



DVC: Teaching and Learning

NWU OPENING ADDRESS 2021

**Address to the guests and staff of the NWU on the three Campuses
A Year of Continued Solidarity and Hope in 2021**

Introduction and acknowledgements

Good morning and welcome to this special opening of the academic year in which we reflect on the highlights and achievements of 2020 and share directions to be pursued in our core business in 2021. Thank you also to members of the management team who provided inputs into this address as part of the welcoming of academic and administrative staff at the official Opening of the University. Our theme in 2020 as University was one of “consolidation”, in terms of the operational model and systems, but in fact it turned out to be a year of accelerated change and responsiveness as Covid-19 developed. In 2021 we must shift energy, and so the theme today draws from the Vice Chancellor’s latest message to staff and students “A Year of Continued Solidarity and Hope”.

Our Strategy Statement is “To transform and position the NWU as a unitary institution of superior academic excellence with a commitment to social justice”. 2020 had the effect of making this commitment real in ways not anticipated. The sudden dispatch of students and staff to their homes as associated with Lockdown Levels 5 & 4 had the dramatic impact of transitioning the University to supporting the functioning of its core business away from the campuses. At the start of 2020 our actual first-time entering undergraduate enrolments totalled 12 286 for both contact and distance students. Commencement of the first semester for 2021 was 15 February, while our first year students will commence with their programmes on 17 March 2021. Our enrolment plan, as submitted to Department of Higher Education and Training for the 2020-2025

planning cycle, noted a target of 11 804 first-time entering undergraduate students for 2021ⁱ. As numbers for the 2020 academic year are being finalised, we can report on 13 709 graduates for contact as well as distance students alike. In 2020 NWU had 58 175 students enrolled on its three campuses.

2020 was a period characterised by abnormally high levels of restrictions, isolation, and anxiety, and so the efforts needed to foster hope, make empathy felt and strengthen communication and collaboration had to be redoubled. In 2021 we aim to do this through the resources of our core business: research and innovation, community engagement and teaching-learning.

This leads me into the next section of this talk focussing as it does on research and innovation, 2020 achievements and foci moving into 2021.

The Research and Innovation Project at NWU: 2020 achievements and new initiatives in 2021

The pandemic has also brought significant changes in the research field at the NWU but not withstanding the constraints, the NWU still remains in the top 7 institutions in South Africa in terms of research outputs. It is interesting to note that African scientists' share of the world's publications has been increasing over the past 20 years from 1.5% to 3.5% of the total contribution to the world research publications. The top 7 institutions in South Africa (which includes the NWU) published about 4 times more than the contributions from all other institutions combined in Africa, showing that the NWU is indeed fulfilling its dream to be an internationally recognised university in Africa. Furthermore, NWU is ranked among the top five (5) universities in South Africa in the area of citations by the THE. It was also the first time the NWU was featured in the THE Young University Rankings, which were announced in June last year.

In 2018 the NWU contributed a total of just less than 1 500 research outputs (1496) and the 2019 submissions totalled just over 1600 (1613). The total

research outputs received for 2020 already stand at 1336 with many contributions still coming in, and the deadline of submissions extended to March 2021. Due to the lock down and travel ban in 2020 a notable decrease in the numbers for conference contributions was observed, down from 143 in 2019 to only 18 in 2020. Luckily the electronic platform is picking up and various conferences are being presented on an online platform, which will still be the main channel of conference contributions in 2021.

During the Research and Innovation Awards evening of 2020 the newly rated NRF staff members were recognised and the NWU now has a total of 248 NRF rated researchers. We are proud that there is again an A1 rated researcher at the NWU, after some years without this prestigious rating. There has been a steady increase in NRF ratings in all faculties at the NWU over the past few years and this trend is also continuing. More than 50 applications for rating/re-rating have been received in the 2021 application cycle, for implementation in 2022.

