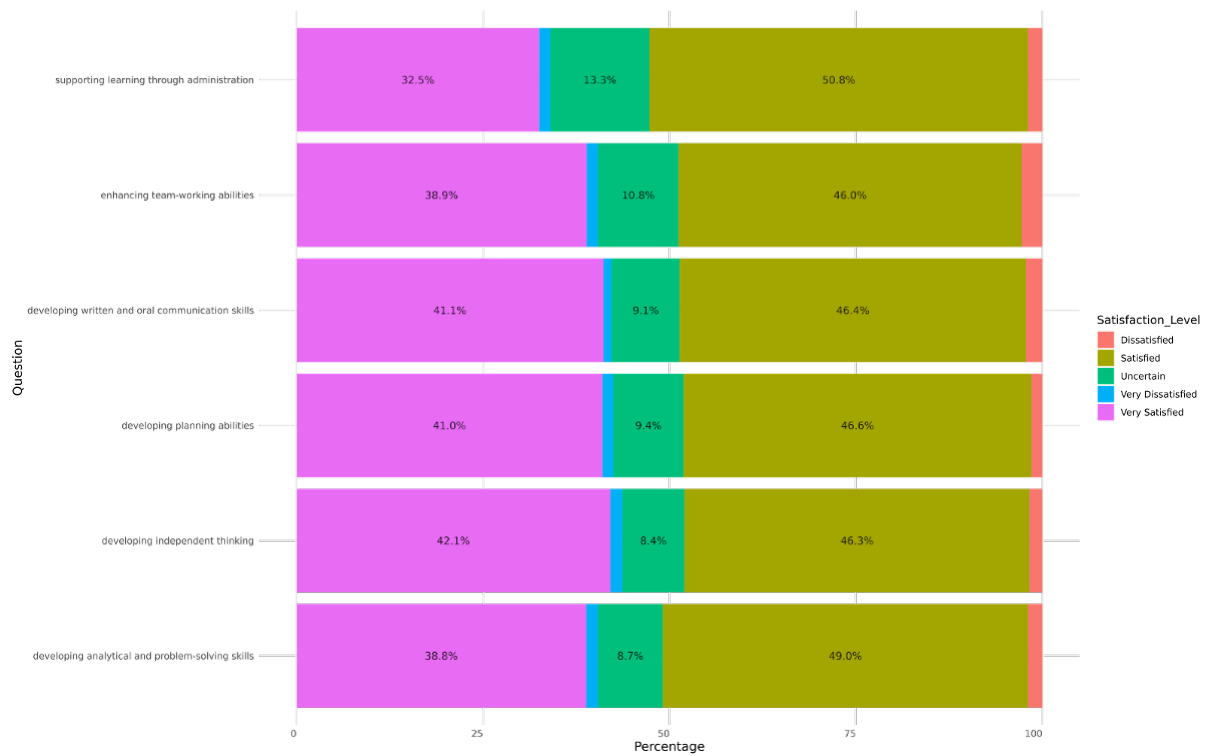**Figure 6: Percentage of Graduate Satisfaction Levels on Programme Objectives & Curriculum Quality**

