

KE EO TABA!

*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives
through quality, impact, and care.*

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA



Qwaqwa Campus Newsletter

August 2025



Welcome to the vibrant second edition of the *Ke Eo TABA!* newsletter for 2025 – your essential compass for news and inspiration from the University of the Free State. While our mountainous campus is renowned as an education hub excelling in teaching, learning, and research, it is also a dynamic canvas painted with fascinating tales of continuing work and transformative initiatives. This issue pulls back the curtain on the exciting developments shaping our university – from crucial infrastructure upgrades designed to elevate the student experience and cultivate a robust academic environment, to the inspiring individuals and programmes that drive our progress.

This is a thrilling opportunity to present a packed edition, brimming with stories that underline the UFS' commitment to excellence and its profound impact. Dive into the journeys of our inspiring alumni, whose achievements reflect the very essence of a Kovsie education. Get an exclusive look inside our Occupational Health and Safety Office to understand the vital work they do to ensure a secure and thriving campus for all.

There is also the remarkable progress of the SA-UK University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP) Phase 2. This pivotal initiative, a powerful collaboration between the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the British Embassy, is making significant strides in strengthening doctoral education across South Africa. The USDP is dedicated to a critical mission: increasing the number of permanently employed South African university staff who achieve doctoral degrees. Its unique joint supervision model, which pairs South African institutions with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) in the United Kingdom, is proving instrumental in this endeavour, fostering a rich exchange of knowledge and expertise.

At the University of the Free State, the programme proudly champions three scholars currently in the advanced stages of their PhD studies. This invaluable collaboration extends beyond mere supervision; it offers both our dedicated scholars and their supervisors unparalleled opportunities to visit the UHI. These immersive visits are crucial to cultivating international collaboration, strengthening academic networks, and enriching research interests, ultimately broadening the horizons of our academic community. Phase 2 of this transformative programme is expertly led by Dr Grey Magaiza, supported by a dedicated steering committee, with Lethiwe Sokhela diligently managing its financial and administrative backbone.

As we embark on this semester, remember that as valued staff members, you are an integral part of this dynamic team. Consider yourselves truly fortunate to be part of an institution with an excellent track record of finding

solutions through challenges. After all, at Kovies, we don't just educate; we inspire excellence and transform lives.

Thank you for your continued support. I hope you enjoy reading this edition as much as I enjoyed bringing it to life.

Till next time,

Au revoir,

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

Re a o amohela kgatisong ya bobedi e hlwahlwa ya *Ke Eo TABA!* koranta ya 2025 – sesupatsela sa hao sa bohlokwa bakeng sa ditaba le kgothatso ho tswa Yunivesithing ya Freistata. Le hoja khemphase ya rona e maloting e tumme ka ho re ke setsi sa thuto se ipabolang ka ho ruta, ho ithuta le ho etsa diphuputso, e ntse e le sebaka se settle se kgabileng ka dipale tse kgahlang tsa mosebetsi o tswelang pele le boikitlaetso ba diphetoho. Taba ena e bulela dintshetsopele tse thabisang tse bopang yunivesithi ya rona – ho tloha ho dintlafatso tsa bohlokwa tsa meralo ya motheo e reretsweng ho phahamisa boiphilelo ba baithuti le ho kgothaletsa tikoloho e matla ya thuto, ho ya fihla ho tshusumetso ya batho le mananeo a tsamaisang tswelopele ya rona.

Ona ke monyetla o thabisang wa ho hlalisa kgatiso e toma, e tletseng ka dipale tse totobatsang makgabane ao Yunivesithi ya Freistata e itlammeng ho a phetha ekasitana le phethahatso ya makgabane ao. Ikakgele ka setotswana maetong a baithuti ba rona ba mehleng, mekaubere ya rona, bao dikatleho tsa bona di bontshang boleng ba thuto ya Kovsie. Akgela mahlo a hao ka hare ho Kantoro ya rona ya Bophelo bo Botle le Polokeho ho utlwisisa mosebetsi wa bohlokwa oo ba o etsang ho nnetefatsa hore ho na le khemphase e sireletsehileng, e atlehileng bakeng sa bohle.

Ho boetse ho na le tswelopele e babatsehang ya Mohato wa 2 wa Lenaneo la Bongaka la Basebetsi ba Yunivesithi la SA-UK (LBBY). Boikitlaetso bona ba bohlokwa, tshebedisanong e matla pakeng tsa Lefapha la Thuto e Phahameng le Thupello (LTPT) le Boemedi ba Borithane, bo etsa kgatelopele e kgolo ho matlafatsa thuto ya bongaka Afrika Borwa ka bophara. LBBY e ikemiseditse thomong e hlokolosi: ho eketsa palo ya basebetsi ba diyunivesithi ba Afrika Borwa ba hirilweng moshwelella ba atlehang ho fumana mangolo a bongaka. Mmotlolo wa tataiso wa yona o kopaneng ka boikgetho, o kopanyang ditsi tsa Afrika Borwa le University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) United Kingdom, o bonahala o thusa boitekong bona, bo kgothalletsang phapanyetsano e ngata ya tsebo le botsebi.

Yunivesithing ya Freistata, lenaneo lena le tshehetsa ka boikgantsho barutehi ba bararo bao ha jwale ba leng mehatong e tswetseng pele ya dithuto tsa bona tsa PhD.

Tshebedisano ena ya bohlokwahadi ha se tataiso feela, empa e fa barutehi ba rona ba itetseng le batataisi ba bona menyetla e ke keng ya lekanngwa ya ho etela UHI. Maeto ana a tebileng a bohlokwa bakeng sa ho hodisa tshebedisano ya matjhaba, ho matlafatsa dikgokahano tsa thuto, le ho matlafatsa dithahasello tsa diphuputso, mme qetellong re atolose tjadimo ya setjhabana sa rona sa thuto. Mohato wa 2 wa lenaneo lena la phetoho o etelletswe pele ka bokgabane ke Ngk Gray Magaiza, a tsheheditse ke komiti ya tsamaiso e itetseng, le Lethiwe Sokhela ya laolang ka mafolofolo ditjhelete le tsamaiso.

