

# **ADDRESS TO STUDENTS AND STAFF ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE FOR THE 2018 ACADEMIC YEAR**

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Deputy Vice Chancellors, Professors Mayende and Hendricks,  
Registrar, Professor Somniso  
Deans of Faculties, Profs Monde, Moyo, Seekoe and Tshotsho, and Drs  
Lubisi and Wayi  
Dean of Research, Professor Gqola  
Dean of Students, Gqeba  
Directors of Service and Support divisions  
Heads of Departments  
Academic Staff  
Administrative and Support Services Staff  
Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me pleasure to address you on this occasion of the official opening of the University for the 2018 academic year. Let me start by welcoming all staff and returning students back from the summer break. I know many of you have been back at work since the 3 January to prepare for the registration of students so that we are able to start the teaching programme without hiccups. I also wish to welcome staff who joined the University at the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018. In the last two weeks, I addressed special orientation and welcome sessions for new students who joined our University for the first time in 2018. Once again, I say welcome to all new students.

Exactly a year ago, I arrived at this University and addressed students and staff to mark the official opening of the 2017 academic year. In that address I identified several issues which required urgent attention and invited the University community to engage in debates on them. The year 2017 afforded me an opportunity to get to know the institution and its people better and to identify priorities for action. I was delighted to meet and get to know some of the finest academics, administrators and support services employees of the University. I wish to use this opportunity to pay tribute to these great colleagues who continue to make the University great. Of course, I also became aware that there are University employees at all levels who get by with the bare minimum of what is expected of them. More on them below.

Last year the University adopted a new strategic plan titled “*Strategic Plan 2017 – 2021: Beginning Our Second Century*”. The plan is founded on four values, namely, *Integrity, Excellence, Ethics* and *Innovation* and seeks to achieve six institutional goals through thirteen strategic objectives which will serve as a guide to all staff over the next five years. These are best presented in the form of a table as shown below.

**UFH Institutional Goals and Strategic Objectives 2017 - 2021.**

<b>Programme 1: Teaching and Learning, Research and Community Engagement</b>	
<b>Institutional goals</b>	<b>Strategic objectives</b>
<b>1. Forge strategic partnerships and promote institutional advancement</b>	1. Enhance the University Brand
	2. Enhance engagement, strategic partnerships for social and economic development
	3. Advance the international standing of the university
<b>2. Provide quality teaching and learning</b>	4. Recruit and support high-calibre students from all backgrounds
	5. Increase success rate
	6. Offer relevant and effective academic programmes and ensure continuous curriculum transformation
<b>3. Promote excellence in research and innovation</b>	7. Strengthen the research outputs and impact
<b>Programme 2: Human Development</b>	
<b>Institutional goals</b>	<b>Strategic objectives</b>
<b>4. Create a conducive Environment for teaching and learning</b>	8. Create a culture conducive to excellence and deliberation, and encourage diversity and social cohesion
	9. Develop human capital and implement management strategies to attract and retain talent and skills from diverse backgrounds
	10. Improve and enhance institutional governance
<b>Programme 3: Infrastructure and support</b>	
<b>Institutional goals</b>	<b>Strategic objectives</b>
<b>5. Develop and maintain infrastructure</b>	11. Provide a sustainable teaching and learning environment with first-class facilities and infrastructure
	12. Advance use of technology to streamline our effective and efficient business processes
<b>Programme 4: Ensure financial sustainability and viability</b>	
<b>Institutional goals</b>	<b>Strategic objectives</b>
<b>6. Ensure financial sustainability</b>	13. Ensure good financial management in all entities and, where applicable, supplementing the university’s income through third-stream income

In 2018 we are going to approach these goals and objectives with a greater sense of urgency. It is my firm view that failure by us to act will plunge the

University into paralysis and low morale thus propelling the institution down a slippery slope towards the lowest depths of institutional decay and mediocrity. These goals and objectives anticipate some of the steps we need to take in 2018, many of which have been discussed several times in the top structures of the University, mainly Council and its committees, Senate and its committees, MANCO and the Extended Management Committee (EMT). The most urgent issues that require decisive action in 2018 are the following:

