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New foundations for the future

THE PAST YEAR at Rhodes has been eventful in many respects and this issue of Rhodos is a welcome opportunity to reflect on recent developments and also to share the emerging trajectory of Rhodes in the coming years.

Overall, the building blocks to reinvent ourselves in critical areas have begun to be put in place so as to ensure that in the decades to come Rhodes will not only remain a distinctive and pre-eminent University, but also one that discharges constitutional obligations and engages with socio-economic challenges. The changes that have occurred and are in train are a necessary condition of securing a dynamic and sustainable future for the University.

INSTITUTIONAL SIZE AND SHAPE

During the past year, the University finalised its trajectories with respect to growth, size, and shape in terms of teaching and research programmes. This was the outcome of a long, deliberative and participatory process involving faculties, departments, academics and administrators and included extensive discussions with the Ministry of Education.

We reached agreement with the Ministry of Education that whereas in 2007 our student enrolment was some 6,000 students, by 2010 Rhodes will:

- Grow to 6,500 students, a growth rate of about 2.5% per annum;
- Seek to increase enrolments in the

natural sciences;

- Seek to increase postgraduate enrolments;
- Reduce its proportion of international students (though not the current numbers) and also diversify away from the current heavy reliance on Zimbabwean students.

Currently, student enrolment is 6,242 students and we are thus on track to meet our target enrolment of 6,500 students by 2010.

Insofar as teaching and research are concerned, the University seeks to pursue the following activities and goals:

Law

- Significantly increase, over the next 10 years, the current intake of 150 LLB students to 240 students
- Incorporate the Grahamstown office of the Legal Aid Clinic, which is an essential component of the legal training of graduates but is currently largely donor-funded, within the University budget
- Investigate the viability of a Centre for African Child Forensic Studies

Commerce

- Significantly expand the current enrolment of 40 students in the Economics honours programme (annually there are applications from over 100 students)
- Seek to introduce new honours, masters and postgraduate diploma programmes in Commerce

Pharmacy

- Expand, if required, in accordance with current infrastructure and staff, the intake of undergraduate Pharmacy enrolments
- Seek to expand postgraduate enrolments and especially the unique PharmD programme

Science

- Seek to expand undergraduate natural science enrolments through more focused funding, marketing and recruiting efforts recognising that enrolment will largely be dependent on the supply of secondary school students with maths and science
- Expand postgraduate enrolments through new honours programmes

Education

- Increase enrolment of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education to prepare teachers for both senior and primary school levels
- Expand postgraduate enrolments in the field of higher education through the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education, masters and doctoral degree studies in a new Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning
- Enhance the contribution to teacher development through additional Advanced Certificate in Education programmes in partnership with the Department of Education

- ▶ Enhance continuing and professional development in education programmes. Donor funding of R1 million has been allocated to pilot a new Professional Development Centre.

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

- ▶ Investigate an archaeology offering within Anthropology
- ▶ Investigate new masters programmes in integrated development and development studies
- ▶ Establish a Confucius Institute supported by Chinese donor funding
- ▶ Establish a masters programme in Organisational Psychology
- ▶ Establish a new masters programme in Digital Arts
- ▶ Establish a donor-funded (South African Reserve Bank) chair in African Economics Journalism
- ▶ Establish a donor-funded (MTN) chair in new media
- ▶ Investigate the establishment, in partnership with the University of Johannesburg, of a Centre for the Study of Democracy
- ▶ Investigate the establishment of a unit and programme on pro-poor social policy within the Institute for Social and Economic Research
- ▶ Complete the digitisation of the International Library of African Music (ILAM) collection to serve as an invaluable cultural and research resource
- ▶ Provide ongoing budgetary support for ILAM, the First Physical Theatre and UBOM!

The University is proud to report that it has been the recipient of two prestigious chairs, one in Chemistry (Prof Tebello Nyokong) and one in Marine Science (Prof Christopher McQuaid) through the South African Research Chairs Initiative funded by the Department of Science and Technology. The chairs provide five years of funding (which is renewable) for chair holders, research, equipment and post-graduate scholarships. The University hopes to win more chairs and a number of niche areas of strong expertise and potential promise have been identified.

The challenge for Rhodes is to ensure that the necessary mechanisms, strategies and processes, as well as infrastructure, are in place and the requisite resources are mobilised to enable the realisation of

the enrolment targets and academic initiatives that have been agreed upon. Seed funding is being provided to investigate the feasibility of some of the proposed initiatives noted above.

INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The goals for the growth, size and shape of the University have necessitated attention being given to institutional infrastructure to support the achievement of these goals. In this regard, the following developments can be noted.

