



Transformation Indaba 2022



Restitution Beyond Rhetoric



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Transformation Indaba 2022

Restitution Beyond Rhetoric

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List of abbreviations

DVC	deputy vice-chancellor
ITC	Institutional Transformation Committee
PASS	professional and administrative support staff
RC	responsibility centre
SITC	Student Institutional Transformation Committee
SITP	Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel
SRC	Student Representative Council
SU	Stellenbosch University
TO	Transformation Office
TP	Transformation Plan
VC	vice-chancellor

Session 1

Welcoming remarks (Prof Nico Koopman)

In his welcoming remarks Prof Nico Koopman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel (DVC: SITP), reflected on the transformation indabas of 2019 and 2020, and their core themes and outcomes. He reflected on where Stellenbosch University (SU) was standing in 2023 and what contribution the institution had made towards transformation. Focussing on the theme for 2023, Restitution Beyond Rhetoric, Prof Koopman laid out current expectations and highlighted what it meant for SU to go “beyond rhetoric”. He noted that, while there had been significant progress, it was inadequate; transformation at SU needed to be accelerated. To that, he added that the institution could not accelerate transformation without much-needed in-depth change.

Prof Koopman listed the ingredients for lasting change: clarity on SU’s aims, assessment of the changes being implemented, accountability for institutional transformation, acknowledgement and affirmation of progress, and individual and collective responsibility for transformation. He declared that the University had to commit to restitution, redress and development. He reminded the SU community that words had impact and that words were actions; therefore, the institution ought to reflect on the kind of impact it had on the societies it served. Prof Koopman encouraged the audience to consider the relationship between diversity and excellence, noting that excellence alone was not enough. We also ought to reflect critically on where we are, where we want to go and how we aim to get there.



Prof Nico Koopman delivering the welcoming remarks

Keynote address (Prof Chris Brink)

The keynote address was delivered by Prof Chris Brink, emeritus vice-chancellor at SU and Newcastle University, under the title “Reflections on transformation at Stellenbosch University”. His point of departure was that an outsider asking about transformation at SU was not really interested in the institution’s committees, policies or strategies, but in the results. In that light, he stated some simple questions on which clarity was sought:

- What was SU trying to change and why?
- What were the indicators of progress?
- What were the targets for each indicator?
- Who was responsible for meeting those targets?
- What results could be shown?

In framing his presentation, Prof Brink referred to his writings, in which he explored the role of the university in society. He stated that, whilst an institution might be deemed excellent, the most important question remained, What is the institution (SU) good *for*? He highlighted the impact of lack of diversity in higher education institutions on their overall educational value. To his mind, the core business of an educational institution was learning; through diversity, its beneficiaries would learn more about what they did not know as opposed to what they did know. He cautioned that diversity did not mean equality, but that it was a necessary condition because “quality needs diversity”.

Prof Brink presented a comparative analysis of the diversity targets that SU had set in 2012 and where the institution was in 2023. SU had not met its 2012 diversity targets measured against statistics for students, staff and Senate. Why had progress been so slow, Prof Brink wondered. He mentioned how difficult it was to obtain information on diversity targets at SU and suggested a single transformation dashboard for ease of reference.

In closing, Prof Brink stressed that transformation was not just about numbers. “Transformation needs to be based on a change of consciousness. The way to conduct transformation as a mind game is as follows: First try to change the consciousness. Once the consciousness is changing, behaviour starts to change. When behaviour starts to change, exploit the opportunities that arise to change the numbers” (2007).