One area that was detrimentally affected by the pandemic is the completion of masters' and PhD studies. Many laboratories were closed and the access to the university was also not possible for prolonged periods and even at lower lockdown levels during the pandemic, it was not possible for students to do face-to-face interviews, access schools and clinics to obtain data for their research projects. In 2018 a total of 748 Masters' degrees and 250 PhD's were conferred and in 2019, there were 800 master's graduates and 340 PhD's. A month of grace for submissions was given at the end of 2020 (18 December) but many students could not complete their studies in time, and it is envisaged that only 650 master's degrees and 240 PhD's will be awarded until May 2021. This decrease in numbers can impact on the subsidy the NWU receives, but on the other hand, many students have indicated that they will be able to hand-in their work for examination before the end of March 2021, resulting in increased numbers of graduates later in the year.

The NWU boasts with 12 Research Chairs and 41 research entities distributed amongst all 8 faculties of the NWU, with only 4 entities being internally evaluated in 2020, with one new proposed entity approved; Governance for Public Affairs (GPA), to be located within the Faculty of Humanities and based on the Vaal Campus of the NWU. Due to the doctoral review process that took place in 2020, the bulk of the time was spent on the preparation of the doctoral review, leaving little time for other internal evaluation processes.

In terms of capacity development approximately R2m of our UCDP funds was provided to staff to complete their postgraduate studies. The first future professor, appointed under the Future Professors Programme (FPP), run under the UCDP programme, was appointed in the Faculty of Health Sciences and a call is again opened for the 2021 academic year. In 2020 there were 215 postdoctoral research fellows hosted in the Faculties, of these 64 are South African citizens and the rest are from 36 different nationalities. The Office of the DVC R&I hosted 5 high level lectures on integrity and ethics, as part of the DVC's initiative to strengthen NWU integrity and ethics code of conduct for researchers and research projects.

Due to the pandemic, the national CHE Doctoral review took place in October of 2020. The NWU is awaiting the report, first for checking the factual correctness, after which it will most probably be released in April of 2021. The review has as aim the assurance and alignment of high standards for the offering and conferring of doctoral qualifications across all South Africa universities.

The research and innovation focus in 2021 will be to specifically concentrate on the various support strategies for improved academic integrity, in conjunction with research productivity, quality, excellence, visibility and impact, and the processes. For this reason, the newly formed Research and Innovation

Support Committee (RISC) was approved at the end of 2020 and already started to function early in 2021, assisting all research entities. The entity evaluation committee has also been given an official status as the Research Entity Evaluation Committee (REEC) and various internal programme evaluations will be done in 2021. At least 4 research forums will be held in 2021, hosted by the office of the DVC R&I. Sustainable and renewable energy sources remains a national and international pressure an increasingly we see a global trend for the need for stronger community partnerships, which brings me to the next section of my address.

Community and the NWU Engagement: 2020 achievements and new initiatives for 2021

Community Engagement has always been part of the University's dream and purpose as part of its contribution to social justice. Our strategy is to focus on sharing of our expertise/knowledge in addressing relevant community needs and to find sustainable solutions in collaboration with all stakeholders. Utilising trust relationships with communities in equal partnerships, the University is able to negotiate opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills in order to reach specific learning outcomes. Community engagement is the vehicle through which the university contributes to development and the attainment of the sustainable development goals.

We endeavour to have a collective impact on the economic, social and environmental well-being of society by sharing the expertise within the University and providing capacity building not only for our students, but also with civil society. The Deputy Deans for Community Engagement and Stakeholder Relations in our Faculties are managing CE activities across the campuses. Each Faculty has formed its own Stakeholder or Community Engagement committee that is focussed on getting faculty strategies aligned and updating policies for Community Engagement and guidelines for the

