

REPORT OF THE INSTITUTIONAL FORUM 2010

Mr Le Roux Burrows

Chairperson: Institutional Forum

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 this 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 Rector and his management team. The members of the IF are divided into three task groups, namely on Diversity and Equity, on Institutional Planning and on Institutional Culture. When necessary, the task groups are supplemented by ad hoc groups. The mandate of the task groups is to investigate as thoroughly as possible specific matters that are assigned to them. They then report back to the IF so that it can give well-considered advice to Council.

Composition

The Institutional Forum consists of 28 members, seven from each of the following four sectors: the governance sector, the staff sector, the student sector and the community sector.

Activities

IF considers its role

The IF's activities have gained an added dimension over the past few years. On the one hand, the IF carries out its normal duties by advising the University Council and commenting on the University Management's implementation of the abovementioned act. On the other hand, the IF also holds discussions from time to time on what its role should be. These discussions are concerned in particular with whether the IF should remain strictly within its legally prescribed duties and responsibilities, or whether there also should be more focused involvement in specific issues, such as community interaction. The latter aspect will remain on the agenda until a satisfactory answer has been found.

Proposed policies are examined

By way of formal reports, the IF advised primarily on the proposed amendments to the Statute and on new policies. University policies that were at issue are the Policy on the Promotion of Weapons-free Campuses; the Policy regarding Joint and Double Degrees at Master's and Doctoral Level with Foreign Universities; and the Policy on the naming of Buildings, Venues and other Facilities/Premises.

Informal comments were also made on the Policy for the Integrated Management of Sustainability; the University's Policy on Academic Integrity: the Prevention and Handling of Plagiarism; and the Policy in respect of the Commercial Exploitation of Intellectual Property.

Appointment of a dean

In accordance with the University's Rules or Procedure for the Appointment of Full-time Deans, the IF appointed a representative to serve in the selection committee with a view to the appointment of a Dean for the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Experts provide elucidation to support IF

In the year under review, the focus of investigation of the three task groups was the Soudien Report, the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions*. A few experts were invited to speak to the IF on this.

- Dr Jerome van Wyk, Director: Employment Equity and the Promotion of Diversity at SU, spoke insightfully on the Soudien Report from the perspective of Stellenbosch University.
- Prof Crain Soudien, compiler of the report, supports the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town with respect to institutional transformation in his role as Assistant Vice-Chancellor. In 2009 he was the Chairperson of the ministerial committee that investigated transformation in higher education.

For background, Prof Soudien first sketched the circumstances that gave rise to the report. Notwithstanding important legislation regarding equality that was passed in 1995/6, 1996/7 and 2000/2001, South Africa has the biggest gap between rich and poor in the world. This gap has increased, despite the democratisation of South Africa in 1994.

According to him there is a great deal of anxiety among people and the problem cannot be fixed by simply considering it empirically. The situation is much more complex and challenges us to find imaginative and creative solutions. People are trapped in their own ways of thinking and there currently is no model in terms of which they can act. Against the background of these circumstances, universities face a very difficult task.

- Prof Jimmy Volmink, Deputy Dean: Research in the Faculty of Health Sciences, described his experiences of transformation at Stellenbosch University.

In conclusion

The IF's Chair, Dr le Roux van der Westhuizen, resigned from the University at the end of June. Mr le Roux Burrows, Vice-Chair, currently acts for the Chair until a new Executive Committee has been appointed.

The IF worked hard throughout to live up to its reputation as a forum where matters can be discussed thoroughly. Continuous self-examination of its role on campus is a natural result of this.

In general, the IF participates actively in discussions of all matters affecting the University. In this spirit we extend an open invitation to anyone to bring any matter concerning policy, culture or planning at the University to the IF's attention for discussion.