Key action points for the future:

- Dismantling the myths of a romanticised past towards inclusive ownership and belonging
- Moving past the long distraction of the *Taaldebat* (the debate about language) and deploying that energy towards reinvigorating transformation
- Reimagining the matter of *koshuiskultuur* (the culture in residences) and *ontgroening* (initiation practices), which constitute a form of structural violence, and replacing them with a values-based approach to welcoming new students to SU
- Treating University accommodation as a resource available to all who need it and stand to benefit from it, not as a reward with academic performance as criterion
- Dealing openly and honestly with SU’s legacy issues from its racist past, followed by a purposeful consideration of what actual restitution is on offer



Prof Chris Brink delivering the keynote address

Poem/Song (Ms Kwenzokuhle Khumalo)

Ms Kwenzokuhle Khumalo, primaria of the women's residence Irene, opted to share not a poem or song but an account of the lived experience of students of colour, with reference to the racially motivated urination incident at SU that had made national headlines in May 2022. She highlighted the emotional turmoil that students had experienced following the highly publicised video of Mr Theuns du Toit urinating on Mr Lubabalo Ndwanya's belongings and how that had captured the multitude of silent forms of oppression and dehumanisation on campus. Ms Khumalo conveyed students' sentiments on Afrikaans and whiteness being a core elements of the University and how anything that did not promote Afrikaans was viewed as an attack. Students felt that buzzwords like "inclusivity" were being thrown around with no real meaning attached to them. She cautioned that inclusivity was not an achievement but a standard, and that praise should not be expected for upholding basic human rights.

Ms Khumalo posed some specific questions and made some specific points:

- What is the correlation between binge drinking and racism at SU?
- Why is it that racist acts are the outcomes of binge drinking at SU?
- Urinating on someone or their property is dehumanising, an act that dates to slavery.
- Nobody should have the platform or power to take away someone's dignity.
- If we get rid of the visible hate, we get rid of the invisible evil.
- Students of colour and allyship are the backbone of transformation at SU.



Ms Kwenzokuhle Khumalo recounting lived experiences

Session 2

Lived experiences at Stellenbosch University (Ms Masilo Silokazi)

(Moderated by Dr Leslie van Rooi, Senior Director: Social Impact and Transformation)

SRC chair Ms Masilo Silokazi opened the session on student perspectives with a rendition of Zamajobe's acclaimed song "Ndawo Yami", which means "a place of my own". She drew comparisons between the song's lyrics and black students at SU desiring to belong. Her performance was followed by a video compilation by Visual Communications student Ms Neo Kodisang. SU students had been asked to share their lived experiences and feelings about "belonging" at SU. The general sentiment, as highlighted by Ms Kodisang, was that black students felt out of place. Some did feel positive, but many did not. The difference in student experiences between white students and students of colour was evident and Ms Kodisang stated that ignorance was used as an excuse to protect perpetrators of discrimination and bigotry. "SU has a habit of making things palatable to white people at the expense of black people and this perpetuated the microaggressions they experience daily," she concluded.



Ms Masilo Silokazi performing a song



Ms Neo Kodisang sharing students' lived experiences

Why we need the Judge Khampepe process (Prof Wim de Villiers)

In his opening remarks on the Judge Khampepe process, SU Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof Wim de Villiers reflected on how different things had been at SU in 2022 than in 2015, when the process to accelerate transformation had begun. It showed, he said, that change and transformation were ubiquitous, imperfect and incomplete. Touching on the issue of language policy that had been a major factor in SU's transformation journey, Prof De Villiers said that SU was not an English, Afrikaans or Xhosa university but a national institution whose quest was to serve the nation. He emphasized SU's role as critical social institution whose role was to educate, train and produce new knowledge. He gave recognition for opportunities for equity and social justice, and for transformation that had occurred at many intersecting levels, extending more broadly than race and gender.

Prof De Villiers highlighted four factors that support transformation at universities: financial stability, skills discourse, trust and equality. He acknowledged that transformation at SU was happening at a slow pace and that the public's trust in universities was decreasing, as such institutions were seen as elitist, irrelevant and untransformed. He reiterated Prof Chris Brink's words that universities ought to reflect and refocus their attention on what they are good *for*, not what they are good *at*. Quoting from a speech by Prof Thuli Madonsela, Law Trust Chair in Social Justice at SU and former Public Protector of South Africa, at the annual Russel Botman Memorial Lecture – in celebration of the life of Prof Russel Botman, former SU Rector, and his vision for educational justice – Prof De Villiers said, "If we are to live together, we have to be mindful of each other's humanity." Transformation is a process that will never end. It is up to all of us to be agents of transformation. Ubuntu is important. The Khampepe Commission, he declared, was an important part of the process of improving justice in the SU community.