Ha re qala semestara ena, hopola hore jwalo ka basebeletsi ba bohlokwa, le karolo ya bohlokwa ya sehlopha sena se mafolofolo. Inkeng le le lehlohonolo ka nnete ho ba karolo ya setsi se nang le rekoto e ntle haholo ya ho fumana ditharollo ka ho toba mathata. Etswe, ho Kovies, ha re rute feela; re kgothaletsa bokgabane le ho fetola maphele.

Ke lebohela tshehetso ya lona e tswelang pele. Ke tshepa hore le tla thabela ho bala kgatiso ena jwalo ka ha ke ile ka thabela ho e etsa hore e phele.

Ho fihlela nakong e tlang,

Sala hantle ho fihlela re kopana hape,

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

Siyakwamukela kwingosi yethu yesibili ehlabahlosile ye-*Ke Eo TABA!* I-Ke Eo TABA ingosi yephephandaba – iyona evela kwenye yamakhempasi eNyuvesi yase-Free State nehlabahlose ngezindaba nokugququzela. Nanoma ikhempasi yase-Qwaqwa edume ngezintaba ibekwe esicongweni njengesikhungo semfundo esihamba phambili ekufundiseni, ekufundeni, kanye nasocwaningweni, iphinde ibe isisekelo esiguquguqukayo esinezindaba ezihlabahlose emsebenzini oqhubekayo nezinhlelo eziletha uguquko. Le ngosi ijeqeza ekhasini lezinguquko ezinhle eziqhuba impilo yenyuvesi yethu – kusuka kwizinhlelo zengqalasizinda eziqhubekayo ezenzelwe ukuthi zisimamise ukuba khona kwezitshudeni nokuhlakula indawo yesikhungo esiphakeme esinamava, kuye kufinyelele ekugququzeleni omunye nomunye kanye nezinhlelo ezifukula inqubekela-phambili yethu.

Kuyithuba lentokozo engefaniwe ukwethula le ngosi evutshelwe ngezindaba ezethula ukuzibophezela kwe-UFS kubuyoninco nokuba nomthelela othela izithelo. Zitike ngezindaba zohambo lwabalingani bethu abanamava aqhakambisa ubumqoka bemfundo yabantu aseke badlula e-UFS nabaziwa ngegama le-Kovsie. Thola ngokukhethekile ukuqondisa izinhlelo zeHhovisi i-Occupational Health and Safety ukubona umsebenzi wabo obalulekile abawenzayo ukuqinisekisa ukuphepha nokudlondlobala kwekhempasi ekufukuleni wonke

amalunga ayo.

Kukhona futhi nolunye udaba lwempumelelo yebanga elinzulu lobudlelwano lohlelo lwesigaba sesibili loDokotela Abangabasebenzi beNyuvesi olubhangqa iNingizimu Afrika neNgilandi olwaziwa nge-University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP). Lolu hlelo olubalulekile oluwukubambisana okunamandla phakathi koMnyango weMfundo Ephakeme kanye neHhovisi leNxusa laseNgilandi lenza uguquko oluhlabahlosile ekufukuleni imfundo yezifundo zobudokotela eNingizimu Afrika yonkana. Lolu hlelo lwe-USDP luzinikele kakhulu empokophelweni ebalulekile: ukunyusa isibalo sabalo sothisha bemfundo ephakeme abaneziqu zobudokotela emanyuvesi aseNingizimu Afrika. Okuyiyona ndlela yokufakela lolu hlelo amehlo okhozi ngokubambisana ngendlela ehangqa izikhungo zemfundo ephakeme zaseNingizimu Afrika neNyuvesi iHighlands and Islands (UHI) eseNgilandi kuthela izithelo ezinhle kulolu bambiswano ngokucobelelana ngolwazi namakhono abalulekile.

ENyuvesi yase-Free State lolu hlelo lusingethe ngokuziqhenya izifundiswa ezintathu ezisesigabeni sokuphuthula izifundo zobudokotela. Lolu hlelo lokubambisana olubaluleke ngendlela engefaniwe alugcini nje kuphela ekuhlolweni kwalezi zifundiswa zihlolwa abahloli bazo; lunika ithuba kuzo lezi zifundiswa ezizikhandlayo kanye nabahloli bazo amathuba angephikiswe okuthi bavakashele inyuvesi esibaliwe. Lokhu kuvakasha kwasebebaliwe kubalulekile ekwakheni ubumbano lwezemfundo ephakeme kumhlaba-jikelele, kuqinisa ukuvuleleka kwamathuba emfunweni ephakeme, kuphinde kuhlakule uthando lwezocwaningo, bese kuvula izindlela zokukhulisa umphakathi wenyuvesi yethu kumhlaba-jikelele. Isigaba sesibili salolu hlelo olunezinguquko lubhekiswisa yiso elibanzi ngobungoti bukaDkt. uGrey Magaiza ngokulekelelwa ikomidi elizinike elibandakanya uLethiwe Sokhela ophethe umgogodla wohlelo-zimali nokuphathwa kwawo wonke amabhuku alo.

Njengoba singena esigabeni sesibili sonyaka ungakhohlwa ukuthi njengomsebenzi otuswayo uyingxenywe ewumgogodla waleli thimba elinamava. Zibukeni njengabantu abanenhlanhla enkulu yokuba ingxenywe yesikhungo esine-rekhodi lokuthola izixazululo ezingqinambeni zemihla-ngemihla. Ekugcineni kwakho konke, kule nyuvesi, asifundisi nje kuphela; siqhakambisa ubuyoninco futhi sishintsha izimpilo.