Figure 7: Percentage of Graduate Satisfaction Levels on Programme Effectiveness
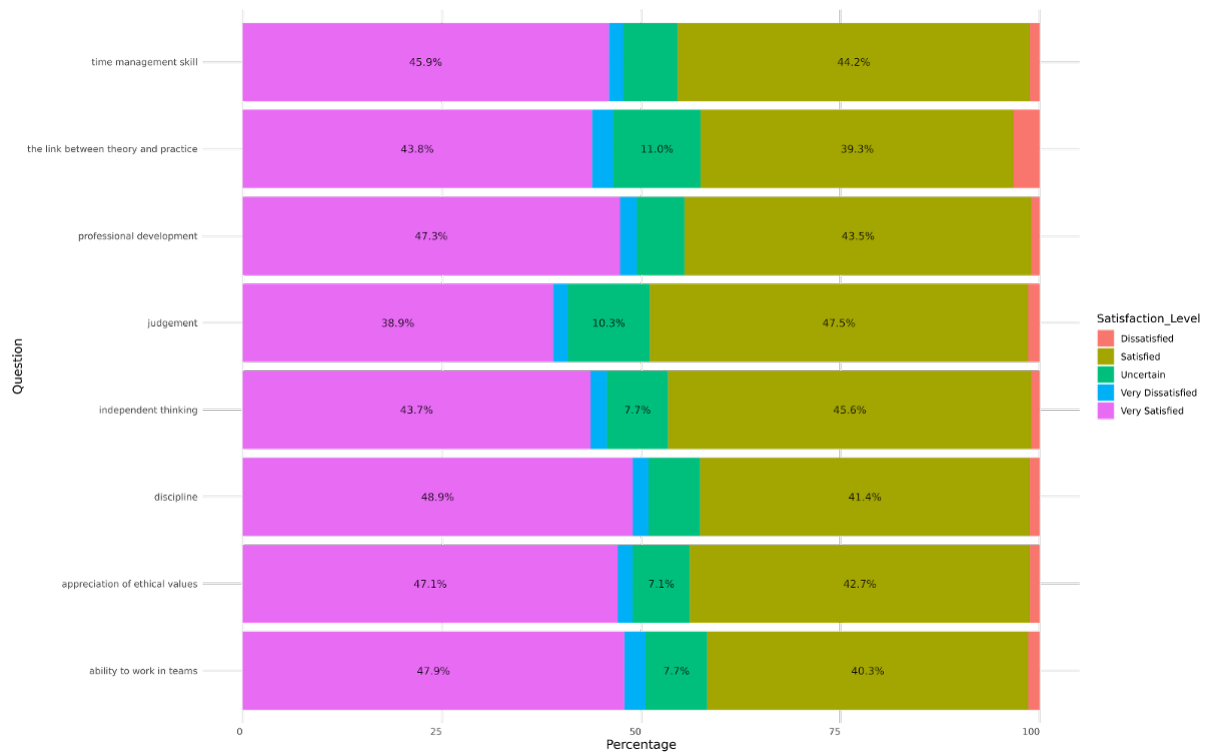
Figure 8: Percentage of Graduate Satisfaction Levels on Internship/SIWES Experience