Prof De Villiers affirmed the University's efforts and commitment to strengthen transformation as embodied by its establishment of the following:

- the Division for Social Impact
- the Transformation Office
- the Institutional Transformation Committee (ITC), moderated by the Rector
- the Student Institutional Transformation Committee (SITC) 2019/2020 subcommittee
- the Judicial Society
- the Transformation Policy and Plan
- the Admissions Policy
- the Disability Access Policy
- the Visual Redress Policy
- the Transformation Indaba
- cultural climate surveys for students and staff, and
- the Transformation Charter.

Prof De Villiers agreed that, although SU was making strides in transformation locally and nationally, its transformation was incomplete. He said that the Khampepe Report would present a tipping point on an irreversible path to protect the dignity of all at SU and to keep transforming. He concluded by affirming his confidence in the direction in which SU was headed in that regard.



Prof Wim de Villiers talking on the Khampepe Report and continued transformation

Staff perspectives on the Judge Khampepe process (Prof Ronelle Carolissen)

Presenting on the staff perspective on the Judge Khampepe process, Prof Ronelle Carolissen from the Department of Psychology at SU reflected on the rationale behind establishing the Commission and on her own experiences at SU. Speaking about staff members' expectations of the Report and their thoughts on its potential implications and opportunities for SU, she said that sentiments of indifference and scepticism had been expressed. Staff felt alienated, unsupported and tired. Therefore, they were not invested in the outcomes of the Report and wanted to "just do their work".

Offering critique on the institutional culture at SU, racism and its consequences, Prof Carolissen wondered when the University would stop seeing racist acts as incidents instead of a pernicious culture at the institution. She added that racist "incidents" were only the tip of the iceberg of everyday racism and discrimination based on gender, class, disability, sexual orientation, et cetera. She also questioned the timing of the Khampepe Commission – was it too little, too late? – and whether the process had been truly meaningful.

Prof Carolissen stated that the Report contained nothing that staff had not already known and that it was painful for them to keep hearing the same accounts of struggles at SU. "Why do we view racism, sexism and other issues as incidents when the lived experience is contrary to incidents, it is continuous?" she challenged.

Prof Carolissen submitted that the legal fraternity enabled whiteness to flourish at the institution. She pointed out that the final investigative committee that considered the “coloured article” was white. On the strength of legal knowledge, whiteness was being reinstated as competent, fair and unbiased, demonstrating deeper dynamics of whiteness and racism. She called it a burden to be black, a black woman, gay, transgender, et cetera at SU and that people felt that they needed to insulate from the community to survive.

She highlighted the nature of the racism at SU as often being indirect, marked by assumptions and assertions of who deserved to be here, shrouded in unearned and undeserved privilege. In closing, Prof Carolissen remarked that those racist “incidents” at SU were sending strong messages and that students had to know that that was not how the University engaged with human beings.

She put forward the following recommendations to combat institutional racism at SU:

- Ongoing engagement about the findings of the Khampepe Commission, especially everyday ongoing institutional racism and its intersections
- Detailed research about student and staff experiences of racism and its intersections: Why had institutional culture surveys not picked up that detail? How had the surveys been constructed? Were surveys the most effective methodologies?
- Using University structures effectively



Prof Ronelle Carolissen sharing lived experiences of staff

Open discussion

Questions

- On the need to change people's mindset as a response to racist issues: How would Prof De Villiers, as Rector, promote changing mindsets?
- How could transformation be embedded if the people who hold the financial power were not interested in it?
- Where were the SU deans? How were the heads of academic departments and living spaces held accountable?
- On restitution statement: How could the restitution statement be embedded in student spaces and what was being done about it?
- What exactly was being apologised for in the restitution statement?
- Would the Khampepe Report be made public?
- How was the University embodying its values?
- Why was isiXhosa the only African language taught at the African Languages Department?
- Was SU not hiring people of colour or were they not applying for vacancies at SU?
- How did SU intend to ensure change in practice?
- Was SU an African university or a university in Africa?

