

Update Report to campus about the work of the Committee for the Institutional Response to the Commission's Recommendations (CIRCoRe)

Dear colleagues

I'm honoured to inform the campus community about CIRCoRe's progress during its first six months of operation. CIRCoRe aims to understand how the institution is seen and experienced as exclusionary by many of the University's staff and students. We are dedicated to creating new perspectives and proposals aligned with the findings and recommendations of the Khampepe Commission. We focus on strategies that foster a campus experience based on fairness, inclusion and equality. Ultimately, we are working on building a campus where every individual – staff or student – feels at home and may make valuable contributions to both the institution and society.

CIRCoRe uses a comprehensive approach to garner support and guidance for the processes instituted in response to the Khampepe Report. This approach involves research, discussions, campus-wide communication and dialogues with staff and students. We regularly engage through report-back sessions and meetings with stakeholders such as Council, Senate, the Institutional Transformation Committee, the CIRCoRe governance committee, the Rectorate, the Visual Redress Committee, the Rectorate Deans' Forum, the General Managers Forum, and the Students' Representative Council (SRC). As a **Rector's contingency committee**, CIRCoRe uses all the advice, feedback and guidance obtained from these sessions and meetings to improve our ongoing work.

CIRCoRe's strategy for meaningful progress involves fostering broad involvement and buy-in, aimed at the development of inclusive ownership and expansive (though noisy) consensus. Based on experiences elsewhere, we recognise that institutional change requires both interactive engagements, for which a university is well suited, and actual transformative actions. These two aspects – **inclusive dialogue and concrete change activity** – must work hand in hand; one cannot precede the other. Currently, CIRCoRe is forging a productive link between our **dialogic and consultative path** and the **creation of practical recommendations**. This process will continue over the next 18 months and will lay the groundwork for ongoing institutional responses and adaptation to align with the objectives of the University's Vision 2040 and the challenges and opportunities that emerge in complex times.

CIRCoRe dialogues and consultations

A limited number of facilitated dialogues have occurred in recent months, primarily in academic departments, academic support environments and student communities. Here, the focus has been on listening to and learning from participants about their experiences and soliciting their

advice for ongoing transformation. These types of sessions will continue and will be followed by sessions on specific proposals and recommendations for change.

We are proceeding with careful preparations for the facilitated dialogues to ensure an inclusive exchange of understanding and ideas for accelerating the transformation process. Exemplifying and building the listening and dialogic institution is core to CIRCoRe's 'theory of change' within University spaces and in partnership with our local communities and stakeholders. We are proceeding carefully to set up all the necessary building blocks for the dialogues and consultations. We are ensuring that the dialogues do not retraumatise facilitators and participants in our attempt to centre campus voices in the CIRCoRe processes, by taking care to capacitate dialogue facilitators with the necessary skills and support.

The work of the workstreams

The various dimensions of the workstreams' work suggest a palpable and emerging theory of systemic university transformation. The critical dimensions of the workstreams' work are dialogue and consultation, scholarly research, consultation and deliberation and proposal generation in response to the recommendations of the Khampepe Report.

CIRCoRe currently has four workstream-based research projects. These are in the areas of 1) the Stellenbosch University (SU) student experience; 2) the scholarly use of race and categories on campus; 3) critical curriculum models; and 4) SU students' living, travelling and learning ecologies. These projects directly inform the workstreams' deliberations and proposal generation processes.

Each workstream has adopted diverse approaches to initiate its tasks, all aligned with the specific operational foci they centre on. They employ research, data gathering, conceptual clarification and discussion as integral tools. The workstreams focus notably on generating change perspectives, proposals and recommendations for implementation.

Several short-term proposals have emerged from the workstreams and are now receiving priority. We are currently doing scoping and development work on the proposals as a precursor to recommending them for implementation. These proposals are:

- training programmes in non-discriminatory institution-building for staff and students;
- inclusive renaming processes for residence spaces, rooms, walls, courtyards, etc.;
- diversifying the welcoming week on the Rooiplein;
- diversifying the University's excellence awards; and
- cheaper and more diversified food options for students.