### **1. Filling Vacancies of Senior Staff**

Several senior positions became vacant over the last three years. The process of filling these positions has been extremely slow and the delays have resulted in us losing many talented people. However, in 2017 we managed to fill some key positions – the Dean of Research (Prof P. Gqola), Director of Interdisciplinary Studies (Dr L. Dondolo), the Dean of Health Sciences (Prof E. Seekoe), the Dean of Students (Mr M. Gqeba), the Director of Libraries (Dr C. Bitso), the Director in the VC Office (Dr I. Du Plessis) and the Manager in the VC Office (Ms T. Mapukata). Senior positions that have to be filled this year are the Director of HR, the Director of International Relations, DVC: Academic Affairs, DVC: Institutional Support, Dean of Education (when the current incumbent retires later this year), the Director of Institutional Advancement and the Director of Community Engagement.

I am aware that there are several senior academic positions such as professors and associate professors that need to be filled this year. In all these cases I will be asking the relevant line managers to move with speed to ensure that the smooth functioning of the University is not hampered.

I am encouraged by the fact that there are people within the University who merit appointment to some of the positions. Even more important is that people in leading Universities in the country have shown tremendous interest in working for the University of Fort Hare.

### **2. Maintenance of Office and Teaching Spaces**

Large sections of our physical infrastructure are in an advanced state of disrepair and I estimate the maintenance backlog to be at least two and a half decades. Even more troubling is the fact that we have not kept pace with regular maintenance of new buildings. I have embarked on a round of inspection of teaching and office spaces and the picture is grim. I will therefore be tabling to MANCO a plan to prioritise the

maintenance of lecture theatres, laboratories and office spaces. We have very modest resources to do this, so the scale of the maintenance will probably address the most critical areas such as leaking roofs, dilapidated lecture rooms and labs, broken furniture and offices that are crying for a coat of paint.

### **3. Greater Attention to Infrastructure Development**

This year several infrastructure projects will come on stream. The Collaborative Library in East London (a joint project with UNISA and Walter Sisulu University) will be ready for occupation in the next two months or so. The project will raise the profile of our East London campus and address an important demand for modern library services on that campus. It will also free up space for other uses.

In Alice, the bulk water back-up reservoir will be commissioned during February and will address the perennial problem of water outages on that campus. The fencing of the campus will be completed soon, thereby addressing the security concerns of staff and students on campus. I should add that the fence will also address the problem of stray cattle which are a menace to all, particularly the people responsible for the upkeep of sports grounds.

We will double our efforts to secure funding to expand the capacity of our residences on both large campuses. In Alice, we aim to secure funding to resume work on the Student Village project which, on completion, will add 1435 beds to the current capacity. We are also planning to raise funds for a large student residence and student centre in East London.

### **4. Professional Management of Contracts**

We have identified several gaps in our management of contracts, particularly those related to the leasing of residences, large-scale infrastructure development and maintenance of our properties. We are going to professionalise contract management and ensure that no room is allowed for the manipulation of contracts by service providers. We will also deal firmly with staff and students who get involved in lobbying and manipulating University processes to favour certain contractors.

### **5. Consequences Management**

In 2017 Council adopted a policy called "*Consequences Management Framework: Towards a Sound Corporate Governance*" which states

that, “all those who are delegated to exercise authority must be held accountable for their actions”. It goes further to state that,

*“All employees of the University should be held accountable for achieving their performance outputs, these being achieved within the applicable regulations, prescripts and legislation. Where an accountable employee of the University fails to meet his/her objectives/targets and or acts outside the legislative framework and prescripts, that employee will be held accountable and the necessary action should be taken by the immediate supervisor of such an employee. Depending on the nature of the infraction, the responsible line manager may be required to take disciplinary action against the employee”.*

I have decided to flag this new policy prominently and to advise all those who have delegated powers as line managers that they are accountable for their own actions (and inactions) as well as those of their subordinates. I will be asking all line managers to agree and sign performance contracts with their subordinates in accordance with this new policy.