Siyabonga ngosinathi lwakho oluqhubekayo. Ngithemba uya-kuthokozela ukufunda le ngosi njengoba nami ngikuthokozela ukukwethulela yona.

Kuze kube ngokuzayo.

Asiqhubeke,

PRECIOUS SHAMASE



NOTICE BOARD

UPCOMING EVENTS

8 August
HR–Women's Day



September
Soccer and netball tournament



24 September
Heritage Day



6–7 November
Postgraduate student conference



13 August
Biennial gendered worlds lecture



19 September
IKS seminar



October
Be Better Be Safe



November
Men's breakfast



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IN THIS ISSUE

Ke Eo Taba! editorial team

All articles in this newsletter were written by Precious Shamase, from the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus, unless otherwise stated.

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<https://www.ufs.ac.za/media/general/publications>

The University of the Free State (UFS) Qwaqwa Campus is proud to introduce you to a vital addition to its commitment to staff and student well-being: the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Office. This office, dedicated to fostering a safe and healthy environment for everyone on campus, is spearheaded by Safety Officer, April Mokhosi.

A commitment to campus safety

Mokhosi's vision for the office is clear and comprehensive. "It is my duty to ensure that students and staff are safe and that the working environment is conducive, whether it is in the offices or lecture venues," Mokhosi states. This dedication extends beyond the campus community, encompassing the safety of all guests as well.

The core mandate of the OHS office is to proactively prevent harm and ensure swift, effective emergency response. This includes ensuring that every building is equipped with trained firefighters, first aiders, and evacuators.

Proactive measures and event safety

Beyond daily operations, the OHS office plays a critical role in campus events. Mokhosi meticulously reviews all events held on campus to ensure compliance with safety regulations. "Before any event, I first check if compliance is met. We have a criteria used to ensure that staff and students comply with regulations to avoid casualties." A key aspect of emergency preparedness for events is the priority of having ambulances on site.

Beyond the obvious: food safety and environmental awareness

The scope of the OHS office extends to less obvious but equally crucial areas of campus well-being. Mokhosi actively monitors food preparation environments on campus, ensuring that food safety and hygiene practices are strictly followed to prevent food poisoning.

Visible safety reminders are also a priority. "To have signs posted on the walls to make sure that people do not smoke in the building, for example, 'no smoking' areas," Mokhosi notes, highlighting the importance of clear communication in maintaining a healthy environment.

Enhanced emergency response and future initiatives

Significant strides have already been made in enhancing emergency services on campus. "Currently, we have an ambulance that is on site 24/7 to assist students and staff members. This is helpful, because we would have to wait hours to get assistance," Mokhosi proudly shares. This immediate access to emergency medical care is a game-changer for the campus community.

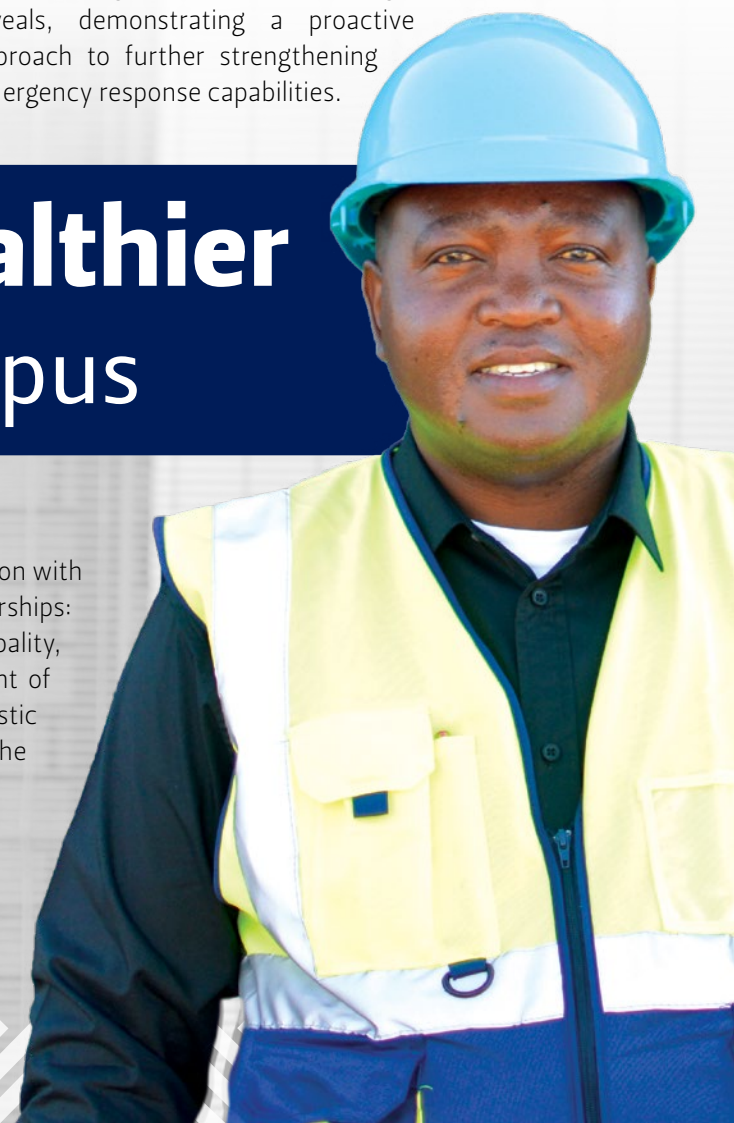
Looking ahead, the OHS office is not resting on its laurels. "Another thing that we are currently working on is to have a fire engine on site to make things easier," Mokhosi reveals, demonstrating a proactive approach to further strengthening emergency response capabilities.

