

Insights from SU Council's meeting of 24 June 2024

The Stellenbosch University (SU) Council met on Monday, 24 June 2024. There were several important issues on the agenda, including Wilgenhof, SUNStudent, the Rector's quarterly report, the University's 2023 financial results and the Annual Integrated Report.

Wilgenhof

As was communicated after the Council meeting, Council extensively debated the recommendation made by the Rector to close the Wilgenhof residence in its current form and replace it with an upgraded residence. The Council concluded that the recommendation warrants further consultation and consideration and, before taking any decision on the recommendation, has invited all interested and affected stakeholders to submit written representations by 31 July 2024 via the provided [**submission link**](#).

To read the more detailed mailer on the matter, please click [**here**](#).

I would like to urge all those who would like their views or proposals noted, to please respond via the submission link – comments not submitted via the link or submitted late, may not be considered.

SUNStudent

The SUNStudent implementation has been difficult. In addressing the next steps with Council, the Registrar emphasised the importance of prioritising the completion of the academic year. Given the implementation challenges, the team is investigating the most appropriate way forward.

Rector's quarterly report

Prof Wim De Villiers gave an update on several highlights and initiatives during Q2.

One of the standout highlights was Prof Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela being awarded the Templeton Prize for 2024. This accolade is a testament to her exceptional contributions to the field of forgiveness and the processes of repair in the aftermath of trauma violence, and it brings great honour not only to her personally but also to SU as a whole. Council members expressed particular appreciation for Prof Gobodo-Madikizela's donation of R8 million of her prize money to SU to support various initiatives, including a scholarship in honour of her parents, Nobantu and Tukela Gobodo, funding for the SUNRISE future professors programme and funding for the Centre for the Study of the Afterlife of Violence and the Reparative Quest of which she is the founding director.

Other notable achievements in the quarter include Prof Tulio de Oliveira's inclusion in TIME Magazine's 2024 TIME100 Health list and Prof Ingrid Woolard's honorary professorship at the University of Groningen.

The Rector also spoke on the University's strategic partnerships with institutions like the University of Groningen (core elements of this collaboration include joint PhD programmes, joint and split-site post-doctoral fellows and student and staff mobility) and the South Africa–Sweden University Forum (SASUF) (focussed on pooling expertise to develop joint solutions for issues like climate change, education for a sustainable society, the burden of disease and sustainable urbanisation). The work of the School for Climate Studies and the School for Data Science and Computational Thinking, as well as the extensive research at SU on medicine and health, position SU at the forefront of research that can change lives, both locally and abroad.

The Times Higher Education's Pan African Universities Summit (co-hosted with the University of Pretoria) emphasised sustainability, equitable research and employability, while the launch of Africa's first Policy Innovation Lab at the School for Data Science and Computational Thinking aims to tackle policymaking challenges using data science and artificial intelligence.

The CIRCoRe Conference on Controversies in the use of race and other human categorisation in the SA higher education sector – held in June at STIAS – was a first of its kind in the country. This highlighted the opportunity for SU to become a leader in inter-disciplinary research on race and human categorisation. Council noted that CIRCoRe is on track with its short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations.

A record number of 40 000 bookings (6 000 alone for the Tygerberg campus and 8 000 for the Engineering faculty) for the recent Open Day underlined the increasing focus on the University as a university of choice for top school talent and holds promise for the 2025 enrolments.

The March graduation ceremonies brought the total qualifications awarded for 2023 to 8 760 of which 320 were doctoral degrees (the highest number since 2020).

The 2023 financials

Council approved SU's consolidated annual financial statements 2023 and the 2023 Annual Integrated Report. Notwithstanding the extremely tough environment, the University produced a small operating surplus in 2023. The calls on the University to step in where public funding is slow or lower than expected, continue to grow. This is not sustainable and it is important that SU continues to build a strong academic proposition and attract strong donors. In this vein, Council was pleased to note the increase in philanthropic fundraising in the first part of this year. We do not take this for granted.

Report from the DVC: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel

Prof Nico Koopman's presentation to Council highlighted the ongoing commitment to social impact and transformation led by many colleagues in the University. Key areas of progress include increased diversity among academic and support staff and improved representation within institutional bodies such as the Students' Representative Council, Senate and Council. The transformation KPAs (key performance areas) being developed aim to integrate a more intentional and conscious focus on transformative practices within the University. Prof Koopman shared that some of his top-of-mind concerns include how to build practices that enhance accountability, support courageous sharing and improve transparency, ultimately shifting the focus for all staff from mere survival to thriving.

Approvals, appointments and Council moves

Council approved

- urgent measures to address the food security of students who have been affected by the NSFAS funding caps;
- the amended Ombud rules and the extension of the current Ombud's tenure to 31 October 2026; and
- amendments and additions to the existing academic programme offering and in particular, the introduction of the new Master's in Pain Management from 2026.

Council noted the reappointment of

- Ms Ilhaam Groenewald as Chief Director: Maties Sport
- Prof MR Madiba as Dean of the Faculty of Education
- Mr JP Bester and Prof ML Woermann as Social and Business Ethics Committee members for a further three-year term
- Prof JD Krige as a trustee on the Stellenbosch Trust for a five-year term.

Mr Willie Liebenberg (elected by the Convocation) has resigned from Council. The process of electing his successor will start shortly. I'd like to thank Willie for his years of service to the University both at Council and in other fora.

Search for new Rector and Vice-Chancellor

The search for the new Rector and Vice-Chancellor is going well. Council is aiming to finalise this process in September.

Some closing reflections

I want to recognise the groundbreaking multi-party cabinet appointed by the President. It would though not be stretching to reflect that the hard yards lie ahead. We all look forward to the cabinet working together to change for the better, the lived experience of everyone in our beloved country.

There is a new Minister and now two Deputy Ministers of Higher Education (one of whom is new and an SU alumna) and we look forward to our engagement with them around the policy and economic issues faced by our sector. A number of the cabinet are SU alumni and, in this regard, I want to congratulate specifically Dr Leon Schreiber (who is a member of Council) on his appointment as Minister of Home Affairs. Strength to your work Dr Schreiber!

And finally, thank you all for your part in delivering what the University does so well. May the winter break bring some time with those close to you.

Warm regards

Nicky Newton-King
Chair of Council