## **6. Compliance Framework to be Implemented**

Our institution operates within a regulated environment. First, as a public institution we are accountable to the taxpayers through the Department of Higher Education and Training. As such, we are expected to submit plans and reports to the department and to account for all funds received. Our programmes and diploma and degree qualifications must meet certain quality standards set by the department and related statutory agencies such as the Council on Higher Education and the South African Qualifications Authority.

Secondly, we are expected to comply with laws and regulations in areas such as the Constitution, labour and employment relations regulations, safety, health and environment, building regulations, municipal by-laws and a host of other regulations. The Vice-Chancellor and all managers with delegated authority are expected to ensure that the University complies with all laws and regulations. In 2018 we will have to exercise extreme care that all our structures and staff comply in every respect and managers will be held accountable for all commissions and omissions that are in violation of applicable laws and regulations.

## **7. Vetting of Staff in Middle and Senior Positions**

In its meeting of the 29 September 2017, Council took a decision that all mid-level and senior staff of the University should be vetted to ensure that they do not carry baggage that could embarrass or compromise the University. From now onwards, new staff at these levels will have to pass a vetting test to ensure that they do not have a criminal or other negative record and that their qualifications are authentic. This is going to put an obligation on selection panels, particularly their chairpersons, to ensure that reference checks are done and that they submit successful candidates to a vetting process before formal offers of employment are made.

The University of Fort Hare has burnt its fingers several times in this respect by employing some people with questionable employment and professional records. It is therefore imperative that our Human Resources department familiarises all selection panel members and their chairpersons with this decision.

Another dimension of the Council decision requires that all mid-level and senior staff should make an annual declaration of interests and that they should submit to lifestyle audits whenever the University deems this necessary. This is applicable to current staff as well as new staff.

## **8. Zero Tolerance for Fraud and Corruption**

As the above suggests, it is concerning that many continue to hold the perception that Fort Hare management is soft on fraud and corruption. This is fuelled by the fact that our record on catching people committing fraud and corruption is dismal. It is my view that those committing fraud and corruption have become more brazen and that they enjoy protection by some in positions of authority within the University. I will be making proposals to the top management structures of the University about how we can improve our capacity to deal with fraud and corruption. However, it is important for me to state here that there will be zero tolerance for fraud and corruption this year, regardless of the positions that the perpetrators hold in the structures of the University.

I am encouraged by the growing number of staff and students who are willing to distance themselves from fraud and corruption by coming forward with information to help our investigations. I hope more staff and students can follow this example.

## **9. Zero Tolerance for Rape and other Forms of Gender-Based Violence**

There is ample evidence that the scourge of rape and other forms of gender-based violence are endemic on our campuses. I wish to appeal to all students and staff to take a stand against rape and other forms of violence by reporting such cases to the relevant offices in the University. As we know, rape and gender-based violence raise uncomfortable questions about abuse of power – by men over women, senior people over junior people, staff over students, senior students over new students, etc.

We are going to have to confront the perception that members of disciplinary panels can be bribed or bought in order to subvert the application of disciplinary sanctions against staff and students.

## **10. Quality Assurance Reviews of Academic and Support Services Departments**

Last year, Senate and Council took a decision to introduce quality assurance reviews of all academic and support services departments. The department of Planning and Quality Assurance will introduce reviews this year and a selection of Departments has been identified. I wish to appeal to Deans and heads of department to co-operate with the Planning and Quality Assurance department to ensure the success of the reviews.

Programme and departmental reviews are standard practice in most South African universities. They provide a useful way of benchmarking and applying peer review mechanisms to ensure that our degrees and support services departments are of the same standard as those in the rest in the country and the world.

## **11. Removing Bottlenecks in our Administrative Systems**

It is not a secret that systems and processes in our University are very sluggish and slow, and are characterised by severe bottlenecks that hamper performance. These bottlenecks are to be found across the spectrum of our operations – HR processes, finance, academic structures, investigations of crimes, investigation of student misconduct, procurement and decision-making. This results in extreme frustration and conflicts amongst staff and between staff and students as the institution seems unable, and even unwilling, to address the concerns of its members.

From my office, I will embark on steps that will help identify the blockages and assist departments to accelerate decision-making and action to address problems. Senior managers will also be expected to use the consequences framework to hold staff accountable for inertia in their respective areas of work.