- Planning is being finalised and fundraising is underway for the building of a new 4,500 square metre library and the refurbishment of the current library. At an anticipated cost of R97.5 million, the new library building will be one of the largest undertakings in the history of Rhodes. It is hoped that construction will begin in August 2008. Thus far, R50 million has been secured from the Department of Education (part of a three-year R80 million capital infrastructure grant), and the University is looking to local and overseas donors, the business sector and alumni to mobilise the remaining funds needed;
- Two new residences (Kimberley 7 and 8) have been completed, accommodating an additional 146 students in the 2008 academic year;
- Two further residences, with funding of R30 million from the Department of Education, are under construction and will accommodate 206 students from the start of the 2009 academic year;
- Some of the existing residences will be reconfigured to provide additional beds;
- An Alumni House has been built with donor funding to serve as the offices of the University's Communication and Development Division and also as the reception hub for visitors to Rhodes.

The growth of enrolments at Rhodes is strongly dependent on the availability of residence accommodation, and in the coming years additional residences as well as new dining halls will be needed. Additional institutional infrastructure for teaching and research will also be required. These needs have been identified and consideration is being given to their costs and how they can be addressed.

A further major challenge, in the light of property prices, is to assist with the provision of affordable accommodation in the vicinity of the University for academic and support staff. The report of the task team on accommodation, which was completed in 2007, will receive close attention this year.

Welcome news in March 2007 from the Minister of Education was that Rhodes would receive R80 million over three years for capital infrastructure – almost four percent of the total new funding of R2.037 billion provided by the National Treasury to the Ministry of Education for investments in higher education infrastructure. This was considerably more than Rhodes would have received (R30 million) if the new funds had been distributed in accordance with our current annual share of the higher education block grant. The R80 million was thus a significant allocation, and can be taken as an indicator of the Ministry's confidence in Rhodes' ability to produce high-quality graduates and to conduct itself as a well-governed, -managed, -administered, effective and efficient institution.

The injection of R80 million signals that Rhodes is viewed as an important component of the new higher education landscape, and has a vital contribution to make to knowledge, the higher education of students, and to our economy and society. There are grounds for optimism in that there could be additional funding for infrastructure in the period beyond 2007/2008 – 2009/2010.

A key financial challenge remains the adequate remuneration of staff, especially academic and administrative support staff. This requires an increase in government subsidy, as there is limited scope for increasing income from tuition fee increases, and possibly securing greater income from sustainable third stream income (research contracts, professional and continuing education courses, donor funding). However, it also necessitates a close watch on the overall remuneration bill so that it is kept at manageable levels and does not adversely affect other key operational areas, as well as attention being given to productivity issues in some areas of Rhodes.

EQUITY AND INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

Key themes of recent years, articulated in numerous and diverse fora, have been:



- That conduct, relationships and responsibilities at Rhodes must be guided by the values of the Constitution and Bill of Rights – respect for human dignity, human rights, equality, non-sexism and non-racialism;
- The need to build Rhodes as a “home for all” which recognises, respects and affirms difference and diversity;
- That Rhodes must purposefully create and institutionalise a culture that embraces difference and diversity, and see these as strengths and powerful wellsprings for personal, intellectual and institutional development;
- That everyone at Rhodes – students, academics, wardens, technicians, secretaries, messengers and ground staff – must be accorded respect and dignity.

Workshops on equity and gender held during 2007 identified issues and challenges that face Rhodes and the possible mechanisms and strategies to address these. Unfortunately, Rhodes lags, sometimes significantly, behind other South African universities insofar as the representation of black South African students and academic and administrative staff are concerned. Moreover, in parts of Rhodes there exist discourses, attitudes and practices which are damaging and offensive to specific social groups

and ultimately give rise to a negation of constitutional values. The issues of equity and institutional culture require, are being given, and will continue to be given, strong attention.

NEW INITIATIVES

A number of initiatives are underway:

- The terms of reference of the Equity Committee have been redefined and the committee has been restructured and reconstituted as the Equity and Institutional Culture Committee under the chairpersonship of the Vice-Chancellor.
- An equity and institutional culture action plan has been tabled for discussion within various University structures.
- Decisions on the equity and institutional culture plan could result in the University’s current employment equity policy and its implementation being reviewed and revised.
- Student recruitment, admissions and financial aid will come under scrutiny, led by the new Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Dr Sizwe Mabizela.
- The current Extended Studies Programme, which seeks to provide access and opportunity to eligible but under-prepared students, will be reviewed.
- A second phase of the Accelerated Development Programme that seeks to

provide opportunities for prospective black and women academics will be instituted with a new \$600,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation. It is hoped that additional complementary funds will be provided by other donors.

- A programme of internships for potential administrative support staff directed at candidates from designated groups will continue and, if possible, be expanded.
- The Dean of Students Division has initiated a number of high profile programmes promoting respect for human rights and diversity on campus.

