

11 May 2015

## **Notice from Council: Update on the future of the name of Rhodes University and institutional transformation**

The Rhodes University Council wishes to update the University community on recent developments regarding the issue of the name of the University and broader institutional transformation.

As stated by the Vice-Chancellor in his circular on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, “the recent developments on our campus do not constitute a crisis but signal a need for us to act with a sense of purpose and urgency.” It is within this same spirit that the Council addresses these important matters with a commitment to transparency and keeping our various stakeholders updated.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2015, the Institutional Forum convened to discuss transformation, in general, and the matter of the future of the name of our University, in particular.

According to the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended), the Institutional Forum is the statutory body within the structures of the University which has the responsibility to advise Council on issues affecting the Institution including the “fostering of an institutional culture which promotes tolerance and respect for fundamental human rights and creates an appropriate environment for teaching, research and learning.” The Institutional Forum consists of 24 members: six members from governing structures, eight members from the student sector (appointed by the SRC), eight members from the staff sector and two members from the community sector.

Consistent with this statutory mandate, the Institutional Forum was requested to provide guidance and advice to Council on the process that could be followed in addressing transformational issues impacting on Rhodes University and its name.

It is important to note that in terms of Section 65 of the Higher Education Act, the final decision regarding a change of name of a public institution of higher learning rests with its Council, and subject to the approval of the Minister. The Act further states that any change of name does not affect any right, duty, liability or obligation of the public higher education institution. To the extent that any decision on the future of the name of our University constitutes an administrative action on the part of Council, it is important, in terms of the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 2000 (Act No. 3 of 2000) (PAJA), that all stakeholders and parties that are likely to be affected by the decision are properly consulted.

The Institutional Forum recommended, for approval by Council, a two-stage process in engaging the matter of the future of the name of Rhodes University. The first stage will entail an engagement with all University constituencies and stakeholders including students, academic and support staff, unions, alumni, convocation, Senate, Board of Governors, Council and the greater Grahamstown community to canvass their views on the name of our University.

The second stage would follow in the event the outcome of the first stage indicates support for the change of the name of our University. This second stage would involve a process of deciding on how this outcome would be brought into effect.

The Institutional Forum advised Council that a Task Team would have to be appointed to investigate the sentiments of the University constituencies. It is intended that the Task Team be composed of members of impeccable credentials so that the outcome of the process can be beyond reproach. The Task Team would report to the Institutional Forum and its findings would be debated and discussed by the Institutional Forum which would then draw up recommendations for consideration by Council.

The process outlined above was presented as advice for consideration by the Rhodes University Council at its meeting of the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2015. Council accepted the advice and further suggested that the Task Team not only investigate the matter of the future of the name of our University but situate this matter in the broader context of transformation at Rhodes University.

This decision by Council will be passed onto a sub-committee elected by the Institutional Forum which will meet to draw up the terms of reference for the Task Team.

The Vice-Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, reported to Council that he had received petitions in support of and against retaining the name of the institution. He further reported that, over and above the receipt of petitions, he had received submissions from interested parties offering their views. These will be passed onto the Task Team for consideration.

Council expressed strong support for the Vice-Chancellor and his leadership team in the manner in which they have handled issues impacting on the transformation and the name of our University.

The leadership of the University will continue to engage in open discussions with all of its stakeholders with regards to issues of transformation at Rhodes University. Council is committed to ensuring the sustainability of Rhodes University and to this end, ideas must be expressed, debated and discussed in order to forge a new and shared future that ensures that Rhodes University is a home for all.

**Mr Vuyo D. Kahla**

**Chairperson: Rhodes University Council**