

From the office of the Vice-Chancellor

8 September 2004

Dear Colleagues and Students

The year 2004 has been very eventful thus far and it is hard to believe that two thirds of the year is gone! Spring is almost upon us, and the examinations are also fast approaching...

I would like to "take stock" of our merger process with you... how far we've come, and where we still have to go.

How far have we come?

- There are certain milestones that should be mentioned:
- Our Council has been constituted and is functional.
- Certain fundamental policy decisions have been taken, such as the acceptance of the general academic rules, common admission requirements, a common academic calendar for 2005, a student disciplinary code and constitution of the Institutional SRC.
- A vice-chancellor (VC) and senior management have been appointed and are busy planning for the rest of the year, both at institutional and campus level.
- Negotiations on the basic conditions of employment are well advanced, and should be ready by 1 January 2005.
- Work on common policies has also progressed well. Most of these will become functional on all campuses on 1 January 2005.
- The alignment and integration of systems and procedures have also progressed well.

Where do we have to go?

There are, however, numerous challenges remaining for the rest of the year:

- There are a number of vacancies that will have to be filled as soon as possible. Without effective management, our new policies will not be implemented, and progress cannot be showed.
- The elections for campus SRC's (on Mafikeng and Vaal Triangle – Potchefstroom campus have completed theirs), as well as the formal establishment of the Institutional SRC must be completed. Next year, the election of campus SRC's should coincide more closely, preferably in the same month.
- The future of the Mankwe Campus must be finalised, in the best interests of everyone involved.
- The Minister of Education still has to accept our statute, by certifying that it is in line with the Higher Education Act. The draft statute submitted to the Ministry in March 2004 is, to our mind, completely in line with the Act. We should be able to settle certain issues raised recently by the Ministry satisfactorily.
- There are two Council meetings scheduled for the rest of this year: on 7 and 8 October at the Mafikeng Campus and on 26 November at the Vaal Triangle Campus. The budget for 2005 is on the agenda of the October meeting. The proposed budget has been unanimously accepted by the Extended Management Committee last week, for recommendation to the Council.
- The office space for the Institutional Management (IM) team should be finalised.
- Training and capacity building for the different layers of management is crucial if we want to be successful as a university.
- The institutional plan has to be submitted to the Department of Education (DoE) before the end of the year.

- The IM has to finalise the allocation of first-year students to the respective campuses within the capping policy to be announced by DoE by the end of September.

The process to appoint senior management

It is clear that there seems to be a measure of misunderstanding about the process among some staff members. Allow me to highlight aspects of the process once again:

- In the best interests of the merger and our new university, Council agreed unanimously at its meeting on 18 June 2004 to follow an “absorption strategy”, i.e. aligning the available persons with the necessary positions. This could include formal interviews (especially where more than one candidate had applied).
- A Council Committee, comprising the deputy chairperson of Council, the chairpersons of the Transformation and Human Resources Committees of Council and the VC, was mandated to oversee the process and make a recommendation to Council.
- The positions were advertised internally and all staff of the University could apply. The applicants who complied with the minimum requirements were invited to be assessed by a professional external human resources agency.
- Based on the assessments, 10 persons were invited for interviews, and the Council Committee recommended a “package” to Senate and the Institutional Forum for their advice.
- Taking this advice into account, the Council Committee made a final recommendation to the Council, which the Council accepted on Friday, 26 August 2004 by a majority of its members present.

We are of the opinion that this IM team represents a very good start to sustainable transformation, i.e. a good balance between efficiency and equity: three of the seven members are from the designated groups (in terms of the Employment Equity Act) and once the Campus Rector for Mafikeng has been appointed, this could be four out of eight. The senior management team is highly qualified, experienced and committed and is the best team for this time of the merger process and in the life of our university.

I would like to appeal to all staff and students to join hands with the top management team and to give them your full support in the difficult task that lies ahead.

The merger “scoreboard”

With the formal phase of the merger almost completed, it is important continuously to keep in mind the “victories” and benefits of the merger to date:

We received almost R13m from the DoE to upgrade the IT capacity of the University.

We received R14m from the DoE to build an office building and classrooms on the Vaal Triangle Campus.

We have bought an apartment block with two hundred rooms to improve the accommodation situation on the Mafikeng Campus.

All three campuses have improved significantly in terms of their research outputs during 2003. This shows that the core business has not been neglected, even at a time of major uncertainty.

Three focus areas for research and postgraduate education were subjected to an international peer review, under the leadership of Professor Michael Gibbons, who until July was the Secretary General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, London. In their feedback the panels expressed appreciation for the improvement in the work of the three focus areas since the previous evaluation in 1999, complimented the three directors for their excellent research management and mentioned that progress in interdisciplinary research was already noticeable.

We received a grant of R6,4m over three years from DoE for foundation programmes on the Mafikeng Campus.

The R48m provision made in the last financial statements of the former UNW will enable us to start implementing a large-scale and rolling maintenance plan for the buildings on the Mafikeng Campus over the next number of years.

The Potchefstroom Campus (for the 2003 year) ended up among the top three universities in the country for good corporate governance (awarded by PricewaterhouseCoopers).

The extended management (involving all senior campus managers) unanimously accepted a university budget for 2005, for recommendation to Council. This followed an extensive consultation process at various management levels.

Planning for the rest of the year

The IM has just completed a two-day workshop during which functions at institutional as well as campus level were discussed and determined. Targets and priorities for the rest of the year were also set. There was an air of determination at the meeting, and a sense that, although we do not underestimate the challenges, we are committed to succeeding.

I would like to appeal to all staff and students to join hands with the top management team and to give them your full support in the difficult task that lies ahead.

As I did on a previous occasion, I once again ask that anyone with suggestions or recommendations should please feel free to put something on paper or send an e-mail to rkte@puk.ac.za.

In addition, and especially with the examinations looming, the best way to contribute to the success of the merger is to continue to focus on our core business: teaching-learning, research and the implementation of our expertise. We are in the final lap of the year: let us complete the race with enthusiasm and commitment. I would like to thank all staff and students who have contributed to making our merger stable and successful.



Theuns Eloff
Vice-Chancellor and Principal