It should be noted that following the racist incidents at the University of the Free State, a Ministerial Committee has been established and tasked with investigating the state of transformation and progress towards the elimination of discrimination and the forging of social cohesion at universities. All universities have been requested to provide evidence of policies, initiatives and practices related to the promotion of constitutional values and equity, to make written submissions on institutional conditions, progress and challenges and to meet with the Ministerial Committee.

It should be anticipated that the Ministerial Committee will almost

certainly recommend the introduction of curriculum initiatives (the basis for which already exists in the higher education White Paper of 1997). There has already been embryonic thinking along these lines at Rhodes in terms of the theme “Where leaders learn”, and an initial R250,000 has been allocated to explore this further.

ADMINISTRATIVE RESTRUCTURING

A process of institutional and senior administrative restructuring initiated in early 2007 has been finalised.

- A new Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, formerly head of the Department of Mathematics, took office on 1 May 2008. This is an existing Vice-Principal post that was occupied by Dr Colin Johnson, who took early retirement at the end of 2007. The post has, however, been redefined away from administrative operational issues to focus on academic and student affairs.
- A new Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Development, Dr Peter Clayton, a former head of the Department of Computer Science, took office on 1 April 2008. This is a new post that replaces the previous post of Dean of Research, and includes new development initiatives, internationalisation and the library. The current Dean of Research, Prof John Duncan, who has ably served the University for many years, takes early retirement at the end of 2008.
- The former post of Registrar: Finance, has been expanded into the post of Registrar: Finance and Operations, under Mr. Tony Long. This post combines finance with the various administrative portfolios of Residential Operations, Human Resources, Estates and Information Technology that were the responsibility of the previous Vice-Principal.
- Prof Chrissie Boughey has been appointed to the newly created post of Dean of Learning and Teaching, which is combined with the directorship of the new Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL). CHERTL replaces the current Academic Development Centre, and will be the hub of the University’s expanded initiatives in postgraduate programmes, training and research in the field of higher education.

- The post of Director of Community Engagement has been created, and has been occupied since the beginning of the year by Dr Joyce Nduna, who brings valuable expertise in the area of community engagement and especially service learning.
- A new Institutional Planning Unit (IPU) with the responsibilities of supporting institutional (enrolment, academic and infrastructural) planning and undertaking institutional research, has been created. The IPU will be guided by the new Institutional Planning Committee chaired by the Vice-Chancellor.
- It is also intended to streamline current committees to ensure more effective and efficient addressing of issues, more effective information flows and iterations through possible faculty participation in key committees without undermining oversight and participation.

Since the beginning of the year, reviews of administrative divisions have been under way in order to ensure that they are effectively equipped and positioned to achieve their goals and support the overall trajectory of the University. Thus far, reviews of the International Office and the portfolio of Dean: Internationalisation, and the Communication and Development Division have been completed. A review of the Dean of Students Division is in progress and reviews of other divisions will occur in coming months.

Finally, following the end of terms of a number of current Council members, a new University Council has been effectively constituted. This provides an opportunity to revisit, and if necessary redefine in the light of new and changing governance norms, mandates of, and relationships between, Council Committees and the Council, and also that between the Council and the Board of Governors. While the Council is the overall governance and accounting body of the University, the Board of Governors plays a vital role in providing strategic advice to the Vice-Chancellor, supporting the University’s fund-raising and in supervising the endowed funds and investments of the University.

CONCLUSION

Rhodes University enjoys a deserved reputation for the quality of its academic programmes, pass and graduation rates, research output per academic staff

member and the quality of its graduates. Students and scholars enjoy a physical, social and intellectual environment that is generally optimal for the core pursuits of a University: knowledge production and dissemination; contributing to human understanding and economic and social development through research; the development of high quality graduates, intellectuals and citizens, and community engagement.

At the same time, Rhodes must confront, mediate and overcome numerous challenges. Some of these challenges it faces in common with other South African universities. Other challenges are a consequence of being the smallest University in South Africa, and of Rhodes’ particular history and geographical location.

During the past year, many of the building blocks for maintaining Rhodes as an outstanding University that also embraces its reinvention, renewal and transformation in important areas have been put into place. Others remain to be put into place for ensuring the effective pursuit of institutional goals and strategies.

The emerging institutional development plan seeks to: delineate overall institutional and specific academic goals; link and align student enrolment planning, academic and administrative planning and reviews; physical infrastructure planning, and the institutional resource allocation process and budget; explicate strategies for the pursuit and progressive realisation of specified goals; specify mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing progress and outcomes, and identify domains of responsibility and accountability. At the same time, the institutional development plan also seeks to respond to the audit of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and to meet our requirement to formulate and submit an ‘improvement plan’ to the HEQC in response to its critique and various recommendations.

If the challenges are numerous and varied, they are far from insurmountable. With the necessary will, and intelligent, reasoned and democratic deliberation that befits a University, they should also be treated as opportunities for institutional innovation and reinvention, renewal and transformation of Rhodes as a small but great University. ■