Comments

- Stellenbosch and SU were the Europe of South Africa.
- The fight about the SU Language Policy was not about language but about communication.
- Those conversations were repetitive trauma to people of colour at SU.
- There was much intellectualisation on the issue of racism, which came across as defensiveness.
- The University's Division of Corporate Communications was very good at acting as a band-aid to cover up the University's flaws.

Responses from panellists

Ms Silokazi

- SU had a culture of silencing.
- SU should focus more on critical engagements, and not just in house committee spaces.
- People came together to create spaces for themselves because those spaces did not exist in the institution. That needed to change.

Prof Carolissen

- It was important to begin with kindness and humanity.
- The reality was that the scourge of racism would not end in our lifetime.

- SU staff had to continue to do the work with a view to leaving the space better, even when it seemed impossible.

Prof De Villiers

- Acknowledged the trauma of the space and spaces at SU.
- Transformation was a never-ending process, there was no “finish line”.
- SU was striving to commit to change.
- There was no adequate communication on restitution and what it meant for SU. More could be done.
- The Khampepe Report would be made public.
- The active and proactive effort to employ more people of colour was an ongoing process.
- Was committed, as SU Rector, to moving the institution forward.



Discussion session

Session 3

Theme: Accelerating transformation – narratives from the Rectorate

(Moderated by Ms Ellen Tise, Senior Director: Library and Information Services, member of the ITC)

In the third session of the day, members of the Rectorate gave presentations on accelerating transformation.

Prof Nico Koopman (DVC: SITP)

- What was the aim of transformation?
 - Inalienable dignity
 - Healing wounds
 - Equality
 - Justice for all
- That was what transformation was all about.
- All of us had to be involved in transformation and were responsible for it.
- Diversification among staff and students contributed to their success.
- That would help foster a feeling of belonging.
- Learning and teaching needed to be transformed.
- Broader transformation was required: quantitative and qualitative transformation.
- On subconscious discriminating prejudices: We exercised the power built into our structures to license the prejudiced structures at work.
- How could SU promote transformation in its space in every structure: academic, cultural, social impact, et cetera?
- The Division of Human resources was a vehicle for transformation.
- How could SU develop its students and staff to contribute to transformation?
- How could SU build healing transformation? By staying true to our grief and trauma.
- How could transformation be experienced by all? By creating spaces for all.
- There was a longing for belonging.



Prof Nico Koopman on accelerating transformation

Prof Deresh Ramjugernath (DVC: Learning and Teaching)

- What was transformation?
- It was a very contested term in South Africa.
- Transformation was thought of as exclusive.
- To improve transformation, we needed to think of it in the holistic sense and not as purely demographic.
- SU needed to evolve continuously for the institution to be transformed.
- It did not seem that SU had gone through a transformative process. The University had a long-term vision: the impact and role of students, staff and graduates for the betterment of the country.
- SU was a national asset.
- SU was doing well in learning and teaching.
- Students of colour were not performing as well as white students. How could SU improve this?
- Where they came from had an impact.
- SU was developing the pipeline to allow students into higher education.
- Looking at the role SU played to improve disadvantaged schools. There were many challenges that needed to be tackled.
- There were some key structures at SU for creating a transformative student experience:
 - Discussions were held about challenges and lived experience.
 - Student Affairs had put together a charter, being deliberate and intentional about what they wanted to do in student communities.
 - Change was not the responsibility of senior management, but of everyone.
 - The elevated status of the Equality Unit: The Unit compiled a bi-annual report that went straight to the Rector (the Monitoring Committee).
 - The Equality Unit reported directly to Prof Ramjugernath.
 - Learning and teaching were being enhanced.
- What was SU doing in its environment that would advance change in its communities?
- US was facing many challenges.
- The narrative that “we are the best and don’t need to change” was a common thread at Stellenbosch.
- Was SU really that great?
- While SU produced excellent graduates, et cetera, how could it maintain that excellence at a deeper level?
- What could SU do that would be gamechangers for the institution?
 - Reimagining skills and graduate attributes
 - Academic renewal
 - Attention to who was standing in front of the classroom and the type of graduate SU produced
 - NB: The role of learning and teaching in its totality



