

REPORT OF THE INSTITUTIONAL FORUM 2008

The Institutional Forum (IF) is an advisory body that, in terms of the Higher Education Act (Section 31(1) of Act 101 of 1997), advises the University Council on policy matters, including the execution of the provisions of the above-mentioned act and national policy on higher education.

The activities of the IF consist of meetings during which their advice to Council is considered, as well as discussions between the executive committee of the IF and the management team of the University. The members of the IF are divided into three task groups – namely on Diversity and Equity, on Institutional Planning and on Institutional Culture. These task groups investigate specific matters that are assigned to them and then report back to the IF.

Composition

The Institutional Forum consists of 28 members, seven from each of the following four sectors:

Governance sector: Two members of Council elected by Council, three members of Senate elected by Senate, one member of Management appointed by Management, and the Registrar or a person appointed by the Registrar.

Staff sector: Two members elected from their own ranks by the permanent non-professorial academic staff, one member appointed from their own ranks by the academic support services, two members elected from their own ranks by recognised trade unions, and two members elected from their own ranks by the administrative support services.

Student sector: Two members of the Students' Representative Council elected by the Students' Representative Council, two members of the Prim Committee appointed by the Prim Committee, one member appointed by the student societies, and two members of the Academic Affairs Council appointed by the Academic Affairs Council.

Community sector: Two members of the Convocation appointed by the President of the Convocation, and five people appointed from their own ranks by the representative bodies of civil society.

Activities

In 2008, the IF firstly provided advice on the following matters in the form of formal reports to the University Council:

The framework for the assurance and promotion of ethically accountable research at Stellenbosch University

The IF studied and approved this proposed policy, but nevertheless had the following comments:

- That the ethical considerations emphasising the interests of the target community and/or participants in the research should be formulated more clearly in order to avoid overloading the target communities with uncoordinated projects or leading to there being no benefit to their participation;
- That the policy should indicate clearly how the researchers will be protected against unnecessary bureaucratic red-tape and unlawful limitation of their academic freedom; and
- That the ethical principles that serve as consideration in the stipulations regarding intellectual property and secrecy should be formulated more clearly in the policy.

Appointment of the Dean of the Faculty of Science and the Dean of the Faculty of Agriscience

In accordance with the University's Rules of Procedure for the Appointment of Full-time Deans, the IF appointed two representatives who participated in the process of considering the suitability for appointment of the relevant candidates and selecting a preferred candidate for each post.

Secondly, it is also the responsibility of the IF to investigate specific matters that are related to the IF's mandate and to comment on them as a critical discussion partner of the Management of the University.

A number of experts were invited to inform the IF on specific aspects:

- Prof Magda Fourie, the Vice-Rector (Teaching), informed the IF on National Higher Education policy and how the role of the institutional forums is defined.
- Prof Andre du Toit, Professor Emeritus in Political Science (University of Cape Town), held talks with the members of the IF on the topic of institutional autonomy and academic freedom.
- A day-long conference was presented where the proposed Overarching Strategic Plan (OSP) of Management was presented to the IF. The IF made use of this opportunity to provide Management with detailed comments on the plan. The OSP was described as a comprehensive and integrated plan that executes the undertaking of the University community to be significantly different and significantly better. A request was made that sufficient institutional debate on the execution of the plan should be encouraged.
- On the recommendation of the Task Group for Institutional Culture, Mr Viljoen van der Walt, the Head of Stellenbosch University Protection Services, informed the IF meeting on safety on the University campus and on the SU Campus Safety Policy and Plan.

Finally, two members represented the IF on both the Language Committee and the Welcoming and Monitoring Work Group for the welcoming of first-year students.

In conclusion

During 2008, the IF tried to be a forum where matters could be discussed that are related to its mandate. The IF is satisfied that it made a meaningful contribution to the activities of the University.

Everyone is invited to bring any matter concerning policy, culture or planning at the University to the attention of the IF for discussion.

Dr Le Roux van der Westhuizen

Chair