

Report on Transformation Indaba

October 2018

1. Context and background

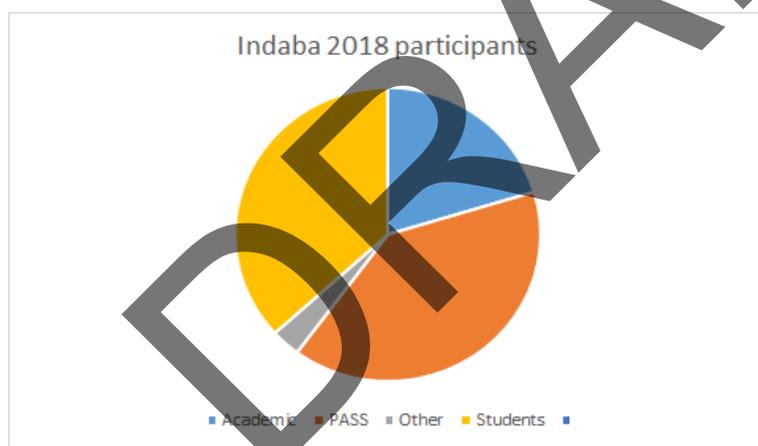
The Indaba started 2 years ago as an initiative of the Intuitional Transformation Committee

- to strengthen a collective responsibility for transformation implementation and progress,
- to check in with staff and students on transformation progress and challenges experienced and
- to determine priorities for the next year of transformation work.

The Indaba is the one annual forum where all transformation structures within the university (including those not represented on the ITC) meet and reflect on the overall progress that has (or not) been made in the last year. The Indaba serves as important barometer for experiences of transformation at the university, and as such provides important input for reflection and planning.

After the first Indaba in 2017, the participation of student voices and perspectives especially in the presentations at the Indaba was identified as a key priority for 2018.

In 2018 the Indaba was attended by 128 participants with the following distribution:



2. Key themes emerging from TI 2018

As per the Indaba structure all tables undertook discussions in three main subject areas: institutional culture, visual redress and transformative student experience. All tables at the Indaba were allocated a scribe. These scribes took notes throughout the discussions and provided a summative reports for each table. These notes were themed, with the following key themes emerging:

- consultation and communication
- person vs. institution centred
- mental health

- belonging vs being welcome

These themes all represent patterns of experience reflected in the discussion groups. Importantly a number of these patterns reflect broader, well documented patterns of experience in universities across the country.

2.1 Institutional culture

2.1.1 Themes discussed

- **Racialised cultural power** needs to shift: White Afrikaans culture and whiteness and patriarchy continue to dominate.
- Associated residential culture and traditions rooted in history and supported by alumni persists.
- Racist and sexist 'norms' i.e. ways of doing things also largely go 'unchecked'
- Everyday experiences of racism and sexism still go 'unchecked'.
- Women of colour feel they are still carrying the burden of transformation work and not reaping the benefits.
- Angry silence has become a dangerous norm for persons of colour at SU 'Suffering in silence is worse than dodging rubber bullets and stun grenades'.
- **Communication** is often policy or perception centred and not people-centred.
- Reactionary communication is experienced as superficial.
- The idea of **excellence is not rooted in Africa.**
- Narrow definitions of excellence as academic success alone.
- **Consultation**, co-option and participation is not experienced as transparent and sincere and there is no bottom up method that includes consultation in decision making.
- There is need to be more deliberation on the authentic use and buy in of the values ECARE.
- The pace of change is slow.
- Rules, culture and traditions become enmeshed at SU.
- The institution is difficult to challenge on matters relating to transformation and those who do are subject to ostracisation and intimidation, resulting in withdrawal and fear.

2.1.2 Recommendations

- The culture of fear that surrounds transformation needs to be addressed with some urgency.
- More social and cultural support is necessary for new and old staff alike e.g. welcoming programme similar to student structure is needed for staff, staff needs more networking and social platforms to interact and
- More professional support is necessary for staff e.g. mentoring and coaching.
- Offer more and safe opportunities to become aware and discuss the culture, norms and biases e.g. training and dialogues.
- Design seating and contact in engagements to be intentional about multiculturalism and networking.
- Review the way task teams operate and function.

2.2 Visual redress

2.2.1 Themes Discussed

- ‘Redress seems to be spoken about in soft tones and broad strokes’ - there are **mixed feelings about the importance of redress**: some regard this as glorified window dressing and other as a low priorities. This presents in a binary of ‘Is it worth renaming instead of using resources for other needs?’ vs. ‘Symbols are a tangible way to change institutional culture.’
- ‘**Restitution without acknowledgement** is the continued perpetuation of pain’ - visual redress must be accompanied by real, deep transformation work.
- The process seems **ad-hoc, and not part of an overarching strategy**. As such it is difficult to understand how decisions are made about projects e.g. why is the Wilcock’s building not being prioritised?
- Visual redress is about the integration of shared experiences alongside one another, how do we do this?
- **African themes** should be introduced and normalized.
- Visual redress should include how certain events are presented (format and design of event) and in attire/clothing/themes.
- There is a tension between the **power of funders to name buildings** and the mandate for visual redress e.g. how is the building of Jannie Mouton centre adding to the vision of Visual Redress?
- There is a sense for some that transformation needs to be approved by the dominant culture.

