



2 August 2021

## **International travel by the Rector and Vice-Chancellor**

*A Sunday newspaper inquired at SU about the costs associated with the international travels of the SU Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Wim de Villiers. This is following a PAIA application that SU received in this regard. SU responded as follows:*

### **Comment:**

Universities' financial sustainability is based on three main income streams: a government subsidy, student fees and research funding. Leading universities worldwide also rely on philanthropic and corporate social responsibility donations – referred to as the fifth income stream. The financial sustainability of universities depends to a large extent on the ability of vice-chancellors (university heads) to raise money.

At SU, the Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Wim de Villiers, plays a crucial role as chief fundraiser – a role that is both complicated and demanding. The role is not a nice extra, but forms part of the Rector's work agreement to channel funding locally and internationally to the University. He is expected to liaise with international partners, attend meetings, make presentations and travel to meet expected outcomes.

Each visit and trip is also planned with clear goals and expected outputs in mind, while approval for trips is granted by the Chairman of Council. As part of the process of performance management, the outputs and work performance are assessed annually by Council with the SU Rector performing exceptionally every year.

The investment that SU makes in order to visit donors, international companies, trusts and overseas partner, consistently delivers a return that is worth the cost and input over and over. Thanks to Prof De Villiers' continued involvement in the Development and Alumni Relations Division's stakeholder engagement, it was possible to raise R1,7 billion in philanthropic funding between 2015 and May this year, of which three-quarters came from trusts and foundations, individuals and companies.

From 2015, SU's international donors have also grown significantly from 13% of all donors to 19% at present. The success of this investment by SU was put into perspective by an analysis by the Bureau of Economic Research which shows that the return is 50 times the cost (R6,17 million) incurred. In addition, the Inyathelo study on fundraising shows that SU's Development and Alumni Relations Division spends only 11 cents for every rand raised.

The impact report (attached) of philanthropic fundraising and internationalisation that has been compiled, unequivocally indicates the value and impact for SU. What is not known, however, is how the other universities and vice-chancellors in South Africa perform with fundraising and what their spending is to make this possible.

Thus, while the return on investment is clearly quantifiable, overseas visits are not only geared towards fundraising, but also to the establishment and expansion of essential and strategic international partnerships and networks. In addition to the exchange of academic and research expertise, networks and agreements offer benefits such as donor advice, partners serving on advisory boards, mentorship roles, exchange of staff and students, and participation in academic industry discussions.

Since 2018, there has been an increase in meaningful partnerships at institutional, faculty and departmental levels with partners in Europe, Asia, the Americas, and also in the rest of Africa. Here, too, the Rector of SU plays a decisive role. Where SU was part of a total of 250 different types of partnerships in 2018, it has

been 298 this year. Such relationships are formed over years, but the fact that SU has acquired 48 partnerships over the past three years, mostly at the request of the partners, is no small performance.

Universities worldwide consider the creation and promotion of alumni networks to be of great importance. Prof De Villiers has been instrumental in a 100% growth in SU's number of alumni nodes abroad since 2015 – from 12 then to 24 in 2021. Apart from the fact that this is a strong indication of the respect that alumni have for their alma mater, it holds great future benefits for both alumni and the University and in particular increases the value of a SU qualification worldwide. Attendance figures of alumni events serve as confirmation: In 2015, 883 alumni attended SU events abroad and in 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic made such events impossible) it increased to 3 518 alumni.

Obviously, one has to ask what happens to the money raised. SU has spent more than a third of the R1,7 billion on bursaries and student support, while other money is focused on teaching, infrastructure, research and social impact projects. The money also contributed to new research centres and teaching buildings on the SU campuses, while the diversity of SU's academic and research staff could be increased through strategic funding.

In line with SU's vision to be a leading research-intensive university, the number of research chairs have expanded, including the Ton and Anet Vosloo Chair in Afrikaans Language Practice in the Department of Afrikaans and Dutch. The chair is aimed at the further development of Afrikaans as an important tool in the service of the South African community as a whole.

#### **In response to specific questions:**

SU's strategic calendar directs the travel activities of the Rector. Budgets are managed accordingly and then monitored and audited.

All trips undertaken by the Rector are done in consultation with the Chairperson of Council and are approved by him. Where the Rector travels for fundraising purposes, these costs are borne by the Division of Development and Alumni Relations. Other travel expenses are handled from the allocated operating budget.

International fundraising is complex and requires highly professional skills. Obviously, this requires investment of money, and therefore SU places a high premium on responsible and efficient spending of money. Before any trip takes place, thorough research and planning is done in order to unlock the most value possible. All expenses are approved by the chief executive officer or the Council chairperson and also audited annually.

SU also points out that the University, under the leadership of Prof De Villiers, is on track with the realisation of the University's Vision 2040 – to be Africa's leading research-intensive university. Since 2015, the University's internationalisation strategy and global fundraising initiatives have become the cornerstones of its pursuit to be a sustainable, thriving higher education institution. Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has enabled SU to successfully complete its academic and research programmes and lay the foundation for the successes that SU will strive for in the post-COVID era.

SU will therefore continue to incur costs, where necessary, to enable the Rector to increase local and international philanthropic fundraising, develop alumni relationships and increase alumni donations, and to promote SU's internationalisation strategy and agenda – this is also part of his working agreement with the Council chairperson. It is essential for a globally recognised university such as SU and accepted practice that this is the expectation of rectors around the world.

END