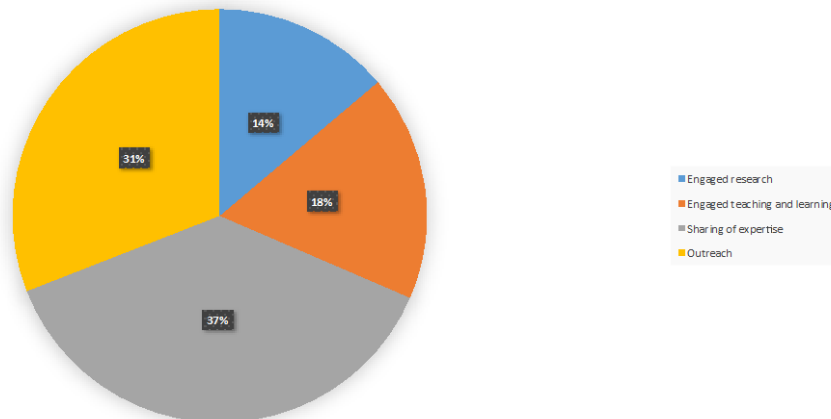
support of work-integrated and service learning across the university. Engaged teaching-learning, engaged research and outreach programmes are implemented for mutual benefit.

In 2020 our DVC for Community Engagement embarked on a food security project at local schools in the Ngaka Modiri Molema district of Mahikeng. This has taken the form of partnering with FNAS with the Crop Science subject group. The main aim of the food security project is to provide schools with the necessary vegetables for a nutritious meal and for the parents to learn gardening skills.

Covid-19 stalled our efforts but also opened opportunities to initiate other projects in order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. Despite this setback, we managed our engaged teaching-learning, engaged research and outreach where we shared our expertise. To mention a few initiatives, the Faculty of Engineering embarked on the food ATM, food relief disaster, ventilator and face shield projects, and the FNAS, Chemistry Subject group prepared a hand sanitiser and part of it was donated to two schools, namely, Sebopiwa Primary and Tetlano High Schools. The Faculty also offered the mobile science laboratory to be used by the Department of Health in the fight against Covid-19. Our Library services raised funds through SASOL to provide equipment and training for the benefit of the visually impaired community members around the North West Province. The project was launched at the Mmabatho Community Library with partners, Department of Arts, Culture, Sports and Recreation on 5 November 2020.

This has led to a total of 105 student led community engagement projects in 2020.

NWU CE profile (2020)



With over 320 registered CE projects overall at the NWU and more than 3000 students volunteering and engaged in community projects.

The University is furthermore one of only nine South African and European universities that are involved with the Common Good First campaign funded by the European Union Erasmus Plus programme. One of the main objectives of the campaign is to stimulate digital literacy and the idea of storytelling for learning in all types of communities. As this is all about the “common good” of societies, it focuses on encouraging people who have found their own solutions for challenges to share their stories. The idea behind the project is to share any kind of social innovation with the world and more especially between universities and students and create networks of shared solutions across the world. We continue to work with the global world to share and learn best practices.

In March 2021 we will be honouring our academic staff members and their teams for their contributions in community engagement. We continue to work

together and hope 2021 will be a better year for the university and the community at large.

The Curriculum Project at NWU: 2020 achievements and initiatives for 2021

2020 was a good year for the NWU in terms of international recognition. The 2020 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) placed the NWU in the sixth position in South Africa, while the Times Higher Education World University Rankings placed NWU between 501 and 600 out of the 1397 participating universities. The research focus on high quality, high impact outputs contribute to our international profile.

The THE also ranked the NWU among the top five (5) in its Emerging Economies University Rankings, which were released in February 2020. Overall, the NWU was placed in position 109 out of the 533 universities from 47 countries. Apart from the NWU, nine other South African universities were also ranked.

The THE University Rankings are considered to be the largest and most diverse university rankings to date. In addition to THE's rankings, the NWU also received favourable rankings by the Centre for World University Rankings (CWUR).

For 2021 THE World Rankings announced their results by subject on 28 October. These rankings cover 11 subject areas, with performance in each area measured across four aspects. These aspects are teaching, research, knowledge transfer, and international outlook. The NWU was measured against 1 512 universities globally. The NWU has excelled among South African universities in the various subject areas. It was third overall locally in engineering, psychology, and physical sciences, fourth in clinical and health sciences, and sixth with law and life sciences. The NWU was seventh with both

business and economics and education, and eighth in arts and humanities and social sciences. The NWU was also one of only 13 South African universities to be included in the seventh annual US News and World Report's Best Global Universities Rankings for 2021. The NWU was ranked among the top seven universities in South Africa and named number 564 on the list of the best universities globally.