2.2.2 Recommendations

- There is need for an **overarching strategy** on Visual Redress.
- The Wilcock’s building needs to be prioritised.
- Communicate **mechanisms for students and staff to raise concerns**/issues regarding the naming of buildings and fora for suggestions from students and staff.
- The following **identities, representatives should be included** in visual redress:
 - non-academic staff
 - students and the faces of ordinary graduates who came through the system
 - a memorial- wall of remembrance space for students who lost their lives
 - communities outside of Stellenbosch as well
 - women of colour
 - academics of colour
 - diverse culture and cultural figures and not just historical or political figures.
- A way to encourage critical engagement with historic anti-progressive figures is to create **juxtapositions**.
- **Different languages** are as important as different names.
- Check the accuracy of African language translations on the trilingual signage.
- The university should **focus on telling new stories**.
- The university should engage beyond the Western aesthetic.
- Transformation and visual redress is not just about coloured people but also **other black African cultures**.
- The stock images in yearbooks and other publications should be considered, and consider ‘people who pulled through not just pictures of models’.
- **Residences** should also consider name changes.
- **Contextualization when renaming happens** is key - tell the stories and the reasons for the name. SU needs to be intentional with visual redress messaging.

- Academic teaching and educational conversations must follow renaming.

2.3 The transformative student experience

2.3.1 Themes Discussed

- There should be **recognition for progress** in residence communities.
- We have a far way to go on the inclusion of **PSO students**.
- There is a lack of transparency and communication on some issues e.g. what happened with Botmanshoogte.
- **Placements of students** whose families live close to SU continues to raise concerns in relation to the limited spaces in residence.
- **Limited shuttle services** to areas like Kayamandi and Idas Valley remain a contributor to lack of inclusion and success.
- Sexual assault remains a threat to, especially, women students on campus.
- The link between **mental health and socio economic circumstances** is poorly understood and/or responded to by the university.
- There is lack of capacity to deal with student mental health issues.
- All roleplayers need to be present when we discuss student issues, so that integrated responses can be designed.
- The institution needs to reflect on its ability to be a student-centred institution.
- **Intentional inclusivity** needs to be prioritised, by teaching all staff that work with students at all levels, sensitivity and accountability.
- **Task teams on student issues are top heavy** and do not hear student voices.
- Ignoring the presence of international students especially African students is xenophobic.
- The memory of FeesMustFall treatment of students, as well as the lingering interdicts, cast doubt on the sincerity of a possible TRC process.

2.3.2 Recommendations

- Include students as a driving force behind change (not just sporadic or mid-process consultations).
- The SRC and Student Parliament should be used as key communicators between SU management and students.
- Staff who work with students (support and academic) should openly engage, model and participate in transformation work. Where they struggle with this they should be given support in the shape of training. They should also be held to account.
- The university needs to demonstrate the same commitment to student wellbeing than to academic performance. This will require funding mental health support initiatives and employing more psychologists in the CSCD. It will also require further capacitating and sensitizing the CSCD.
- Accountability of stakeholders should be ensured in case of sexual harassment.
- Intentional conversations and attention is needed for (esp. white) male residences to address the culture and resistance to change.
- The fear of white students to become diverse should be institutionally addressed.

2.4 Mental health (Short remarks - There was no time for a separate discussion)

- Mental health needs to be taken seriously as a **predictor of student success at SU**.
- The **relationship between socio-economic status, race and gender and mental health** risk must be recognised and responded to. This is true for both students and staff.
- Students should be **better informed of student support services** especially as they relate to mental health e.g what should I do if someone attempts suicide?
- SU is run like a business with less regard for other needs e.g. poverty, gender equality.
- We need a **diversity of helping staff**, especially psychologists.
- **Disciplinary matters should be handled with speed and dignity** and regards for mental health.

Recommendation

- Create platform with enough time and key stakeholder representation to discuss Mental health (Mental Health Indaba).

3. General reflections on the Indaba by Transformation Office staff

- The design of the Indaba programme is still mimicking an institutional hierarchy.
- External voices and perspectives will help stimulate conversations to not just focus inwardly.
- The design of a one day programme is too packed to allow for proper sharing and deliberation and more indabas or a 2 day programme should be considered.
- Participants stayed for most of the day and there is a clear appetite for collective participatory gatherings on transformation.

4. Feedback from evaluation survey

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1SamA9rigTm5ZftKvRZ9_ZjrciEIPar7mJGR-SfMDw5E/viewanalytics