

VC newsletter

Dear Colleagues,

The 3rd term of 2007 has come and gone in the blink of an eye, and with spring in the air we know that the end of the 2007 academic year is looming.

Towards the end of the third term we encountered a number of difficulties, some of which made the media. These include the following, and I mention them specifically to highlight the seriousness of the cases:

- Plagiarism (and probably academic fraud) with regard to the production of a number of PhDs and Master's degrees have come to light. This is obviously viewed in a very serious light; as such cases cast suspicion on all degrees the NWU has awarded. The cases are being investigated thoroughly and more information will be made available at a later stage. In the meantime, I appeal to all school directors and study leaders to act with the greatest responsibility and the highest integrity in the process of guiding Master's and PhD students.
- A number of cases of theft and financial fraud have also been uncovered. In one case it involves a large sum of money, which was defrauded over a long period of time. Again, investigations are underway and more information will be made available as applicable.
- One case of an outside service provider offering and awarding a qualification that was not agreed to by the NWU (and in fact was not accredited by the HEQC) has also occurred. An investigation is underway, and I appeal to senior managers to review all outside contracts and agreements urgently. These should all be approved by the legal office, because poorly phrased or drawn-up agreements can bring the NWU's good name into disrepute.
- What is gratifying is that our internal control mechanisms brought some of these issues to light. In the process leading to the Institutional Audit in 2009, we will continuously review internal processes to determine whether these are adequate to act as efficient control mechanisms.

At an operational level, we are struggling with the consolidation of the old systems in order to issue all staff members with IRP5 tax certificates. I have had a discussion with the authorities, and a plan is being crafted to ensure that staff members will not be penalised in the event that the set deadlines cannot be met. More information will be made available as soon as possible.

On the other hand, there is ample good news to report too...

- We had a very good Council meeting on 21 September 2007. The Council newsletter can be read elsewhere, but I would like to share with you that the Council is functioning very effectively, and a constructive spirit continues to prevail at meetings. This specific Council meeting dealt with its agenda before 14:00, having started at 10:00.
- The North-West University's commitment to upholding best practice in effective management and corporate governance was acknowledged as the NWU was awarded the joint first place with the Central University of Technology at the PricewaterhouseCoopers Higher Education Governance Excellence Award Ceremony in Port Elizabeth on 27 August 2007. The NWU has previously achieved second and fourth positions. This clearly indicates that we are indeed "getting it right"...
- The SA government announced the Fundza Lushaka Bursary Programme in December 2006. The aim of the programme is to enable students of high academic promise and commitment to undertake professional teaching education and, upon qualification, to enter the service of provincial departments of education. An amount of R120 million was approved for 2007, of which R7,2 million (205 bursaries of R35 000 each) was allocated to the North-West University. The bursaries were awarded during a ceremony at the Potchefstroom Campus. The Deputy Minister of Education, Mr Enver Surty, officiated at the ceremony, and expressed satisfaction with the number and quality of students who received the bursaries. Choirs from the Potchefstroom and Mafikeng Campuses performed during the ceremony.
- At the level of research, the following good news can be shared:
 1. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) is finalising the allocation of the third DST Hydrogen Centre of Competency (CoC) to NWU and the CSIR, with NWU in the lead position for the first five years. The

programme is expected to run for between five and 15 years and NWU and the CSIR will be hosting the Hydrogen Infrastructure CoC. The work will include hydrogen production, storage, reticulation and codes and standards. The CoC will receive R6 million per annum (to be shared equally by NWU and the CSIR) for the management effort. This project is expected to be of strategic value to NWU and will pioneer many collaborative research and innovation activities.

2. Two NRF Niche Areas have been approved for funding at the Potchefstroom campus. Another three NRF Niche Area funding applications, one at the Potchefstroom campus (Education), one at the Vaal Triangle Campus (Basic Sciences) and one at the Mafikeng Campus (Research and Graduate Studies), have been submitted to the NRF.
3. In 2007 the NWU received R3,06 million from the NRF for THUTHUKA grant holders, R1 178 332 for the NRF Niche Area programme and a total of R7,4 million for the NRF Focus Area programme. A grant of R5 million was received from the NRF in 2007 for specialised research equipment (nuclear magnetic resonance spectrometer) at the NWU (Potchefstroom campus).
4. The NWU received R14,4 million from THRIP in 2007 and we are part of the top five universities (UP, Wits, US, UCT and NWU) that received the most THRIP funding.
5. The NWU post-doctoral programme increased from 18 post-doctoral fellows in 2006 to 32 in 2007.

The Mafikeng campus benefited from investments made in the Centre for Applied Radiation Science and Technology (CARST). R1,5 million was allocated for the construction of laboratories and office space. It is expected that the building will be completed before the end of this semester. Laboratory equipment to the value of some R1,5 million was ordered and has begun to arrive. A total of five industry lecturers have been appointed as Adjunct Professors for five years. Three posts have been advertised that, if filled, will bring the staffing situation to five full-time and five part-time staff members. Two technicians are also expected to be recruited, as these posts are funded by DST.

Due to the geographic location of the three campuses and Institutional Office, staff interaction has always been a challenge. The Institutional Management has approved the first ever Inter-Campus Social Day for staff, to be held on 9 November.

At the Vaal Triangle campus, the Resilient Educators Programme (Reds) was compiled by Dr Linda Theron, senior lecturer in the School of Educational Sciences, in collaboration with Dr Ike Xaba, from the same school. The programme aims to empower teachers with better coping skills and greater resilience with regard to the HIV/Aids pandemic. Thus far the programme has been successfully implemented among volunteer educators from three provinces, and it is expected that the programme will shortly be extended to three more provinces. In an effort to broaden the scope of the programme, Dr Theron and her fellow-researchers from the University of Pretoria and the Potchefstroom campus recently met with a visiting academic from the USA.

Thank you to all of you who have supported the Know Your Status, Each one reach Five campaign by having an HIV test done... it's only through continued awareness that we will be successful in addressing this pandemic.

In early August the Faculty of Engineering hosted a visit by the Minister of Science and Technology, Dr Mosibudi Mangena, at the opening of the Fabrication Laboratory (FabLab). This new facility is a world-class enterprise that gives the users (from school learners to engineers) the opportunity to develop ideas, create designs, and develop and test the designs. The FabLab at the Potchefstroom Campus is the fifth of its kind in the country, and has already been instrumental in developing a community-based alarm system, an affordable disposable thermometer and a revolutionary light bulb. This facility is supported by the Department of Science and Technology.

In addition, a number of important processes are underway:

The roll out of the new NWU brand is proceeding in earnest following the approval of the brand roll-out plan by the Council on 22 June 2007. A project management approach, through the Projects Office in the Institutional Office (IO), has been adopted by the Institutional Corporate and Branding Identity Committee (ICBID) to oversee the successful implementation of the new brand across the Institutional Office and three campuses.

A follow-up of the 2005 culture and climate survey is being planned for distribution at the end of this month. At present, the questionnaire is being finalised with stakeholder groups that include the Senate, Institutional Forum and senior management. I would like to appeal to all staff to participate in this survey. We hope to give a full report back to all staff before the end of the year, but at least before the end of January 2008.

Management has started with the process to update/revise the Institutional Plan. IM will table the updated plan at the November Council meeting. We have come a long way since the first round in 2006 and are indeed well underway to achieve the respective milestones.

In conclusion: this is a hectic time of the year. I wish everyone well and hope that your commitment and strength will remain at high levels until the last working day of the year or the start of your leave – whichever comes first! Thank you for all the wonderful things we have already achieved in 2007!

Kind regards,

Theuns Eloff
Vice-Chancellor