

Report of the Institutional Forum 2016

Mr Le Roux Burrows, Chair of the Institutional Forum

The Institutional Forum (IF) is an advisory body that, in terms of section 31(1) of the amended Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, advises the University Council on policy matters, including the implementation of provisions of the aforementioned act and of national policies on higher education.

IF activities consist of meetings to consider advice to Council, as well as opportunities for discussion between the IF executive committee and the Rector's Management Team. From time to time, the IF utilises three task teams on diversity and equity, institutional planning, and institutional culture respectively to finalise its activities more swiftly. Members volunteer to serve on the task team(s) of their choice. The task teams are mandated to properly investigate the matters assigned to them and report back to the IF, which then provides well-considered advice to Council.

Composition of the Institutional Forum

According to the Statute of the University, the IF consists of 32 members. Eight members are appointed as prescribed from each of the four sectors of governance and management, staff, students and the community.

Activities

The IF is expected to advise Council on policy documents and to comment on the University management's implementation of the Higher Education Act. To this end, the full IF and its executive committee each meets four times a year. At each executive committee meeting, the agenda of the following IF meeting is finalised. The executive committee also endeavours to meet with the Rector's Management Team prior to each IF meeting.

Moreover, the IF continuously seeks to focus on specific matters in addition to its legally prescribed duties and responsibilities so as to provide Council with proactive advice for its consideration and further investigation. The strategic priorities of the University are considered paramount throughout.

Transformation on campus

The IF remains committed to actively take part in accelerated transformation in order to establish a culture of inclusivity on the University's campuses. In this regard, an IF representative serves on the Transformation Committee, chaired by the Vice-Rector (Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel) and reporting to the Rector's Management Team.

Appointment of senior staff

As provided for by the applicable rules, the IF took part in the processes for senior staff appointments, namely those of the Vice-Rector: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel, and the Vice-Rector: Strategic Initiatives and Internationalisation, as well as the reappointment of the Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching, and the Vice-Rector: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies. IF members also serve on the selection committees for the appointment of various deans.

Comment on proposed policies

University policies on which the IF advised Council by way of formal reports included:

- the Postdoctoral Policy;
- the first draft of the Admissions Policy;
- the Language Policy;
- the Policy on Unfair Discrimination and Harassment;
- the Trademark Policy;
- the Employment Equity Policy;
- the Student Disciplinary Code;
- the Records Management Policy; and
- the Plagiarism Policy.

The IF supports the overall intentions of the policies above. The Forum proposed technical and editorial amendments to some of the policies, and emphasised the urgent need for training and empowerment to enable effective policy implementation. It was also recommended that Council in each instance determine whether the Afrikaans or English version of a policy should be regarded as the operative version.

In light of the University's Vision 2030, in terms of which the institution seeks to be welcoming and inclusive, the IF will continue to recommend necessary amendments to policies and regulations in order to realise this vision.

Closing remarks

As in the past, the IF feels very strongly that codes of conduct for staff and students should continue to receive attention in order to expedite the establishment of an inclusive culture on campus. In this respect, the pursuit of a listening, tolerant culture is particularly important.

With a view to the future, the IF will continue its normal, legally prescribed activities in 2017, while also actively focusing on encouraging campus discussions on aspects of diversity promotion and transformation. Feedback will be provided to Council by way of formal reports.

Mr Le Roux Burrows
Chair: Institutional Forum