

STEPS: the Strategic Transformation of Educational Programmes and Structures

14 April 2010

Our University of Technology has commenced an exciting process to give effect to the new Vision of ourselves approved last year by Council and Senate. We are calling the process “STEPS”, which stands for the Strategic Transformation of Academic Programmes and Structures.

Our new Vision envisages that CUT increases its already impressive developmental role, by seeking explicitly to contribute to socio-economic advancement in our province and beyond, mindful of both current and future economic, social and environmental trends. The Vision focuses on outputs, outcomes and their impact, attuning our curricula, programmes, research and innovations to the needs of its primary users. It looks to carefully chosen and sustained strategic partnerships with stakeholders in business, government and civil society to support our initiatives. Finally, the aim is that, in proceeding in this way, CUT becomes a ‘new generation organisation’, flexibly and responsively revisiting its own offerings, processes and structures for greater relevance to these commitments. You may wish to access the following link for a presentation of an articulation of this approach that I gave in a paper to a recent conference among universities of technology ([click here for paper](#)).

The aim of STEPS is to take this vision forward by involving ourselves in reviewing our core activity, namely the programmes and their constituent curricula that we teach in our diplomas and degrees. Since 2008, there have been several academic related initiatives like instituting a core curriculum that would help to deal with educational backlogs some of our students have; designing our own unique qualifications framework that aligns with the new HEQF and expresses our Vision; restructuring of the faculties and schools to make them fit for the vision; enhancing high technology focused offerings so that we become a university of technology in practice; etc. These initiatives, which ran in parallel, could not reach finality by the end of 2009 when Senate and Council approved Vision 2020. To us, this presented an opportunity to integrate and align their intended outcomes with Vision 2020.

We hope to identify some programmes for improvement and updating, possibilities for new programmes – perhaps inter-departmental or even inter-faculty – to enhance our developmental impact, and, of course, programmes that need to be out-phased over time. These innovations may in turn involve enhanced modes of teaching and learning, and new partnerships.

STEPS will stretch our thinking and expose us to new ideas. And, it is a participative process. It has been approved by Senate and considered at an extended Senate, but inputs and involvement will be broader and more sustained. To help to broaden our ideas, national and international experts on academic transformation, be it in curriculum and programme development, research and innovation or academic structures and management thereof, have been invited to share their expertise and enrich our debates and initiatives.

Accordingly, a key initial event is a conference being initiated and to be hosted by CUT, where we shall explore the implications of our new vision, in the light of changes in the socio-economic context, student needs, and employer expectations. Clearly, as much as there will be national and international participation, the focus of the conference is on CUT’s academic transformation within its context and location in the central region of South Africa.

The conference will be held on **13-14 May 2010**. The theme is being finalised. Please reserve these dates, as we hope that many staff and university stakeholders will participate, as well as interested (senior) student representatives and leaders. Further details will follow shortly.

Following the Conference a smaller Workshop will be held in which inter-Faculty work-groups will actively engage with these ideas, and identify priority changes or innovations to be developed for implementation in subsequent months by suitable task groups.

As Vice-Chancellor and Principal, I am personally leading the STEPS process at a strategic level. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic, Professor Rocky Ralebipi-Simela, is driving its operational roll-out, supported by the other executive managers and chairpersons of broadly-recruited committees suitable to the successive stages.

We are assisted by Professor Mark Orkin, a professor of management, who has experience with such change processes in the public sector, especially the sub-sector that deals with learning, research, innovation and knowledge management. Professor Orkin led such processes in organisations like the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in the late nineties, Statistics South Africa in the early 2000's, and most recently at what used to be called the South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI), which he transformed to Public Administration, Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA). In all these organisations, Professor Orkin distinguished himself and made them highly competitive.

We look forward to keeping you informed, and benefitting from your involvement, as CUT takes this bold, innovative and worthwhile initiative.

Thandwa Mthembu
Vice-Chancellor and Principal