The preparatory work on these proposals is currently being done by the relevant University role players who are considering their viability and generating practical options for implementation. The starting point for these is to pull together all the information, regulative instruments and related practices germane to the 'activity sphere' of each of these proposals and use these as a basis to generate a coherent approach for implementation.

One key recommendation to the Rectorate by the workstream on "Simplifying and Aligning University Structures, Policies and Regulations with Transformation" is an **integrated policy on unfair discrimination, gender-based violence (GBV) and HIV/Aids**. The recommendation to

the Rectorate was prepared by the Equality Unit and involves a policy arrangement to improve the University's operational and procedural management of all cases involving unfair discrimination. As a direct response to the Khampepe Commission's findings that the University's processes are complicated, overly bureaucratic and operationally inefficient, the recommended policy would aim to ensure a nimble and just approach to dealing with complaints related to discrimination. This integrated approach to unfair discrimination is, for example, one response to the traumatised pleas to make the campus more caring and safer that were heard in our dialogue sessions. This policy will be presented to the Rectorate for consideration and possible immediate implementation at the end of November 2023.

Mr Phila Msimang was appointed the new head of the CIRCoRe workstream on "Race, Human Categorisation and Science" (RHCS). Msimang, from the Philosophy Department, took over from Prof Dion Forster, who has taken up an academic position in the Netherlands from 1 November. Msimang brings scholarly expertise on categorisation to this position. He recently gave a well-received presentation on the use of human categorisations in science, research and policy to the Rectorate.

Under Msimang's direction, the workstream will endeavour to enhance practical engagement with various campus stakeholders. He has proposed the development of a digital infographic tool that lecturers and researchers can apply to guide them in making decisions about using race and human categories in their research, teaching and social impact community work. This digital tool will be developed via consultation and trialling on campus during the next six months.

One example of the research and proposal development work of the workstreams is the ongoing **work done by the curriculum workstream** that centres on the Khampepe Report's proposal to develop a compulsory module for all students. The workstream seeks to provide an educationally sound basis, which involves conceptualisation, design and implementation dynamics, to inform our curriculum work. The infusion of critical justice and citizenship into all the University's programme offerings, formal curricula, and co-curricula is on the table. The workstream focuses on designing staff training for the implementation of a critical humanity-orientated curriculum.

CIRCoRe's cross-cutting work to leverage an inclusive and welcoming University

CIRCoRe has been facilitating concrete activities that involve work across the various workstreams. These activities respond directly to core aspects raised in the Khampepe Report and follow an integrated approach. They involve addressing the core functional dimensions that would make the campus experience for staff and students welcoming and inclusive.

The first of these concrete activities is the Rectorate-approved Interim Working Group (IWG) that deals with the University's response to incidents of discrimination experienced by students and staff, including incidents of racism, GBV and HIV/Aids. CIRCoRe recommended a practice note based on greater efficiency, justice and coherence for responding to such incidents. The IWG comprises seven senior persons, including the head of the Equality Unit, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC): Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel, the head of CIRCoRe, the director of Employee Relations, the senior directors of Transformation and Student Affairs, and the director of Corporate Communication. The IWG follows a coordinated and agile process in

responding to discriminatory incidents. It has thus far responded to a small number of incidents and has delivered an efficient, integrated response.

The second is the promising implementation of a productive and permeable approach to policy-making between CIRCoRe and various policy development processes in the University. CIRCoRe is interfacing with policy processes in, for example, transformation, data management, approaches to curriculum knowledge diversification, and work done by the Visual Redress Committee. CIRCoRe's policy input is targeted at providing guidance to align campus policies currently being developed with promoting non-discrimination and building a welcoming and caring campus. One key CIRCoRe policy imperative is to encourage consistency in using definitions, approaches and perspectives across various University policies.