Aiming for a healthier and safer campus

Collaborative partnerships for a safer campus

The success of the OHS office relies heavily on strong collaboration with external stakeholders. Mokhosi highlights these crucial partnerships: "We are also working with our external stakeholders: the municipality, police officers, the Department of Labour, and the Department of Environmental Affairs." These collaborations highlight a holistic approach to safety, extending the reach and effectiveness of the OHS office beyond the campus gates.

The Occupational Health and Safety Office, under the dedicated leadership of April Mokhosi, is poised to significantly enhance the safety and well-being of the entire UFS Qwaqwa Campus community. ■



The 'facelift' goes far beyond a fresh coat of paint

The landscape of our Qwaqwa Campus is constantly evolving, with a series of significant projects and infrastructure upgrades underway to enhance the student experience and ensure a robust academic environment. Nico Janse van Rensburg, Senior Director of University Estates, shared insights into the ambitious plans shaping our campus.



Milestones in modernisation

One of the most visually striking achievements to date is the Intsika Building, the exterior facelift of which has been hailed as a resounding success. The heart of our campus, the Intsika Building has recently undergone a significant revamp, emerging with a fresh and modern facelift that promises to enhance both functionality and aesthetics for staff and visitors alike. This exciting transformation marks a new era for the campus operations, reflecting our commitment to providing a contemporary and efficient working environment.

This transformation extends beyond aesthetics, with the new offices for Student Affairs being a particular highlight, marking a significant milestone in improving student services.

The Student Centre is another key area of focus. Recognising its crucial role in student life, the university is actively working to ensure that it delivers optimal service. Negotiations are currently underway with a local Qwaqwa supplier to manage both the personnel restaurant and a general store – similar to a 'Seven-Eleven' – within the centre. This initiative aims to provide convenient access to amenities for students. Furthermore, efforts are being made to formalise informal vendors currently operating outside, inviting them to move into the centre and contribute to a vibrant, integrated student environment. The UFS is also actively seeking new tenants to further diversify the offerings within the Student Centre, all with the overarching goal of creating a truly conducive space for students.

For years, the Intsika Building has served as the central hub for essential campus functions – from student admissions and financial aid to human resources and executive offices. While its historical significance is undeniable, the building's infrastructure has increasingly shown its age, impacting daily operations and the overall campus experience. The recent renovation project addresses these challenges head-on, breathing new life into a beloved, albeit aging, structure.

Beyond these prominent structures, the university is immensely proud of the Academic Literacy Venues for the Centre for Teaching and Learning, which are playing a vital role in supporting students' academic development.

Looking ahead: exciting developments on the horizon

The coming year promises even more exciting developments. A major undertaking is the expansion of the Health and Wellness Centre. This expansion is critical to integrating essential services such as Kovie Counselling and Kovie Health, which provide comprehensive support for student well-being. Janse van Rensburg confirmed that construction is set to commence within the next two to three months, signalling a swift move towards enhancing student health services.

Further bolstering academic support, a dedicated Postgraduate Hub is slated for construction, complete with its own ablution facilities. This will provide a focused and conducive environment for postgraduate students to excel in their studies.

Addressing campus accessibility, the university is tackling road challenges, particularly those posed by a wetland area. In a strategic move to ensure efficient maintenance, responsibility for the maintenance of student residences has been transferred to University Estates. This shift will allow for dedicated maintenance work to be carried out during the December break, minimising disruption to students.

Enhancing learning spaces

The commitment to modernising learning environments extends to library facilities. Following the successful completion of the South Campus library and the final stages of the Bloemfontein Campus library, attention is now firmly on the Qwaqwa Campus library. The final phase of this renovation is underway, with a critical next step being to address the issue of accessibility to the main entrance. This significant undertaking, due to the magnitude of funding required, is being executed in carefully planned phases to ensure a thorough and effective upgrade.

Behind the scenes: essential infrastructure

Not all crucial projects are immediately visible. The university is also investing in vital underground infrastructure, with plans to enlarge the sewer system to accommodate the increasing student population. This proactive measure ensures that the campus can sustainably support its growing community.

Additionally, the Mendi Building has undergone a complete electrical overhaul to enhance safety – a


critical but often unseen project that underscores the university's commitment to a secure environment. Finally, the VIP Lounge at the Mandela Hall has recently been completed, offering a modern facility with its own ablutions, further adding to the campus' amenities.

These continuing projects, overseen by the dedicated team at University Estates, are a testament to the university's commitment to providing a world-class environment for its students, fostering academic success and holistic well-being.

Refreshed exterior

The most visible change, of course, is the exterior facelift. The building now boasts a refreshed facade, improved landscaping, and a more welcoming main entrance, creating a positive first impression for all who enter.

The positive impact of these renovations is already being felt across the campus. Staff members are enjoying more comfortable and functional workspaces, leading to increased productivity and morale.

The Qwaqwa Campus Principal, Prof Prince Ngobeni, said this project is a testament to the university's continued investment in its infrastructure and its dedication to providing the best possible environment for its staff and students. "The revamped Intsika Building is not just a building; it's a symbol of progress, efficiency, and a bright future for our institution. We encourage everyone to come and experience the transformation for themselves!" he said. 

Unveiling Qwaqwa's real story – the PhuthaPop census

A new lens on Qwaqwa's population: the PhuthaPop project

For too long, the true number of people living in Qwaqwa has been a mystery. The last official figures from Statistics South Africa, based on the 2011 census, put the population at around 275 000. However, anyone living here knows that this number feels vastly underestimated. Accurate population figures are not just statistics; they are the bedrock for effective planning, governance, and research. Without them, it is impossible to build the infrastructure, provide the services, and implement the policies that our community truly needs.