a

b
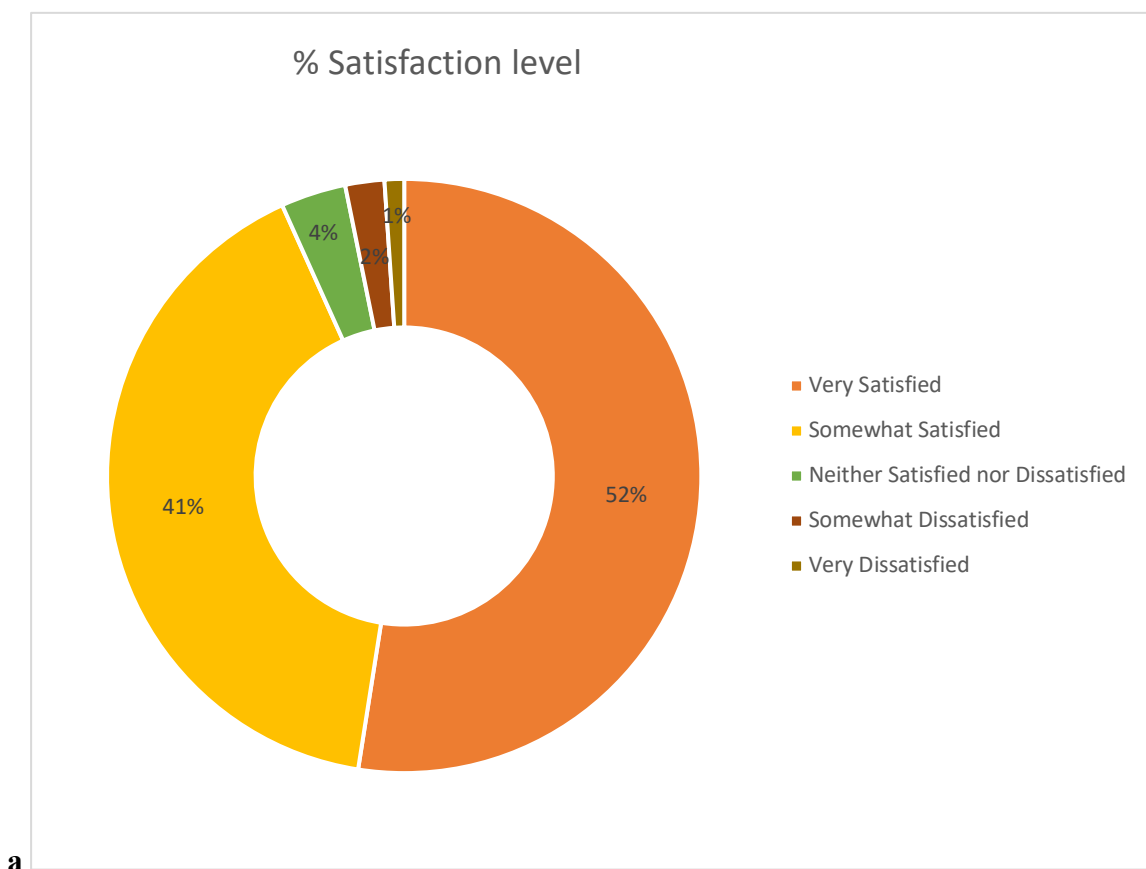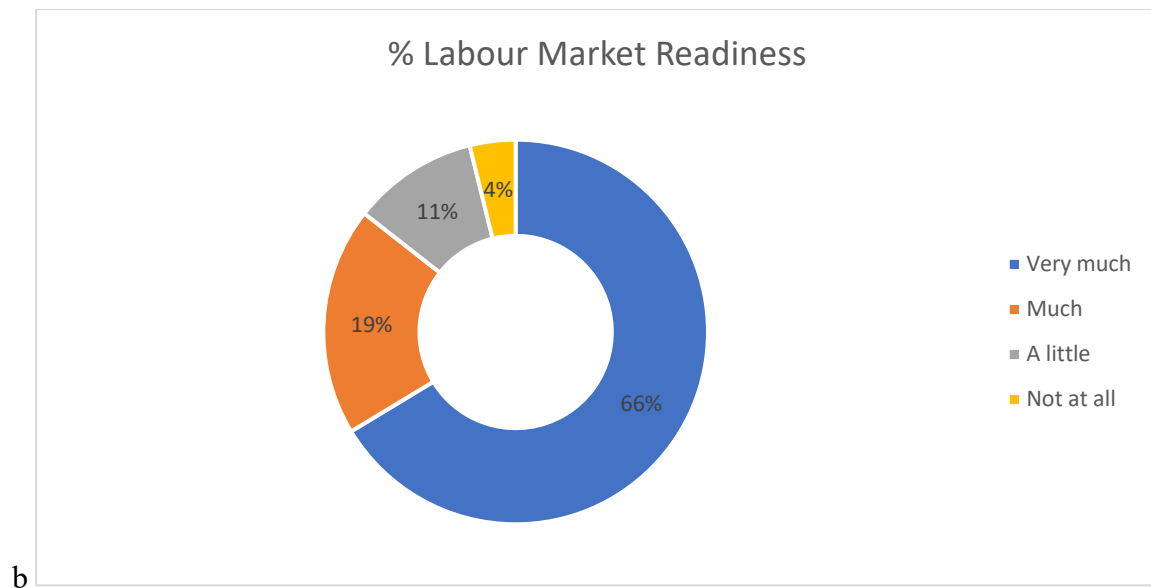
Figure 9: Postgraduate Exit Survey (2023/2024) with a focus on Graduate Overall Satisfaction