Prof Deresh Ramjugernath on accelerating transformation

Dr Ronel Retief (Registrar)

- SU was accelerating transformation.
- How was the Rectorate playing a supportive and active role in transformation?
 - Student Administration
 - Government support
 - Legal Services
- Change is hard because people overestimate the value of what they have.
- SU was clinging to change.
- SU needed to focus on its values and vision statement.
- What was SU doing regarding its values?
- SU had set strategic priorities to get new outcomes and ensure systemic transformation.
- To increase diversity in the student body, SU was broadening access and removing barriers to make it easier to apply to the University (much hard work and pushback).
- Statistics and details regarding applications:
 - The number of black African applicants had increased because of an easier application process.
 - The number of black and coloured students had increased markedly.
 - Application fee had been waived for quintile 1 to 4 schools.
 - The “quality” of students had improved, measured according to grades.

- The quality in the black African pool had improved.
- Because of its history, SU was not the first choice for disadvantaged students.
- SU could not grow in total, but it could grow in diversity and enrol more diverse students.
- The 2019 SU Statute was emphasised as a tool for transformation. It constituted a framework and spirit rather than just a set of rules.
- Access policies were being revised. In the meantime, the current policies had resulted in more diverse ratios.
- How to support students:
 - Psychosocial support
 - Academic support
 - BeYou initiative, offering students the choice of the gender presented on their student profiles/cards, or to be gender-neutral
 - Making Admin A accessible for wheelchair users (work on that had begun)
 - Making spaces more attractive to students; for example, providing charging ports, microwaves, coffee outlets – all low hanging fruit
 - Naming and renaming of buildings, increasing diversity in the student body by broadening access and removing barriers to make it easier to apply to the University (much hard work and pushback)
- Statistics and details regarding applications:
 - The number of black African applicants had increased because of an easier application process.
 - The number of black and coloured students had increased markedly.
 - Application fee had been waived for quintile 1 tot 4 schools.
 - The “quality” of students had improved, measured according to grades.
 - Quality in the black African pool had improved.
 - Because of its history, SU was not the first choice for disadvantaged students.



Dr Ronel Retief on accelerating transformation

Ms Christelle Feyt (on behalf of Prof Hester Klopper, DVC: Strategy, Global and Corporate Affairs)

- The responsibility centre (RC) Strategy, Global and Corporate Affairs had a strategic role.
- The Code of Conduct had been revised shortly before.
- SU was a data powerhouse (refer to PowerPoint presentation for the value derived from data).
- Action taken by the University in that regard included constructing and maintaining interactive dashboards for various purposes.
- SU's score card regarding composition of the total student body (visually represented in presentation) showed efforts at diversification. One could go so far as to use the word "excel".
- The University had been 88,5% successful in reaching its goal to become one of Africa's leading research-intensive universities, thus having a global presence.
- While strides had been made to push open communication, more could be done. Actions in that regard included the Transformation Indaba and increased social media presence.
- SU condemned infringement of human rights and discrimination strongly.
- Women of SU initiative launched.
- Rebranding of SU – a new identity: undergraduate recruitment team, student access for success, et cetera; portrayed the University's commitment to excellence, inclusivity and diversity.
- SU had to up its marketing game.
- Key issues were accommodation and insufficient financial support.