Internally to NWU we hosted the Annual Teaching-Learning Excellence Awards event in early 2020 and were able, shortly before the lockdown, to recognise and celebrate the achievement of some 36 members of the NWU academic staff, for their contribution to teaching-learning excellence. We also hosted 3 online Careers Fairs for our students and corporate sector attendance was great.

2020 saw exciting progress on the NWU qualification and programme offerings. New qualifications that were added are the Bachelor of Engineering in Mechatronic Engineering. Our distance offering includes the Postgraduate Diplomas in Special Needs Education and another in Education Management and Leadership; and an Advanced Diploma in Intermediate Phase Mathematics. Campus alignment continues to be strengthened with five BSc honours programmes also now available at the Vanderbijlpark campus. Likewise the BCom honours programmes saw extensions to our other campuses: The Honours in both Marketing Management and Entrepreneurship are also available in Potchefstroom and Vanderbijlpark and the BCom in Business Operations may now be taken in Vanderbijlpark too. Another programme in Environmental Management added to the growth in the Master's degree category. In total over 23 programmes were approved by the DHET in 2020.

During a time of tremendous challenge when Covid-19 disrupted the academic programme, the NWU Centre for Teaching and Learning played a crucial role

in ensuring the continuance of online Teaching and Learning. The CTL established a Keep on Teaching and Learning web site with focused lecturer, student, and distance student support pages. These pages provided daily updated news on the pandemic and teaching, learning and assessment support in the online modality. The CTL Induction Programme for new academics was also affected by the pandemic and had to be replanned for online delivery and participation. Ultimately 49 new academics attended the induction programme. The satisfaction rate relating to the overall experience of the new academics was 90%, thus easily meeting the objective of an 80% satisfaction rate.

During 2020, CTL also offered 79 Academic Professional Development (APD) opportunities to more than 2000 academic staff members, mostly in the online modality, and with an overall satisfaction rate of 88,6% and we continued to support the development of 22 NGap appointments with DHET funding. Last year we met all our earmarked grants reporting deadlines and the excellence of University stewardship of resources was recognised in NWU doubling the allocation of UCDP funding for the next funding cycle from 30 million in 2017 to 45 million per year for the next three years.

At a policy development level, the revision of the 2016-2020 Teaching-Learning Strategy of the NWU was completed and the new T-L Strategy 2021-2025 was approved by Council in November 2020. The revised Strategy will impact in 2021 on the revision of the Faculty's Integrated Teaching-Learning Plans and the Teaching-Learning and Assessment Rules of the University, with a strong focus on the importance of preparing our students for transitions from first to final years of undergraduate and onwards to postgraduate study so as to give expression to self-direction, project and problem-based learning and the realisation and mastery of graduate attributes that we as a university, and our graduate employers, covet.

During 2020 we were able to remain true to the spirit of the NWU Language Policy and continued working towards the ambitious aspirations of starting the implementation of Faculty Language Plans to the best extent possible, given the disruption caused by the pandemic. We continued particularly to develop short courses enabling staff to teach more multilingually, while language acquisition short courses were also presented. All of these activities were adapted so as to enable a transition to the online environment, opening up new and exciting prospects in the process.

In addition to the doctoral qualifications review in 2020, and despite the disruptions caused by the Covid pandemic, other undergraduate, honours and or structured masters programmes engaged with Internal Programme Evaluations (IPE's) in the Faculties of Natural and Agriculture Sciences (2), Humanities (5), Theology (3) and Engineering (1). Furthermore, virtual External Programme Evaluations (EPE's) were conducted for the Faculties of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (FNAS), Engineering, and Theology. These reports and Improvement plans have already served at the Senate Committee for Teaching and Learning. Several Internal and External programme Evaluations are scheduled to take place during 2021. The University also expects to host several statutory body evaluations during the course of 2021. These include, but are not limited to, the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), the South African Council for Planners (SACPLAN) and the South African Board for People Practices (SABPP). During 2020 even the NWU Council underwent a comprehensive self-evaluation followed by a peer evaluation, with excellent results. In 2020, a similar process was followed for Student Judicial Services. Peer evaluations planned for 2021 include the Career Centre, Protection Services, Library and Information Services, Technology Transfer and Innovation Support (TTIS) and also Student Academic Life Cycle Administration.

