

Communication from Council (meeting of 6 April 2020)



A composite image of selfies taken by Council members and observers participating in the historic first-ever virtual meeting of the body on 6 April 2020 due to the COVID-19 lockdown, from left, top row: Prof Eugene Cloete, Mr Ainsley Moos (vice-chair), Mr Charl Cillié, Profs Wim de Villiers, Hester Klopper and Arnold Schoonwinkel, and Ms Nadine Moodie; middle row: Prof Reggie Nel, Mr Mohamed Shaikh, Mr Lewis Mboko, Profs Johan Fourie, Nico Koopman, Amanda Gouws and Aslam Fataar; bottom row: Mr Johan Theron, Dr Tsakani Ngomane, Adv Jean Meiring, Prof Stan du Plessis, Messrs. Jannie Durand and George Steyn (chair), and Dr Ronel Retief.

THE COUNCIL of Stellenbosch University (SU) held its first meeting for 2020 on Monday 6 April.

In a first for Council, the meeting was conducted virtually on an online collaboration platform allowing for videoconferencing. This was in compliance with the national lockdown regulations to curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). It was also the first meeting of the new Statute-aligned Council, which had been reduced from 30 to 25 members.

Council was proud to note that the SU community is doing its bit in response to the disaster. Efforts include Food Science researchers [turning stale bread into hand sanitiser](#); hundreds of [Tygermaties volunteering](#) to serve on the front line; 45 multidisciplinary coronavirus-related research projects and activities unfolding in various University environments, and a record 3 278 graduands being awarded their qualifications in the first ever SU [virtual ceremony](#).

Because the COVID-19 crisis requires swift and agile action, Council ratified a recommendation for the temporary delegation of authority to the chair and vice-chair of Council to take urgent decisions on behalf of Council, if necessary.

In addition, Council received reports from management about SU's response to the global COVID-19 crisis and took important decisions relating to SU's financial sustainability. Council also welcomed new members and took leave of others, and wished Prof Wim de Villiers well for his second term as Rector and Vice-Chancellor.

Please read on for more details ([click here](#) for an online version).

Kind regards, and stay safe

George Steyn
Chair: SU Council

COVID-19 pandemic

This SU Council meeting took place in a climate of uncertainty across the entire higher education landscape due to the impact of COVID-19. In March, the World Health Organisation declared the spread of the disease a global pandemic. And the South African government introduced drastic measures to mitigate the infection rate, flatten the curve and curb the devastating consequences of the virus.

Council commended management for having taken swift and decisive steps to safeguard SU's students and staff, while also ensuring continuity in the University's activities. The Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Wim de Villiers, emphasised that the University now has only **two overriding priorities**: to complete the academic year, and to ensure sustainability.

To this end, the COVID-19 Contingency Committee, which was established in February, has been expanded to an overarching **Institutional Committee for Business Continuity (ICBC)** led by SU's Chief Operating Officer (COO) Prof Stan du Plessis. Its activities have been reorganised into seven workstreams covering student services; staff; learning and teaching; communications and external relations; campus operations; finance and legal matters, and research. The ICBC is also served by a Medical Advisory Committee headed by Prof Eugene Cloete, Vice-Rector: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies.

Since contact tuition has been suspended and, at this point, it is uncertain how long the COVID-19 pandemic will last, major efforts are under way at SU to prepare for **online teaching and learning** to commence on 20 April. Over the past number of years, SU has in any event been gradually increasing its hybrid and online teaching and learning offering. Now, the fast-forward button has simply been pressed.

The Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching, Prof Arnold Schoonwinkel, acknowledged that this shift would not be without its challenges, but also reassured Council that the University is doing its utmost to support staff and students. SU lecturers have been taking part in daily webinars about online teaching, and a special webpage has been created to provide students with tips on online learning. The University also confirmed that certain cellphone networks would be providing zero-rated access for students connecting to SU's online learning and teaching platforms.

Financial decisions

The full extent of the financial implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the University, as for society more broadly, remains to be seen. However, it is likely that the impact will be significant in terms of direct and indirect costs as well as loss of revenue. To prepare the University for this disruption and protect the institution against unforeseen institutional expenses relating to the management of the crisis, Council on Monday authorised nearly **R105 million to be held in reserve**, which was secured as follows:

- At the recommendation of its Executive Committee, Council approved SU's 2019 financial results and decided to allocate the entire surplus of R45,24 million on the 2019 main budget to the University's contingency reserve.
- Council also allocated an additional amount of R45 million on the 2020 budget – resulting from a larger-than-expected state subsidy announced in December 2019 – to the contingency reserve.

- Lastly, Council decided that the currently unallocated R14,5 million in the institutional block of the 2020 main budget should also be held in reserve for expenses relating to COVID-19.

In addition, Council noted that spending from main-budget balance funds in responsibility centres and faculties had been embargoed. Until further notice, expenditure for any new initiatives from balance funds will only be possible with the permission of the COO or the Chief Director: Finance.

Rector's second term

Council congratulated Prof Wim de Villiers on the start of his second five-year term on 1 April 2020. When Council unanimously reappointed him on 25 September 2019, it was noted that SU had delivered excellent performance during Prof De Villiers's first term, and that he had tabled a compelling vision for his second term. While the COVID-19 crisis has since complicated matters, Council chair Mr George Steyn said the Rector had shown remarkable leadership in the face of this challenge.