The third centres on CIRCoRe's work in promoting employment equity (EE) at SU as central to making SU an inclusive place of work. The University's commitment to accelerating EE and securing a diverse workforce in an optimally functioning University is central to this work. CIRCoRe facilitated a day-long round-table discussion in November to consider ways of developing integrated and more focused EE-targeted mechanisms and processes. CIRCoRe partnered with the University's Human Resources Division and the Transformation Office to consider ways of addressing and accelerating EE. The Rector attended the round-table discussion, which was facilitated by an external team.

The day's programme consisted of discussions on the regulatory environment that governs EE practices within the higher education sector, a data-based discussion on the state of EE at SU, target setting, and experiences with EE in specific University environments. The discussion identified blockages that might prevent the University from moving decisively forward with EE. The event concentrated on ways to promote and accelerate EE at the University in responsible and sustainable ways. The deliberations aimed to identify immediate short-term measures for possible recommendation to the Rectorate for implementation. It deliberated on medium and longer-term processes and practice alignments for reaching our targets. It also identified areas of further research, information and deliberation, some of which would be covered variously by CIRCoRe workstreams.

The fourth cross-cutting issue is addressing the structure, culture and functional dimensions of residences to promote dignified and non-discriminatory residence living conditions. Improving the residence experience is one of the core matters identified for redress by the Khampepe Report. It will receive concerted attention through the first half of 2024. All role players are being engaged, including Facilities Management, Finances, Student Affairs, the Registrar's Office and other relevant operations. In partnership with the Division Student Affairs, CIRCoRe is currently scoping ways of addressing this complex challenge. We are bringing together all relevant role players in a joined-up, systems-based approach to addressing students' experience of residence life.

The fifth and final initiative combines the **scholarly underpinning** of CIRCoRe's work with its practical and programmatic interventions. **CIRCoRe has started planning two significant conferences on race, human categorisation and science.** These conferences will be hosted in collaboration with the RHCS workstream, the DVC: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies, the divisions of Research and Innovation and Transformation, and the Rector's Office. The first, slated for May 2024, will be an SU practice-based conference, and the second will be an international conference in early 2025. All relevant University sectors will be involved in the

lead-up to the conferences. These sectors are being engaged to interrogate their approaches to scholarly inquiry, research methodology, social impact, curriculum and teaching practices to identify the problematic use of race or other discriminatory categories in their work, as it ties into the RHCS workstream's foci and work. These learnings would be brought to the conference, where debate would centre on the appropriate use of categories and their practical impact on the academic and academic support work. The first conference would thus focus on understanding and interrogating SU-based practices and setting a concrete agenda for developing academic practices that align with non-discrimination. The second conference aims to advance local and global academic scholarship in the non-discriminatory use of categories in science and to further establish the University as a scientific engine for the public good.

Conclusion

CIRCoRe's work has thus far been exciting, complex and fruitful. We enjoy the full support of the Rector, Rectorate and our various partners in the University and community. Our communications campaign, seminar series and public deliberations have come on stream and have given us broad legitimacy. Our work on producing a transformation charter has started and will be boosted during the next period. At the launch of a book titled *The Educational Pathways and Experiences of Black Students at Stellenbosch University* (Fataar, A. (Ed). 2023. Africa Sun Media), attended by 150 students and staff members, SU's role in providing an enhanced and inclusionary experience to black and all other students was passionately deliberated. The transformation of Stellenbosch University is currently on a good wicket. CIRCoRe has momentum. Expectations are high, yet the stakeholders are beginning to appreciate the multidimensional and incremental nature of the change involved in aligning and transforming a complex university such as SU. Concrete delivery on these expectations during the next 18 months will be one of the cornerstones of our work.

Best regards
Prof Aslam Fataar
Head of CIRCoRe

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