In relation to student and staff support and with careful coordination with our Finance Division, we have been able to successfully deliver a number of initiatives. At the outset of Covid-19 our surveys showed that NWU students needed 6500 laptops. The NWU was able to procure 3534 laptops during the lockdown period to offer students as a loan device. By November 2020, of the 3534 laptops, 3436 had been successfully accepted or delivered.

During Semester 1, 2020 up to 61% (29869) of UG students received data from the University during different months, while being off campus; By end Semester 2, 2020 the numbers subsided to 34,5% (16 893) of undergraduate students being supported with data monthly as many returned to campus and then had access to computer labs and libraries. Of these numbers, 10 289 were NSFAS students. These efforts alone show in material terms how all our efforts as University are geared to supporting student success and the support of our staff, so much so that preliminary indications are that our students achieved in 2020 a 91% pass rate when compared to the 85.6% pass rate in 2019.

In 2020 the Unit for Continuing Education (UCE) offered 43 short learning programmes with a total of 2276 participants with an income generated in excess of the 52 million. We were pleased after a long search process to appoint a new Director at the end of the year. Also in 2020 Council approved a special structure for the NWU Business School to position itself better nationally as a premier provider of executive education with a particular focus on Africa. Several national online Think Tanks, and African Bon Bon events featuring short interviews with prominent entrepreneurs and economy commentators, government as well as academic experts, were held and at the end of 2020. An important benchmarking exercise in collaboration occurred with the University of the Witwatersrand, and the School similarly made a substantive appointment of a new Chief Director towards the end of the year. In 2021 the Business School will make application for its AMBA reaccreditation.

Whilst Covid-19 affected student success rates, and compelled a repositioning of outreach as well as commercialisation opportunities, important academic and infrastructure initiatives which commenced in 2020, receive extra energy in 2021.

In 2021 we will also pursue the further development of a Centre for Higher Education Development with the Senate and Faculty of Education, and the professionalisation of University teaching at the NWU through the development of a postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education both of which have received support by the Faculty. Also afoot for the year is the focus on Language, Race and Gender as key themes for cross-curricular engagement between academics and students of the NWU to be offered in the online modality. It promises to be a very exciting year ahead everyone. The attention we focus on our core business depends of course on the capacity of our single most valuable resource, you, and so in the next section I focus on leading for change at NWU.

Leading for change in 2020 and readiness for 2021

Our sector was affected financially also last year. In June 2020, the National Treasury (NT) indicated the reprioritisation of state funds for universities in order to accommodate Covid-19 related activities as follows:

- The earmarked grant for Infrastructure and Efficiency Grant (IEG) of R2 840,532 million for 2020/21 has been reduced by R710 million, of which R210 million is reprioritized for Covid-19 related activities at universities. The net amount of R500 million has been deducted from the Department's budget;
- University subsidies have been reduced by R2 500 million, of which R2 117,404 million is reprioritized for Covid-19 related activities at universities. and
- R2 500 million of NSFAS state funds has been reprioritized for Covid-19 related activities, in particular the purchase of student devices. This R2

500 million involves universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. Furthermore, NT has reallocated an amount of R2 327,404 million (R210 million and R2 117,404 million noted above) to accommodate Covid-19 responsiveness (CR) expenditures within universities. These expenditures are related to changes in teaching and learning (CRG1) which include changing the traditional contact tuition, or face-to-face tuition, as well as changes in campus readiness (CRG2).