Prof De Villiers thanked Council members for their good wishes. He acknowledged that the University had entered uncharted territory due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, the Rector also expressed confidence in **SU's ability to overcome the crisis** – and, in the process, provide valuable assistance to the country and its people – thanks to the sterling contributions of staff, students, alumni, funders, donors and friends of the institution.

[Click here](#) for the Rector's full management report to Council.

Research, innovation and postgraduate studies

At this meeting of Council, it was Prof Eugene Cloete's turn to report on activities in his responsibility centre (RC) – Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies – over the past year ([click here](#) for the complete document, and [here](#) for a pdf version of the PowerPoint presentation). Achievements in this area bode well for the realisation of SU's Vision 2040 of becoming "Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognised as excellent, inclusive and innovative, where we advance knowledge in service of society".

Highlights from Prof Cloete's report included the following, reflected under selected SU core strategic themes:

A thriving Stellenbosch University

- Some 76% of SU's **third-stream income** (from research contracts) in 2019 came from international sources. This shows that the institution enjoys global recognition, which will support its sustainability in the long run.

A transformative student experience

- In the 2019 academic year, 50,8% of **qualifications awarded** by SU were at postgraduate level. These included a record 361 doctoral degrees, which represented an increase of 35% from the 267 in 2015. Over the five years from 2015 to 2019, SU awarded an astonishing 7 460 master's degrees and 1 519 PhDs. This constitutes a significant contribution to progress and development – not only in our country, but also on the rest of our continent and globally.

Networked and collaborative teaching and learning

- SU's **Library and Information Service** holds 798 508 printed books and 15 141 e-books, and provides full-text access to 258 125 journal titles. In 2019, the six libraries on SU's three campuses recorded more than 1,3 million visits.

Research for impact

- In February 2020, the number of **SU researchers with a National Research Fund (NRF) rating** stood at an all-time high of 485, up from 394 in 2016.
- SU now has 51 **research chairs** – more than double the number we had in 2014. Of these, 28 form part of the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI), which is funded by the Department of Science and Innovation. Another 23 research chairs at the University are funded by other sponsors.
- SU remains one of South Africa's most **research-productive** institutions. Our academics achieved a record of 1,64 research publication outputs per capita in 2018 (the last available figures). And according to the Department of Higher Education and Training, academics at SU also topped all other universities in South Africa in terms of subsidy-qualifying books published.
- SU continues to lead the field in terms of the number of Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) **patent applications** generated in South Africa (127 from 2009 to 2019). A number of these inventions have made headlines internationally.

SU brand refresh

Council noted a submission on the SU brand by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Strategy and Internationalisation, Prof Hester Klopper.

In the run-up to SU's Centenary year in 2018, a uniform and consistent SU brand identity was developed after an audit had revealed more than 170 different visual identities across the University. The Centenary logo was well received and started paving the way for a **monolithic brand identity**.

The Rectorate subsequently provided the following directive towards a refreshed visual identity:

- Retain the heraldic crest (albeit refreshed, if needed)
- Develop a monolithic institutional identity
- Create a refreshed visual identity and replace the S-leaf logo
- Retain maroon as the primary institutional colour

Pursuing the goal of a monolithic institutional identity, a **brand narrative** was developed following an extensive analysis of more than 120 documents (including *Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework 2019–2024* and survey results). While it might still require some wordsmithing, a near-final version of the narrative has since been approved by the Rectorate.

Work on the **visual identity** is also making steady progress. In the past three months, appointed brand agency Boomtown, in collaboration with colleagues from the University's Corporate Communication Division, has made significant headway with crafting a refreshed look for the SU brand.

[Click here](#) for extracts from the branding progress report submitted to Council.

Personalia

Council welcomed the following individuals as **new and returning members**:

- Mr Lewis Mboko, chair of the Students' Representative Council (SRC), and Ms Ingrid Heydenrych (Prim Committee chair and SRC member), elected to Council by the SRC for 2020
- Mr Jannie Durand, re-elected by SU donors for the term 2 April 2020 to 1 April 2024
- Mr Wayde Davidse, re-elected by permanent members of SU's professional administrative support services (PASS) staff for the term 6 April 2020 to 5 April 2022
- Prof Reggie Nel and Prof Amanda Gouws, respectively elected and re-elected by Senate for the term 2020–2021, and Prof Aslam Fataar, re-elected for the term 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022
- Prof Arnold Schoonwinkel, appointed to Council by the Rector and Vice-Chancellor as the only vice-rector to serve on Council for the year. This is in accordance with the new composition of Council, which took effect on 1 April 2020 in terms of the amended SU Statute. Prof Schoonwinkel's term will end on 31 December 2020, when he will retire.

Council also welcomed Ms Susan van der Merwe, acting senior director of Corporate Communication, and Mr Mohamed Shaikh, executive manager of the Rectorate, in their capacity as **observers**.

Finally, since the following Council members' terms had recently **expired**, Council thanked them in their absence for their valuable contributions:

- Prof André Coetzee, elected by the Convocation
- Prof Joan Hambidge, elected by the Convocation
- Mr Paulu Joubert and Ms Carli van Wyk, elected by the SRC

Next meeting

The next meeting of the SU Council is scheduled for **22 June 2020**.

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