with (a) Academic Programme and (b) Labour Market Readiness
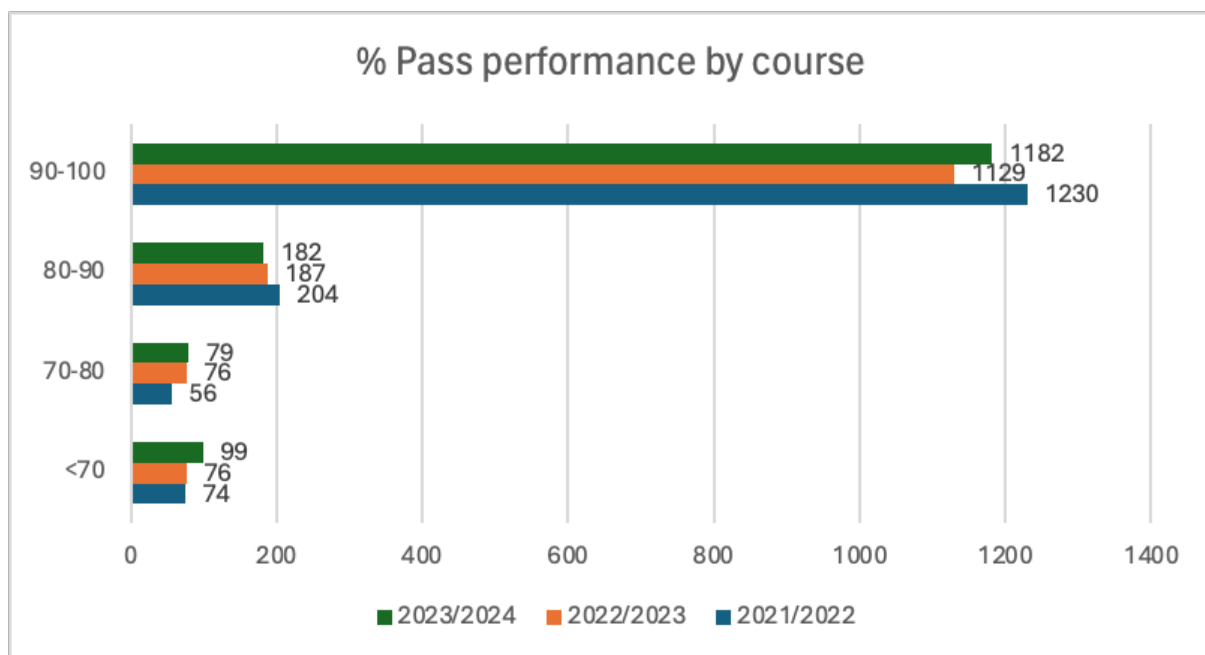
Figure 10: Student Course Performance Rate across three academic sessions