This is precisely why the PhuthaPop project was born. Spearheaded by a collaborative effort between the

UFS ARU, the Department of Geography, and international partners, including Jess Delves (GLOMOS, United Nations University, and Eurac Research), Stefano Terzi (UNDP), Dr Stefan Schneiderbauer (GLOMOS Co-head), and Ronny Schomacker (Berliner Hochschule für Technik), PhuthaPop is developing a groundbreaking methodology to estimate Phuthaditjhaba's population using remote sensing, rigorously validated with on-the-ground surveys. This initiative is a testament to the long-standing research partnership between the UFS and GLOMOS, which is dedicated to understanding social-ecological systems and sustainable development in the Maloti-Drakensberg. It was during the continuing research that the critical data gap regarding Qwaqwa's population numbers was identified, leading to this vital effort to provide accurate, up-to-date information for researchers, decision makers, and policy implementers alike.

Qwaqwa: a legacy of resilience and continuing challenges

To truly understand the significance of the PhuthaPop census, it is crucial to grasp the historical and socio-economic context of Qwaqwa. Located in the Eastern Free State, Qwaqwa was a product of apartheid's deeply unjust policies, established as a homeland for Sesotho-speaking people. In 1974, it became a self-governing territory, serving as a site for forced relocations that led to chronic overcrowding, limited infrastructure, and profound socio-economic marginalisation. Life for many revolved around migrant labour in distant cities, while women and children bore the brunt of underdeveloped conditions within the homeland.

With the dawn of democracy in 1994, Qwaqwa was reincorporated into South Africa, becoming part

of the Maluti-a-Phofung Local Municipality, with Phuthaditjhaba as its bustling urban core. Yet, the echoes of this marginalisation persist today. High unemployment, critical deficiencies in service delivery – particularly water and waste management – and a heavy reliance on social grants remain significant challenges. Despite these formidable obstacles, Qwaqwa is also a vibrant tapestry of cultural resilience, a dynamic informal economy, and continuing educational endeavours, proudly including a campus of the University of the Free State. The PhuthaPop census therefore offers invaluable insights into how historical inequalities continue to shape contemporary development and, crucially, highlights the remarkable community-driven strategies for resilience and adaptation that define this region.

Initial insights from the PhuthaPop census: what are we learning?

While the full findings are still being compiled and analysed, the initial insights from the PhuthaPop project are already incredibly compelling and, in some cases, surprising. The use of remote sensing, combined with targeted in-situ surveys, is painting a far more detailed and accurate picture of our community than ever before.

The power of localised data: why a Qwaqwa census matters

Conducting a census specifically for Phuthaditjhaba is profoundly significant, because it provides context-rich, place-specific data that truly reflects the unique socio-economic and spatial realities of this historically marginalised urban area within Qwaqwa. As the administrative and commercial heart of the former homeland, Phuthaditjhaba has long grappled with the compounded effects of apartheid-era underdevelopment and the complex challenges of post-apartheid governance. This localised data allows us to move beyond broad national statistics and delve into the specific needs and dynamics of our community, enabling more targeted and effective interventions.

Key population figures and community growth


While the precise new population figures from PhuthaPop are still being finalised, the project is

already indicating a significantly higher population than the official 2011 census. This increase points to a substantial growth in the community, driven by a combination of factors including natural population increase and continued migration to the urban hub. Understanding the true scale of this growth is crucial for planning adequate housing, health care, and educational facilities.

Unpacking education, employment, and essential services

The PhuthaPop census is also shedding light on critical aspects of life in Qwaqwa, including education levels, employment sectors, and access to essential services. A poignant example of the challenges faced – which will be further illuminated by the census data – is the severe water crisis experienced during the 2016–2020 drought. Residents of Phuthaditjhaba and surrounding areas have faced immense difficulties accessing water, with many households enduring weeks without piped supply due to damaged infrastructure and inadequate municipal management.

In the absence of reliable services, community members demonstrated incredible resilience, relying heavily on alternative sources such as rivers, springs, and communal taps, often located far from homes. Some families ingeniously developed makeshift rainwater harvesting systems, while others – when financially able – resorted to purchasing water from informal vendors. These coping mechanisms starkly revealed deep inequalities: wealthier households had the means for better storage and purchasing power, while poorer residents faced significant health risks from using untreated water. This crisis underscored how water access in Qwaqwa is not solely shaped by climate conditions but is profoundly influenced by socio-economic status and systemic neglect. The PhuthaPop census will provide critical data to quantify the impact of such challenges and inform more equitable and sustainable solutions for essential service delivery.

Ke eo taba! The PhuthaPop census is more than just a counting exercise; it is an initiative to empower Qwaqwa with the accurate information it needs to build a more equitable and prosperous future. Stay tuned for more findings as the project progresses! 



Centre for Global Change adds new face to officer ranks

The Qwaqwa Campus is thrilled to introduce Thandi Dhlamini, the new Assistant Officer in the Centre for Global Change (CGC). With a profound commitment to fostering growth both within the university and the surrounding community, Dhlamini brings a vibrant energy and a clear vision for impactful engagement. Her role is pivotal in ensuring the seamless operation of the CGC – a hub dedicated to bridging the gap between academia and real-world change.

The engine behind the Centre for Global Change

As Assistant Officer, her responsibilities are multifaceted, primarily focused on logistics, coordination, and administrative support. She is the cornerstone that ensures smooth operations for students and departmental activities alike.

Her key responsibilities include **Conference coordination**: Managing all logistics for students attending academic conferences – from booking accommodation and processing registration payments to ensuring that every aspect of their trip is meticulously organised.

Event planning and support: Handling venue bookings, coordinating catering, and managing event setup, including branding and decorations for in-house events.

Travel and logistics: Assisting with transport arrangements for both students and staff, including booking rental vehicles.

Interview coordination: Organising virtual meeting setups for postdoctoral fellow interviews and providing administrative and moral support alongside Prof Otomo.

Daily administrative duties: Efficient management of emails, scheduling meetings, and supporting the planning and execution of projects, including vital community engagement and outreach initiatives.

“My role is to ensure that the CGC’s activities run efficiently and that both students and staff are well supported,” Dhlamini explains. “It’s a role that keeps me engaged, organised, and constantly learning – and I truly enjoy it.”