## **12. A Social Contract by all Campus Stakeholders**

It is my view that the core values of the University of Fort Hare - *Integrity, Excellence, Ethics and Innovation* – require certain conditions to prevail before they are realised. First, the University needs a degree of stability to realise these values. The conditions of conflict that prevailed for several months in 2017 made it nearly impossible to achieve these values. Conflict and differences of opinion are inevitable in a University. However, it is important for us to agree that differences of opinion should be processed in particular ways to ensure that the fibre of the University does not get destroyed. Violent actions, arson and theft such as we witnessed in East London and Alice last year do not bode well for realising our core values.

Secondly, a certain work ethic needs to be agreed and nurtured by all. We have to agree that current levels of absenteeism and failure by staff to apply themselves to their responsibility serve to destroy the soul of the University. The majority of our staff apply themselves diligently to their responsibilities. However, there are some who do the bare minimum and invest very little time to build the University of Fort Hare. I am also aware that there are people in lower positions in the University who are extremely resentful towards their seniors who do everything to shirk their responsibilities. I am often confronted by staff who tell me that I am surrounded by lazy officials – *amavila*.

Thirdly, abuse of University property and resources is widespread and nobody seems to care. We have non-employees occupying University properties and the managers turn a blind eye. University vehicles are abused on a daily basis. Students loot university facilities and shops with impunity. Indeed, those who raise objections or blow the whistle are often targeted and harassed.

Fourth, various networks mobilise and lobby for jobs to be given to their friends and relatives. We also know that there have been cases where people get appointed into positions even though they clearly do not meet the requirements of those positions. There are also people



who are on the payroll of the University but are hardly ever on campus.

The same applies to students who wage battles and disrupt the operations of the University in order to access student governance structures. Often, the rest of the student body and student structures are manipulated by those who seek to gain access to resources.

Finally, the University community is either unable or unwilling to address the issue of diversity and how it should be managed. This is made worse by some people, a few of them in senior positions, who peddle the falsehood that South Africans are not good enough for PhDs and academic positions, on the one hand, and those who believe that a moratorium should be placed on the employment of international scholars. I reject both these views. I will ask the DVC: Academic Affairs to address the issue of diversity, or lack thereof, in our academic divisions. I also call upon members of the University to discuss this matter openly and honestly instead of the current state of affairs where people gossip and spread rumour.

The above issues are of major concern to me and I propose to open up a University-wide dialogue for us to address them together frankly and openly. My objective is not to initiate dialogue for the sake of talking. Rather it is my desire that we initiate deliberative processes so that we can arrive at consensus among all stakeholders that we can differ but continue to strive together for Integrity, Excellence, Ethics and Innovation. I invite all of you to a new battlefield – not one where the weapons are sticks, stones and matchboxes, but one where the weapons are ideas! Let 2018 be year of the new battle for ideas at the University of Fort Hare.

I have asked the staff to find dates during March for campus assemblies where all stakeholders will be afforded an opportunity to debate issues affecting our University.

In concluding, let me once again and, at the risk of repetition, recall a story from my high school days more than forty years ago<sup>1</sup>. One of our school teachers' favourite reading from the bible at morning assembly was "*Isidiliya sikaNabhodi*" ("Naboth's Vineyard") from the book of 1 Kings 21:

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<sup>1</sup> I quoted the same story in my inauguration speech on 3 May 2017. Unfortunately, I could not read the speech because of a disruption of the event by Nehawu members.

1-29. We joked about it at the time but we did not grasp its full meaning until his arrest by the security police in 1976<sup>2</sup>. The message was simple but powerful. Naboth refused to sell or exchange his vineyard to King Ahab despite the lucrative offer he was made. In the end, King Ahab got Naboth killed and took the vineyard. Of course King Ahab never enjoyed the vineyard as one tragedy after another befell him and his family. Applied to our time and our institution, the moral of the story is, the University of Fort Hare is not for sale and no price is big enough to make me change this view.

Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> That teacher was none other than the current Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare, Advocate Dumisa Ntsebeza SC. The students nicknamed him 'Nabhodi'. Mr Ntsebeza was arrested on a cold winter day in June 1976 and was found guilty and imprisoned for terrorism.