Table 1: Undergraduate Students On-time Programme Completion rates

Programme Duration	Entry Year	On-time Graduation Year	Percentage (%)
4-year programme	2018/2019	2021/2022	72
	2019/2020	2022/2023	66
	2020/2021	2023/2024	68
5-year programme	2018/2019	2022/2023	55
	2019/2020	2023/2024	66

Table 2: Graduate Students On-time Programme Completion rates

Programme Duration		Entry Year	On-time Graduation Year	Female Percentage completion (%)	Male Percentage completion (%)
3-year programme	PhD	2020/2021	2021/2022	19	17
		2021/2023	2023/2024	11	0
2-year programme	MSc.	2021/2022	2022/2023	87	55
		2022/2023	2023/2024	61	43

Table 3: Makeup Requests for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students

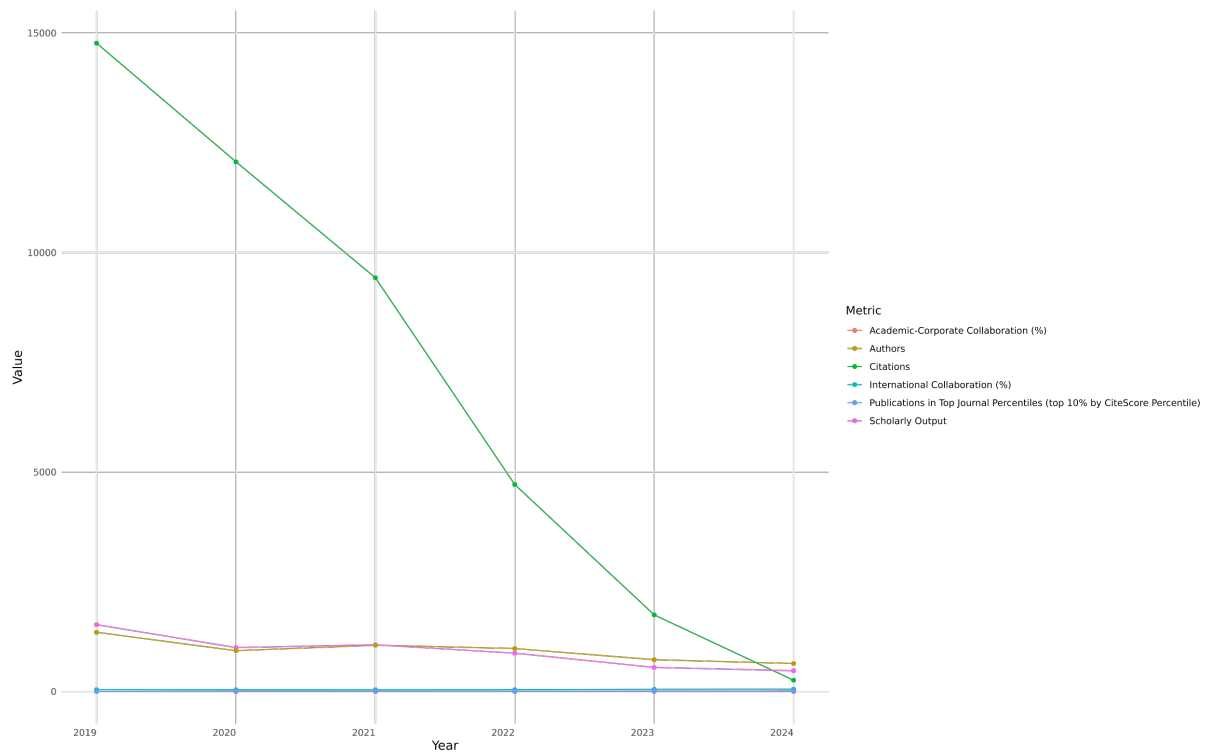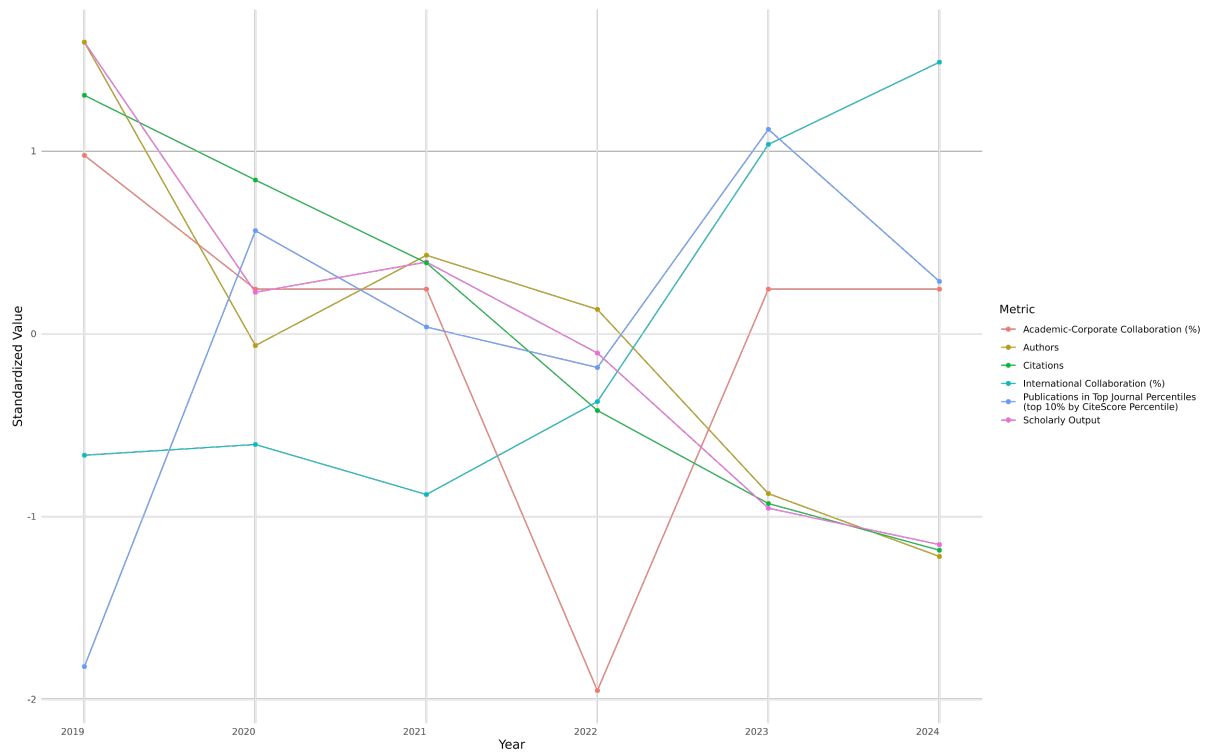| Academic Programme	Academic session	Number of Makeup Request	Number of Makeup Approved	Percentage Makeup Approved (%)
Undergraduate	2022/2023	4,895	243	4.96
	2023/2024	4,998	260	5.20
Postgraduate	2023/2024	3	3	100

