

**UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE**  
**ACADEMIC TURNAROUND STRATEGY**

**2010**

**Introduction**

The following academic plans and proposals are presented to Senate for consideration and, in some cases, approval. These are among the core proposals that will position the University of the Free State among the leading universities on the continent and, in the course of time, in the competitive rankings among world universities. Some of the changes proposed are physical and organizational in character, most are cultural in nature and therefore difficult but necessary to achieve as the UFS moves from being a good institution of higher learning to a truly great university.

**1. Compulsory Class Attendance**

The reasons for the poor throughput rate are multi-factored and complex, but one of the critical variables over which we have control is class attendance. Where class attendance is required, results are better than in courses or programmes where they are not. The Vice-Rector *Teaching and Learning* will discuss and bring a proposal to the Deans and to Senate for a pilot programme targeting those courses/modules with the lowest throughput rates for attention. Three requirements will have to be met from the side of management to implement this policy: adequate classroom space, high-quality teaching and appropriate technologies and staff support for recording class attendance.

**2. The Vice-Chancellor's Prestige Scholars Programme (Next Generation Professors)**

This initiative selects 25 of the most promising young scholars (new PhDs/terminal doctoral studies students) for intensive preparation in becoming the next generation of UFS professors. Intensive mentorship in the home institution with placement alongside leading scholars in their fields in other countries, the 25 prestige scholars will be placed on a fast-track scholarship programme with high-level research outputs over a three-year funded cycle. This initiative draws young scholars from the humanities and the sciences, and does not displace other capacity building actions for all young academics. This process will be driven by the Rector.

**3. The New Class of Senior Professors**

The UFS continues to receive applications from South Africa and abroad from senior academics wishing to be considered as one of the 25 senior professors of outstanding quality that could be added to the core of A and B-rated (or equivalent) scientists and scholars of the university. The Deans have been invited to identify from the short (or long) list those scholars who should be

invited for preliminary interviews within the relevant departments. The purpose of this initiative is to strengthen the professorial core of the university in ways that lead to a sharp increase in scholarly outputs, attracts top postgraduate students, and builds the intellectual climate on the campus. This process will be driven by the Rector.

#### **4. The New Academic Promotion Policy**

The existing academic promotion policy is uneven across Faculties and not demanding enough in line with the new academic standards being set for the university. The new academic promotions policy will set high and consistent standards for academic progression especially for promotion into the professoriate, and taking account of the standards of evidence in specialized disciplines such as music and the arts. For example, no person should be considered for promotion to senior lecturer and above without sustained (every year), high-levels of research outputs and positive teaching evaluations. The consultative process and the development of the draft academic promotions policy is being led by the Vice-Rector Teaching and Learning.

#### **5. The New System of Tenure**

The probation period for new academic staff will be taken very seriously, and it will no longer be a near-automatic transition from initial appointment to permanent appointment on the UFS establishment. The mechanism for achieving this will be a demanding but transparent application of the performance management plan for every new academic in which research and scholarship, in addition to teaching, will feature strongly in the academic outputs agreed to with the new staff member. This process will be supervised by the Vice-Rector Operations.

#### **6. The Institutional Ranking Assessment of the UFS**

In order for the UFS to position itself amongst the top-ranked universities in the world, it requires an honest assessment of its status as an academic institution followed by a detailed analysis of what it will take to shift the institution from its current status into a rankable position on one or more of the major university ranking indices in the world. This assessment exercise is being led by Dr Rolf Stumpf, currently acting CEO of the CHE, and the entire plan is being supervised by the Vice-Rector Teaching and Learning. The interim and final results of this exercise, including the consultative process, will be channelled through Senate.

#### **7. The Minimum Research Output Requirement**

Research is fundamental to the new vision of the University. In recent years academic research output has been in constant decline. There are academic departments within the University with 0 research outputs and even more with less than 1 unit of production. Research production is carried unevenly across the academic departments. The decline in research productivity and outputs not only has negative consequences for individual promotion, it also has

institutional consequences in terms of funding and stature for the UFS. *It is immediately proposed that Senate accepts a minimum (and it is only that) requirement of one research unit of publication in accredited journals for every full-time academic member of staff, whether permanent or on contract.* The Vice-Rector Research and Commercialization is responsible for overseeing this function, and ensuring that this standard of performance is met for every academic as specified. The Rectorate is in the process of investigating financial incentives and penalties that should accompany this requirement.

## **8. The Review of Academic Admissions Criteria**

The Vice-Rector Teaching and Learning will lead a task-team review of the academic admissions criteria of the UFS to determine whether our entrance requirements play a role in the high failure and drop-out rates across the institution and within specific faculties, departments and courses or modules. This review will take place under the oversight of and with participation of senior members of Senate. The dual considerations of funding streams and academic integrity will weigh heavily on the minds of the task team, as will the demands for equity and access among talented youth underserved by the public school system. The proposals of the task team will be considered by Senate during the course of 2010.

