

Communication from Council

Wednesday (1 October) marked a historic milestone for Stellenbosch University (SU) with the formal inauguration of Prof Deresh Ramjugernath as our 13th Rector and Vice-Chancellor, celebrated through a wonderful series of events.

As I noted in my remarks during the formal ceremony, Prof Deresh has big strategic goals and although there is lots to do, the path ahead is clear. In this extremely stressed macro-economic environment which SU has to navigate, Council stands firmly beside our Rector. We will exercise oversight and uphold accountability, and we will also support, encourage and cheer lead. The success of Prof Deresh's tenure will be seen in the success of every student, of every staff member and in the achievement of his bold vision for the University.

Council had a full programme when it met for its Q3 meeting on 29 September – and the Rector was first on the agenda with critical updates on the following matters:

- **The next five-year strategic planning process:** Work is well underway and Council expects to sign this off at its year-end meeting.
- **The associated proposed structural realignments at management level to enable better delivery of the strategic plans:** Council has approved the direction of travel on management realignments. There is still some formal consultation in this regard to be undertaken on some roles and subject to these, the formal recruitment processes will start. The importance of putting in place all the necessary senior leadership roles as a matter of priority is shared by Council members.
- **NSFAS funding stresses and support for NSFAS and missing middle students:** The University has undertaken significant efforts to provide critical funding and wraparound support, for which the partnership with donors is critical. Council has approved the provision of collateral for bank funding to final-year (including graduating) students subject to bank approval. Once the finer details have been finalised with the relevant banks, more information will be shared by the Acting Chief Operating Officer (COO).
- **Progress on improving SU's Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment status from its current level 8:** Rectorate is working to achieving level 5 this year and to improving it in 2026. The University's BBBEE level is already assuming increased importance for stakeholders who look at this when evaluating their choice of academic institution with which to partner. Improving it will require focussed attention from all Responsibility Centres and faculties.
- **The ongoing attention to the development of new sources of revenue, partnerships and innovations:** These have, of course, assumed increased importance given the stresses on traditional forms of revenue. These, fee and salary increases, and prudent expense management will be critical to the long-term financial sustainability of SU and

will form an important part of the Council discussion of the University's 2026 Budget later this year.

Council had a good discussion with the Ombud around the themes she identified from matters that her office handled in the first six months of this year. Many of these relate to student funding queries. Council was encouraged that the Acting COO, Prof Nicola Smit, was able to reflect on a number of initiatives implemented in the past weeks, including the appointment of full-time and temporary resources, to enable faster resolution of these queries. The importance of resolving the query backlog as a matter of priority is shared by all and I would like to thank those who are working so hard to make this possible.

Council had a full report on the use of Afrikaans at SU and it is clear how much effort and resources go into this. The report enabled a constructive conversation around intentionality and stakeholder perception. The multilingualism at the Rector's inauguration was noteworthy.

The forthcoming rollout of the Performance Enhancement Framework, scheduled to commence in January 2026, was noted as a major priority for the institution with Council strongly supporting driving and rewarding excellence while also noting the importance of managing this as a moment of change for staff.

Council approved the ICT Acceptable Use Policy, the Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Policy, the Conflict of Interest Institutional Rule and the Rule for Financial Conflict of Interest for Research Conducted under United States Public Health Services Grants or Agreements. Council was joined for the latter discussion by Prof Juanita Pienaar, the Acting Dean of Law, and appreciated the discussion on the interplay between the policy and academic freedom.

Council approved the awarding of a number of Honorary Degrees, which will be conferred at upcoming graduation ceremonies. This is always such a special opportunity to recognise people who have achieved the extraordinary – one of my favourite Council items! Details of these degrees will be announced in due course.

There were several reports from University and Council structures including from Senate where Council approved new academic offerings.

We also welcomed Dr Tsietsi Jacob Medupe to Council – one of two new Ministerial appointees, as well as two interim Student Representative Council members, Asanda Vilakazi and Natalie Nortje. We look forward to their contributions.

As we move to the final quarter of the year, I am mindful of the enormous privilege that we have leading, being involved with and studying at our special University. There are great winds in our space and great opportunity ahead. It is a time I think to be mindful of the uncertainty that comes with change. To achieve Prof Deresh's bold vision, we will need strong stakeholder partnerships, and we should not take our position or the support of any of our stakeholders for granted. Council and I look forward to working with all of you to consolidate that support.

Warm regards
Nicky Newton-King
Chair of Council