A vision for Qwaqwa: growth beyond infrastructure

When asked about her greatest aspirations in her new role, Dhlamini’s passion for the Qwaqwa community shines through. “I would love to see Qwaqwa grow, not just in infrastructure, but in the hearts and lives of the people, through the impact of the university,” she states.

She firmly believes that while the



university boasts immense expertise, brilliant students, and dedicated researchers, its presence must translate into tangible benefits for the local community. “We cannot continue being hosted by this community for years without them truly benefiting from our presence,” she emphasises. While acknowledging the presence of local students as a positive start, Dhlamini advocates for intentional engagement. “We need to intentionally engage the community in our projects, share knowledge, empower the vulnerable, and offer real opportunities for development. That’s how we will grow – not just as a campus, but as a nation.”

This ethos perfectly aligns with the mission of the Centre for Global Change: ‘bridging the gap between academia and community, between research and real-world impact.’ The newly appointed assistant officer expresses genuine happiness at being part of a team that positively influences both students and the community, calling it ‘purposeful work’. Her ultimate desire? To witness “real, lasting change, starting right here in Qwaqwa.”

Beyond the professional: a creative and joyful spirit

Outside of her demanding professional life, Dhlamini reveals a vibrant and creative personality. She is the proud owner of Botle bo Bokalo, a small beauty business specialising in nail and lash services. When not channelling her creativity, she cherishes time with her son, engaging in deep conversations over rooibos tea or coffee with friends, and exploring the Word of God. She finds solace and joy in sharing uplifting messages on WhatsApp and embraces humour on TikTok, using it as a space to unwind and spread laughter. “I love spreading joy,” she says, “whether it’s through humour, inspiration, or a flawless nail set.”

A message of perseverance and purpose

Dhlamini is driven by a deep-seated joy in witnessing others succeed, especially those who overcome adversity. “It gives me joy to witness others rise, especially when they come from difficult or humble beginnings,” she shares. She sees the university as a place filled with inspiring stories of resilience and achievement through research and education, urging everyone to realise, “it’s not just them, it’s also us. You can do it too”. Her own journey, shaped by perseverance and faith, fuels her passion for encouraging others to relentlessly pursue their potential.

In a powerful message to the students of the Qwaqwa Campus, Dhlamini highlights the immense privilege of their opportunity. “Don’t take this time for granted. Give these few years your best shot. Work hard, stay focused, and remember why you started.” Drawing from her own humble beginnings, she reiterates that education is a powerful key to unlocking doors, reminding students from similar backgrounds that “you deserve to be here, and you have every reason to fight to be great. Your future is worth the effort”.

For the staff, she emphasises the profound responsibility and meaning of their work. “I truly hope we are here because we want to be here,” she states, acknowledging the challenges but reminding everyone that their core purpose is to serve students and the community. This, she believes, necessitates being “sober-minded, intentional, and kind in how we treat one another. Growth doesn’t happen in isolation – we grow, influence, and uplift others as we go along. And that’s what makes this work meaningful.”

Her personal mantra is ‘Patience is power’, which encapsulates her philosophy. She believes that “true strength often lies in the quiet moments – in waiting, trusting, and allowing things to unfold in their own time”, confident that “with patience comes clarity, growth, and lasting impact”.

The Qwaqwa Campus community extends a warm welcome to Dhlamini. Her dedication to administrative excellence, coupled with her profound commitment to community upliftment and personal growth promises to be an invaluable asset to the Centre for Global Change and the university. 📌

Connecting the centre with communities: new community officer

The Centre for Global Change (CGC) is excited to introduce the newest member of the CGC team – the Community Officer. In this pivotal role, he will be the vital link between the centre and the communities of the Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality.

KE EO TABA! sat down with Thabang Mokoena to learn more about his new role, vision, and what he hopes to achieve.

A new role focused on community-driven impact

“My main responsibility is to serve as a bridge between the centre and the communities,” Mokoena shared. “My focus is to ensure that all CGC projects are community-driven, responsive to local realities, and truly reflect the lived experiences of the people we serve.”

His primary responsibilities are wide-ranging and impactful, including the following:

- Developing and leading the CGC’s community engagement programme.
- Building and strengthening relationships with local stakeholders, including traditional leaders and royal families.
- Ensuring that CGC activities align with local regulations, guidelines, and municipal bylaws.
- Informing the CGC’s research and community development agenda, based on community needs.
- Coordinating outreach initiatives, workshops, and awareness campaigns.
- Promoting active community participation in local development projects.
- Supporting vulnerable groups by linking them to CGC and UFS opportunities and resources.

Exciting initiatives already underway

While new to the role, our Community Officer has already stepped into several meaningful projects. One key initiative involves local visual artists who are creating artworks that reflect the identity and lived experiences of the Qwaqwa community.


This project aims to explore how rural areas influence artistic expression and resilience in the Eastern Free State.

Another exciting venture is the ‘Three Local Schools Electricity Project’, which tracks electricity usage in selected schools. The goal is to identify strategies to help reduce electricity bills and promote sustainable energy practices in these learning institutions.

Beyond these, several other initiatives are currently being conceptualised. “Because they are designed in close consultation with the communities, we believe they will be more sustainable and impactful in the long term,” Mokoena explained. “I firmly believe in working with the community rather than for the community and ensuring that every project reflects their true needs and aspirations.”

Unwinding and staying grounded

When not in the office, our Community Officer finds joy and rejuvenation in his personal life. Family plays a significant role, with twelve nieces and nephews providing a constant source of fun and grounding. “They visit my home often, and that time together helps me recharge and stay grounded,” he shared.

A love for the outdoors is also evident, with hiking and camping being favourite pastimes. “Having grown up in Qwaqwa, nature has always been my refuge and a place where I find peace,” he said. Connecting with local community members through casual conversations also keeps him in touch with his roots. 