## **9. The Institute for Studies on Race, Reconciliation and Social Justice**

A document is being prepared for Senate to consider the formal establishment of the proposed *Institute for Studies on Race, Reconciliation and Social Justice* to be housed in the DF Malherbe House as a premier national and international site for scholarship and research on the themes of race, reconciliation, forgiveness and social justice studies within the context of higher education. An idea mooted in the wake of the Reitz incident, there has since been extensive consultations prompting the establishment of this Institute with shared institutional and external fundraising.

## **10. The Postgraduate School**

A document is being prepared for the establishment of a Postgraduate School that caters separately for the administration, development, promotion and advancement of postgraduate students and postgraduate studies at the UFS. In line with trends elsewhere, the goal is to build a strong and coherent postgraduate student community with high and consistent standards and expectations of postgraduate teaching, research and administration across the seven faculties. The Postgraduate School will fall under the authority of Senate.

## **11. The Undergraduate Core Curriculum Requirement**

Led by the Rector and the Vice: Rector Teaching and Learning, a Senate Task Team will be established to investigate the possibility and the content of a core undergraduate curriculum for all first-year students which provides the core knowledge and skills that is foundational to learning across the disciplines. The core requirement emphasises not early specialization but broad knowledge; it

conveys the intellectual qualities needed that enables students to think critically and engagingly across the domains of science, aesthetics, ethics, culture, values and ideas. This is not academic development, and yet the core curriculum provides added foundations for academic reading, writing and reasoning lodged in an interdisciplinary understanding of the world.

## **12. The Centre for Teaching and Learning**

The restructuring of CHESD will place higher education studies as a fifth department under the Faculty of Education and a separate Centre for Teaching and Learning devoted to the development of a scholarship of teaching in higher education and the study and improvement of undergraduate teaching at the UFS. The Vice-Rector: Teaching and Learning will prepare the documentation and conduct the consultation on the design and content of this Centre for presentation to Senate.

## **13. The Review of Academic Administration**

Following a critical review report by Professor Derek Swemmer of Wits University on academic administration at the UFS, a new structure and functionality is about to be implemented in this division. Academic administration requires new thinking in terms of technology and new leadership to implement the new plan. This plan requires the appointment of a new Registrar capable of taking-up the challenge of a modernised academic administration function at the UFS. Academic heads will continue to be consulted about the new plan and its implementation to ensure a much more efficient system of student administration from registration to graduation.

## **14. The Review of the Marketing Strategy**

The UFS Marketing Strategy is not very effective in terms of attracting the best students to the university as institution of first-choice. Mr Mickey Gordon will head-up marketing (and fund-raising) reporting to the Vice-Rector: External Relations. The Rector will play a more visible role in the marketing function especially to leading and promising schools through an aggressive national campaign. In this respect a close relationship will be built that synergises faculty-based and central-marketing initiatives to schools.

## **15. The New Fundraising Strategy**

The Vice-Rector External Relations is preparing the final fundraising plan for the UFS that involves [1] a capital fundraising campaign with the goal of raising R100 million, combined with [2] institution-wide fundraising strategies (there are six project proposals being drafted from the Rectorate), and [3] unit-based fundraising (like Beds of Hope or Boyden) where the proposals emerge from the departments or faculties of the UFS. The Rector will also spearhead some of the national and international fundraising campaigns with the relevant Vice-Rector; this is one of the reasons for the establishment of the Senior Vice-Rector position.

## **16. The First-Year Study Abroad Programme**

The Vice-Rector External Relations is working with his International Office to place the first 100 first-year students in a short study abroad programme as part of the effort to broaden the learning and exposure of our new undergraduate students. This project is one of the major institutional fundraising initiatives of the UFS. The students will be carefully selected and negotiations with the relevant academic departments concerned to minimize any impact on the UFS learning schedule of each student.

## **17. The Review of the Institutional Language Policy**

The Language Committee will be asked to review the existing UFS language policy against new demographic trends (diverse languages), funding realities (lack of state funding) and policy commitments (such as integration). The workload of academics and the costs of duplication of classes will be balanced against the language and learning needs of students. Concrete proposals will be brought to Senate for consideration and guidance.

## **18. The University-School Partnership Project**

The University will slowly scale-down many of its existing community-based projects and introduce a major school-university partnership project designed to strengthen the links between disadvantaged schools and first-year university access at an institutional level. Recognizing the value of the CPP and the extended degree programme for individual students, the USP is intended to make a direct and sustainable impact on the quality of education at school-level in conjunction with the provincial departments of education, starting in the Free State. This externally-funded project will be a very visible commitment of the UFS to its surrounding communities even as top students from these schools (especially first-generation students) are recruited into and prepared for advanced studies at the UFS. This project will be led by the Rector with the Vice-Rector Teaching and Learning, and the Dean of Education.

## **19. The Careers Preparation Programme**

The gap between university training and workplace demands is decried everywhere. The small initiative of the UFS will be scaled-up and other efforts co-ordinated to ensure that every graduate is optimally prepared for the world of work by the time of graduation. A document is under preparation for consideration by Senate so that the academic content of what the UFS does and the networks and programmes that connect degree-training to workplace demands, are in sync.

## **20. Incentives for NRF Ratings**

The existing incentives for NRF ratings will be reviewed so that there is much greater participation in the annual rating exercise and much greater motivation for pursuing upper-level ratings.