As regard the Revised Block Grant Budgets for 2020/21 the sector block grant of R3. 5729 018 billion (excluding the gap grant) for 2020/21 was cut by R382,596 million, representing a cut of 1.07%.

In 2021 the NWU employs 3942 permanent staff of which 1559 are academics and 2383 are support. The University also employs 647 temporary positions when compared 884 in 2020. In anticipation of an eventual normalisation of campus life, critical infrastructure needs will receive attention in 2020.

Infrastructure development is linked to our student and staff value proposition. The challenges of the initial lockdown levels were overcome by implementing remote working practices which enabled the planning and procurement processes of projects to continue. Maintenance work has also been impeded in this respect and some delays are still experienced in obtaining materials. Though time was lost due to construction activities that were halted, but project- and construction teams are making an effort to progress efficiently under the restrictions and regulations of the different lockdown levels still enforced. To highlight a few infrastructure projects that you can look forward to: On the Vanderbijlpark Campus, the new administration building will be completed in few months which will lead to the conversion of the old building into a multi-purpose hall for the campus. The new main road and lecture halls should also be completed soon this year and construction will start on the new Psycho Social Health Building which is planned for completion in 2023. A new building-

link between the two buildings occupied by the Economic Sciences Faculty is being planned to improve and expand their teaching learning experiences and spaces.

The Mahikeng Campus is looking forward to the completion of the first phase of the new student residences, which will provide 1728 additional beds at the end of the project. This project will set a bench mark on how different funders (being universities, DHET and DBSA) in the sector can come together to respond to the needs of our students. Additional lecture rooms are being planned which will support the new way of learning. The Disability Unit will be relocated to a new space adjacent to the Campus Health Clinic and will offer a one-stop health support service to students. The Business School's and UCE's new space will be completed along with the new Building for Psycho Social Health this year. Various academic departments will be relocated while their spaces are being upgraded. A new Law Clinic that will serve the community is planned for construction in the near future.

On the Potchefstroom Campus the construction of the new laboratories for Education will start soon along with the completion of the High Performance Institute's new space. The refurbishment of Building K21 will then start to enable the movement of the Biokinetics gym into an academic environment. The Library at Education Sciences will be extended to support group work activities of students. Biological- and Geospatial Sciences will also relocate to upgraded spaces. The Wag-'n-Bietjie residence's upgrade will continue. Due to the financial impact of Covid-19, some infrastructure projects have been rescheduled for execution in 2022. These developments include projects that are part-funded also by the DHET as part of their Infrastructure and Efficiency Funding. The value of projects completed in 2020 is R163,029m while R214m will be carried over into 2021, the total approved amount for projects for 2021 is R739 832 498. The limited funding available from DHET for new

infrastructure projects will be focused towards improving on the new ways of learning.

Concluding remarks

In the effective working of our University we ask our leadership to welcome, support and assist with the induction of new members of staff into the NWU Way, and all staff to welcome our students most of whom have returned to our campuses. Though we need to retain the teaching-learning project mostly in the online modality in order to remain compliant with Covid-19 related regulations, please do ensure that there is adequate staff presence in our support offices as well as academic leadership offices so that friendly faces and words of welcome and support are experienced by the student body to facilitate the settling down to academic work and the smooth commencement of the academic programmes. Our commitment to staff development, student support research and teaching and learning excellence remains firm in this year of solidarity and hope. We have the advantage of immense learning and understanding about how to operate effectively during a national (health) disaster in 2020, and so together we can approach 2021 with that spirit of hope and optimism, careful to curtail risks to our communities and determined to overcome the impact of isolation, fear and anxiety associated with Covid-19. Even within an ethos of Covid compliance we will strive to enhance our ethos of care, so as not only to minimise the risk to lives, but also to enhance the sustainability of the NWU as an academic community devoted to social justice and committed to excellence.

Thank you.

References:

NWU Strategy, 2020
NWU Teaching and Learning Strategy, 2021-2025.
NWU Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and TLA Rules, 2019

ⁱ Data verified by Strategic Intelligence in February 2021 (2020 data not-final)