Faculty of Education hosts transformative WOW Day 2025

The Faculty of Education on the Qwaqwa Campus was alive with anticipation on 23 May 2025 as it hosted its annual World of Work (WOW) Day in the Mandela Hall. Organised by the Teaching Practice Directorate, under the leadership of Dr Lulama Mdoana-Zide, the event aimed to prepare final-year Bachelor of Education (BED) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students for their transition from lecture halls to classrooms. By connecting future teachers with experienced professionals, the day offered an invaluable blend of practical advice, candid insights, and inspiration.

The atmosphere in the hall was one of excitement and focused attention as students prepared to exchange the structured rigour of academia for the unpredictable realities of teaching. Proceedings opened with a warm welcome from Prof Cias Tsotetsi, Campus Vice-Principal: Academic and Research, who urged the graduating cohort to approach the profession with adaptability and an open mind. Drawing on findings from an NRF-funded project with pre-service teachers, he highlighted challenges they may face—such as limited resources, infrastructural constraints, multi-grade classrooms, and the needs of hostel-based learners without parental support. He also touched on the pressing issue of learners whose cognitive development lags significantly behind their grade level, sharing examples of Grade 2 or 3 pupils unable to write their names. His message was clear: while the teaching profession is rewarding, it demands resilience, creativity, and patience.


A major highlight of the day was the keynote address by Advocate T Malakoane, Head of the Free State Department of Education, who spoke on *The Power of Assessment to Drive Quality in Education*. He explained how thoughtful, well-implemented assessment strategies not only track learner

progress but actively shape better educational outcomes. His insights underscored the role of assessment as both a diagnostic tool and a driver of quality teaching.

The programme also offered practical sessions to prepare students for the administrative and professional aspects of teaching. A representative from the Free State Department of Education provided a comprehensive overview of conditions of service, equipping future educators with a clear understanding of their rights, responsibilities, and benefits as public servants. Adding a school-based perspective, the principal of Hlatseng Primary School shared what to expect as a newly appointed teacher, and spoke with warmth about the challenges and joys of working in a special school.

Leadership in education was the focus of an engaging session by a Chief Educational Specialist from the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, who encouraged students to “take up space” in their schools—whether as formal leaders or through everyday acts that contribute to improvement and innovation. This call to active participation was echoed by an inspiring alumnus from Iteboheleng Primary School, who recounted their own teaching journey with honesty and humour. Their story of perseverance, adaptation, and reward resonated deeply with the soon-to-be graduates, offering a glimpse into the road ahead.

Students left the event motivated and better informed about the realities of the profession. As one final-year attendee reflected, “This is such an informative and educational event – we are grateful to the faculty.”

WOW Day 2025 was a testament to the Faculty of Education’s commitment to preparing its students not just with theoretical knowledge, but with the confidence, resilience, and vision needed to thrive in the classroom. With the combined wisdom of experienced educators, departmental leaders, and alumni, the day served as a powerful send-off for the next generation of teachers—ready to inspire, lead, and make a lasting impact on learners across the Free State and beyond. 



Dr Akinyelu's *robotics initiative*: bridging the tech gap for local youth

Dr Andronicus Akinyelu – Lecturer in Computer Science and Informatics and a prominent figure at our institution – has been spearheading an impactful robotics project for several years, initially focusing on empowering high school learners and now expanding its reach to Maluti TVET College students. This initiative, which began with the core objective of community engagement and skills-building, has evolved significantly to maximise its impact and sustainability.

Nurturing young minds: the high school journey

The project initially targeted Grade 12 learners, aiming to equip them with foundational knowledge in artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics. However, due to the demanding schedules of Grade 12s, the focus shifted to Grade 10 and 11 students, with invaluable assistance from Community Engagement Coordinator Officer, Moodi Matsoso, who played a crucial role in identifying participating schools and fostering collaboration. In 2023, the project kicked off with three high schools: Makwane, Mohaladitwe, and Molapo. Learners were introduced to the fundamentals of AI and robotics, including hands-on experience in building robots using LEGO Mindstorms.


Initially, classes were held at the schools, but logistical challenges such as unreliable electricity supply led to a change in strategy. Learners began attending sessions at the university every Thursday for two hours over six months, with breaks during exam seasons. Their commitment was remarkable, even covering their own transportation costs, and upon completion, participants received certificates of completion. In its inaugural year, Dr Akinyelu personally mentored 30 learners, and

by 2024 the number grew to nearly 50 with the addition of two more schools, Kgola-Thuto and Mathabo. Schools selected participants, usually top Science students, with Prof Aliza le Roux offering crucial support during the expansion.

Expanding horizons: collaboration with Maluti TVET College

This year, the project entered a new phase through an initiative by the Campus Principal, Prof Prince Ngubane, who emphasised the need to expose local youth to robotics and AI at an early age to keep pace with global technological advancement. A key turning point came with his suggestion to partner with Maluti TVET College, which already boasts an impressive robotics lab. While the college offers advanced aspects of robotics and Python programming, the university's contribution focuses on building a strong foundation with basics such as LEGO Mindstorms. "It is important to introduce them to the basics first; that's where we came in," explained Dr Akinyelu.

The programme at Maluti TVET College ran for two months, with classes every Friday. Transport was provided by the Campus Principal and the Community Engagement office, ensuring accessibility for students. Dr Akinyelu, who initially spearheaded the project solo, was joined by Dr Adebola Musa, Lecturer in the Department of Computer Science, and together they facilitated the programme. As Dr Akinyelu transitions to new endeavours, Dr Musa will continue to lead this vital project, ensuring its sustainability and growth.

This evolving robotics initiative is a testament to the power of community engagement, strategic partnerships, and a shared vision to empower the next generation with crucial technological skills. 