Figure 11: Year-over-year Trend in Covenant University Research Performance with focus on Academic-Corporate Collaboration, Authors, Citations, International Collaboration, Publications in Top Journal Percentiles, and Scopus Scholarly Output
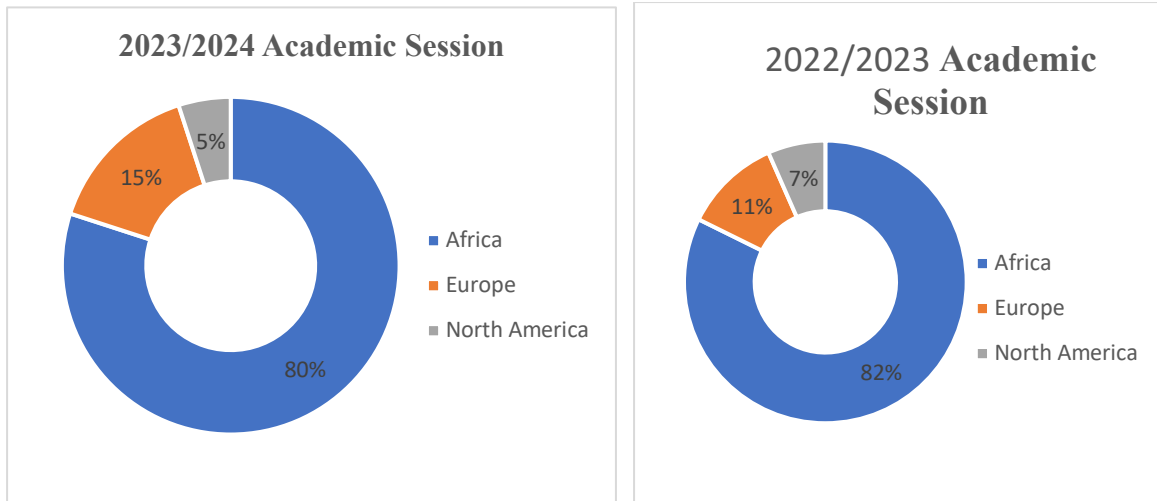
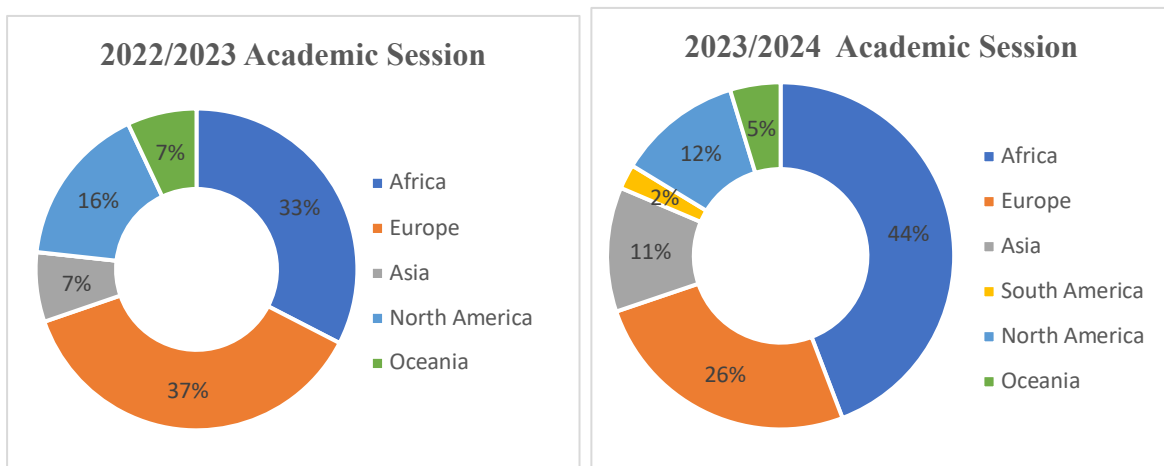**Figure 12: Percentage number of International Students in Degree Programmes by Session**

Figure 13: Percentage number of International Visiting Scholars Engaged at Covenant University by Session

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Covenant's strategic implementation of quality assurance tools has been pivotal in fostering a resilient and inclusive education system, enhancing institutional performance and stakeholder satisfaction. These measures have strengthened pedagogical effectiveness, improved learning outcomes, and ensured better alignment with the university's mission to nurture future leaders. However, specific areas require further attention for sustained growth and continued excellence. Priorities include enhancing the internationalisation of students and faculty to foster a globally competitive academic environment, refining welfare processes to address faculty and student needs better, and streamlining compliance procedures to mitigate issues in result processing and high positive revalidation outcomes. A stronger focus on enforcing student compliance with institutional rules and regulations will reinforce discipline and alignment with the university's core values. By addressing these areas, Covenant can further cement its position

as a model for resilient and inclusive higher education in Africa while contributing to the broader goals of quality and sustainable education as outlined in SDG 4

5. Acknowledgments

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