



## ***“Iminingo”***

### VICE-CHANCELLOR'S COMMUNIQUÉ

Thursday, 30 April 2019

## **UPDATE ON RECENT KEY DEVELOPMENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY**

### **Changes in management responsibilities**

In May 2018, I seconded Dr David Mohale to lead the Student Services Sector following the resignation of the then Registrar, Professor Thenjiwe Meyiwa. This secondment was subsequently ratified by Council in its meeting held in June 2018.

Dr Mohale led Student Services for almost 10 months. Under his leadership, the following were achieved:

- The section held a Strategic Planning Session for the first time. We have begun to implement some of the recommendations, which include, but are not limited to, the approval of additional positions taking into account student numbers that have grown exponentially over the years. We will also be using the Strategic Planning Session Report to inform and guide a major review that we need to do for the Student Services sector.
- The appointment of a highly experienced Dean of Students after numerous failed attempts since I assumed duty at DUT. Dr Maditsane Nkonoane assumed duty on 1 February 2019. In fact, the reason Dr Mohale no longer needs to assist in Student Services is precisely because of Dr Nkonoane's vast experience in this portfolio which allows him to assist the Registry almost effortlessly.
- After many years of student strife with regard to NSFAS payments through the SBux system, NSFAS agreed to devolve, with effect from February 2019, the responsibility for payment of student allowances to DUT following a series of engagements. We are still in the early days since we took over this function for proper assessment of its success. As I write, four payment tranches for February, March, April and May have already been smoothly and successfully made to our students.
- The establishment of the Student Parliament and the review of major policies within the ambit of student services, some of which will be ratified by appropriate structures during the course of the year.
- An increase of about 4000 additional beds available to DUT students from about 9000 in 2018 to slightly over 13 426 in 2019 for both our Durban and Midlands Campuses. There will be additional beds arising from the latest RFP that we are busy finalizing.

I wish to thank Dr Mohale for having enthusiastically accepted this delegation. He gave it his best shot in the shortest period of time, in addition to his daily duties in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor. I must note, though, that this withdrawal does not mean that when he is needed in Student Services or in any portfolio that the Vice-Chancellor feels he could make a contribution in are required, he would not be deployed there for whatever short period.

### **New Head for General Education**

On 17 January 2019, I announced that Professor Ashley Ross had been appointed as the new Head of General Education following the early retirement of the previous incumbent, Dr Delysia Timm. At that time, I had been assured that negotiations with Professor Ross had just been awaiting formalities. I wish to retract that announcement and apologize to both Professor Ross and the entire DUT community for the misinformation. Professor Ross and the negotiators could not agree on terms and conditions of his appointment, resulting in him not being appointed in that position at all.

Instead, the university has appointed Dr Suresh Ramsuroop to act as the Head of General Education for a period of six months starting from 1 February 2019. Dr Ramsuroop has been with DUT since 1990 when he started teaching at the then ML Sultan. He has scooped numerous local and international awards in his career as a researcher, an academic and an author. I am confident that he will use his depth and width of experience to help us reimagine General Education as a tool for production of all-round graduates with attributes to contribute the betterment of humanity.

### **Secondment of Professor Ashley Ross to the Planning Office**

With the development of the strategic plan and many other transformation and change management processes in process, Professor Ashly Ross has been seconded to the Planning Office to assist the Director: Institutional Planning, Ms Nicky Muller, with effect from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. He has been seconded as Specialist: Strategy and Operational Planning in the Office.

Professor Ross is currently a member of the Strategic Planning Working Group that I announced to the University community towards the end of last year. He brings with him in-depth knowledge of the University having served as academic Head of Department (HOD), Deputy Dean and Acting Executive Dean. Alongside assisting with developing the new Strategic Plan, he will also be responsible for drafting the 2020 Annual Performance Plan and in driving alignment of strategy down to department level.

### **Update on the processes relating to the formulation of the new Strategic Plan**

We started with consultations with stakeholders towards the end of last year in our deliberate quest to ensure that the process to develop our new Strategic Plan is consultative and inclusive. By now, we have made presentations to over 1200 members of staff, students and stakeholders.

We adopted this approach out of our firm belief and conviction that inclusion in planning enhances better understanding and ownership of the final product. It became evident during consultations that the University will have to place people at the centre of everything we want to do. Perhaps the single greatest lesson we learnt from the wide consultation with staff is that people – but, the right people I must add - are a source of anything to be done and achieved.

We have so far consulted with virtually all the stakeholders in the University. The first workshop was with Council in September last year. The second phase involved consultations with Faculties. We have further engaged all support services departments, the Midlands Campuses' staff, the Unions, the students through the Student Parliament, Alumni and the University Planning and Resources Forum (UPRF). Starting on Monday, 6 May 2019, there will be follow up focus group sessions facilitated by Professor Ross in order to delve into emergent themes from our discussions thus far.

While we do note some discordant voices from one of the stakeholders with regard to representativity of the Strategic Plan Working Group, I am glad that the process is largely receiving overwhelming support for most of the staff members we engaged with. As explained, the Working Group of experienced academics and other staff, some of whom actually teach strategy and operations, is simply about **working** to produce a draft of the strategic plan, under my direction. I often call upon many staff members to assist here and there based on their expertise. Thus, the Working Group is not a consultative or a politically representative structure. When Management has, with the group's assistance, produced a draft strategic plan, a consultative process will start where all stakeholders will participate. In any case, as mentioned in the paragraph just above, focus group sessions on various themes have been arranged. We call upon all members of staff and stakeholders to participate in those sessions.

The Working Group meets every Friday to monitor progress. As it drafts the strategic plan, it will take lessons from the environmental scan, the internal engagements and also from other trailblazing universities around the world that have achieved success in transforming and changing their being and have thus become great. We wish to have first-hand and intimate knowledge of what it takes to be a trailblazing, innovative, entrepreneurial and a 'damn' great university.

Lastly, albeit belated, I wish to take this opportunity to thank all staff members and students who attended our inaugural State of the University Address (SOUA) in Durban and Midlands Campuses on 27 and 28 February respectively. SOUA provides an opportunity for our collective reflection of our performance during a previous year, while also communicating plans for the new year. It is an integral part of our University planning cycle. We drew lessons from this year's experiences and the next one will certainly be a bigger success, qualitatively and quantitatively.

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