Ms Christelle Feyt on accelerating transformation

Prof Sibusiso Moyo (DVC: Research and Innovation)

- SU needed to work actively on increasing its research portfolio.
- SU was building a culture of research and innovation.
- SU needed to understand that research was important before taking action.
- SU needed to ask the questions, What are we trying to transform? and, What do we actually want to do?
- It was extremely important that SU knew what was going on outside of its borders.
- Who were the key roleplayers in SU's local community?
- Few women featured at the top level.
 - Why do we need diversity and more people of colour? (An important question to ask before pursuing a goal is knowing your 'why'.)
- How were we using our resources?
- Had to acknowledge the struggles that POC women were facing.
- The attitude of "we are happy to have representation, so we don't question it" had to change; we had to question it.
- SU had to emphasise the importance of the words we were using; comparable to blue-collar crime and murder.
- Transformation required measurement and action.



Prof Sibusiso Moyo on accelerating transformation

Mrs Ilhaam Groenewald (Chief Director: Maties Sport)

- SU had to invest in staff and future leaders.
- Much work still needed to be done.
- The University needed to consider how it depicted data, e.g. male and female.
- Women of colour needed greater representation at senior levels.
- Qualitative measures had been identified (refer to PowerPoint presentation).
- If SU was not serious about transformation it would not happen.
- While the PowerPoint presentation showed that representation was good, it could be better.
- Would funding be made available for transformation?
- Did SU really need more money, or did it need to spend its money differently?
- Gender-neutral spaces were very important.
- SU was withdrawing its Women's Sevens rugby team because it did not include enough black students – black students were being overplayed.



Mrs Ilhaam Groenewald on accelerating transformation

Questions and comments

- Was enough being done for the immediate Stellenbosch community?
- What was the University doing for the children of farm workers in and around Stellenbosch as regards access to SU?
- What was being done to support “missing middle” students who did not qualify for NSFAS assistance but could not afford university tuition?
- How was money spent at the institution? SU needed economic transformation. It was difficult to find black service providers. All service providers on the system were white. The businesses that we support say a lot about the institution that we are.

Reponses from the panel

- Ms Ellen Tise: Transformation had to be inclusive. Prof Deresh Ramjugernath (in response to the missing middle): SU needed to change the way it looked at society. Student funding was one of the biggest challenges at SU. The challenge was not money; of that, SU had enough. The challenges lay with problematic sources of funding and with identifying students who needed help. Additional funding could be found; we just needed to understand the needs.
- Prof Nico Koopman on students in neighbouring communities: SU needed to work at considering more disadvantaged schools.
 - Black economic empowerment was a priority.
 - More needed to be done to equip micro businesses in our environment by means of business and entrepreneurial courses.



Delegates at the Transformation Indaba

Update on the SU Transformation Policy and Transformation Plan (Dr Zethu Mkhize, Head: Transformation Office)

- Update shortened because the proceedings were continuing beyond the stipulated time.
- Feedback had been received and the second iteration of the Transformation Policy was being drafted.
- Defining decolonization and restitution as a principle (as framed by the 2017 team) formed a very serious aspect of the Policy.
- How were other processes at SU assisting the transformation process (contextual and conceptual)?
- Restitution had to be considered in the context of SU.
- It was taking longer than expected.
- A Transformation Managers Forum workshop would be held two weeks later (from 20 October 2022).
- A third draft would be circulated in the next year.
- SU was good at drafting policies but poor at implementing them.
- The goal was to implement the Policy.
- The University was forced by circumstance to have a policy regarding transformation.
- SU had made no positive headway in advancing transformation.
- Indicators were not linked to specific people; no one to be held accountable.
- Concern: The talk was all about transformation, not about democracy, too.
- Those “on the inside” were being undermined by the system they were working for.
- Response to previous conversation points:
 - Transformation was a work in progress.
 - Every single faculty should have a professorship programme.

Vote of thanks (Mr Jaco Greeff Brink)

Mr Jaco Greeff Brink, Head: Equality Unit, acknowledged and thanked the attendees for their participation in the 2022 Transformation Indaba. He also thanked all staff members who had been actively involved in the work of accelerating transformation at SU, including his colleagues at the Equality Unit. He acknowledged the challenges of working in that space and encouraged staff to remain passionate and resilient about their work.



Transformation Indaba 2022 article:

<http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Lists/news/DispForm.aspx?ID=9611>