A spirit of international collaboration and heartwarming generosity filled the air on the Qwaqwa Campus as Prof Julie Shepherd-Powell, Graduate Programme Director of Appalachian Studies at the Appalachian State University (App State), generously donated winter clothing. This act of kindness, however, is more than a simple donation; it is a tangible example of how academic partnerships can actively contribute to creating responsible societal futures by addressing immediate community needs and fostering sustainable, long-term connections.

The genesis of a partnership

The story began with a long-standing academic partnership between App State University and the University of the Free State (UFS). Since 2020, Prof Shepherd-Powell has been working with Dr Grey Magaiza, Deputy Director of the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies (CGAS) – through a US Department of State grant – to develop a master's degree in Community Development at the UFS. This professional connection led to a visit where Prof Shepherd-Powell and her colleague, Dr Trevor McKenzie, Director of the Centre for Appalachian Studies at the Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, were introduced to local community leader, Kgosatsana Feeleng Mota. This fruitful venture was made possible by the Mountain-to-Mountain collaboration-based partnership, designed at its core to strengthen the University of the Free State and the Appalachian State University.

A spirit of collaboration and generosity: community helping community


"Dr Magaiza took us to meet with the princess to talk about the issues and challenges that the community is facing," Prof Shepherd-Powell explained. It was during this meeting that she learned of the community's need

for warm clothing. The idea of 'mountain community helping mountain community' resonated deeply, connecting the mountainous regions of North Carolina and Tsheseng. The contribution was a true labour of love. Faculty and staff at App State donated winter clothing, which Prof Shepherd-Powell personally packed into vacuum bags and carried with her on her flight to South Africa. This direct and hands-on effort highlights the deep commitment to this cause.

Kgosatsana Mota expressed her profound gratitude, saying, "I am overwhelmed that they did it. This act of kindness today has left me truly emotional." The jackets, which come in a variety of sizes, will be distributed through the traditional council to ensure that they reach those who need them most.

A continuing connection for a better future

Looking ahead, Prof Shepherd-Powell hopes this is just the beginning. "We have to keep this collaboration open, because it's good to have mountain communities in conversation with one another," she said. The partnership, which includes Dr Magaiza, Prof Stephanie Cawood on the Bloemfontein Campus, and Trevor McKenzie, is seen as a beautiful and continuing connection that transcends continents.

"This donation is not just about clothing; it's a powerful symbol of global empathy and a shared commitment to community well-being," stated Dr Magaiza. International partnerships can be leveraged not just for academic enrichment, but also for practical, community-centred action that contributes to a more compassionate and equitable world. This initiative demonstrates that by integrating a focus on local needs with global collaboration, we can actively work towards creating a future that is more inclusive and socially conscious. 

From one mountain community to another:
App State professor delivers warmth to Qwaqwa



June is more than just the start of winter. It is a time to confront an urgent truth: Men are struggling. Emotionally. Mentally. Socially. And often silently.

In our lecture halls, offices, and homes, men are present but not always emotionally available. Many carry invisible burdens masked by culture, pride, or fear of being perceived as weak. As a university and community, we must ask: Are we creating spaces where men can be vulnerable, heard, and supported?

Silence is not strength

From childhood, boys are taught to hide pain and 'man up'. These lessons build emotional walls that block connection and lead to fractured relationships, mental distress, and destructive behaviour.

At UFS Student Counselling and Development, I have seen young men afraid to admit depression, and staff silently burning out. This is not just a personal issue. It is a workplace and community crisis.

"Traditional masculinity ideology encourages men to be stoic and suppress emotion. This repression leads to disconnection, psychological distress, and poor mental health." **Dr Ronald F Levant**

"For many boys and men, the only acceptable emotion to express is anger. Behind that anger lies sadness, anxiety, fear, and loss. Emotions society has taught them to silence." **Prof Malose Langa**

UFS leading change

The UFS is responding through initiatives such as the Men-to-Men Mental Health Programme and the Lekgotla Men's Well-Being Project. These challenge harmful masculinity norms and offer a new message: It is okay to feel, to speak, to heal.

This work is supported by the leadership of the Division of Student Affairs:

- Dr Hlasho, Executive Director
- Dr Munita Dunn-Coetzee, Director of Health and Wellness
- Zoleka Dotwana, Director of Student Affairs, Qwaqwa Campus

Together, they champion safe spaces where male students can reflect and grow emotionally, preparing them to be role models in their communities.

"To improve men's health, we need to undo the masculinity that kills men and hurts those around them. We need to remake how we raise boys and allow men to be whole human beings, capable of feeling, expressing, and healing." **Prof Kopano Ratele**

"We have constructed masculinity as a homophobic test: the fear of being perceived as weak, as emotional, as less than a 'real man.' That fear limits men's full humanity." **Dr Michael Kimmel**

Women as partners in healing

Women play a vital role as mothers, sisters, partners, and colleagues. They are often the first to notice when men are struggling emotionally, but they may feel unsure about how to help. Creating emotionally safe spaces where men can share without judgment or pressure is key. Listening, affirming vulnerability, and challenging outdated 'man-up' attitudes help to reshape norms.

Raising boys who can cry and seek help is revolutionary. In the workplace, women can advocate for wellness programmes inclusive of men and support male peers seeking help.

"When we ask men to be vulnerable but ridicule them when they fall short of being 'strong,' we trap them in shame. And shame is where disconnection thrives."

Dr Brené Brown

Towards collective healing

Healing is not about rescuing men. It is about walking alongside them as they reclaim their full humanity. When men heal, families stabilise, workplaces improve, and communities grow stronger.

As we observe Men's Health Month, let us move beyond awareness and build a culture of care where vulnerability is strength and healing is shared. Let us not just mark Men's Health Month but transform it into a movement.

"When men heal, families stabilise, relationships strengthen, and communities thrive." **K**



From humble beginnings to national acclaim: the inspiring journey of Nkosana Kheswa

The University of the Free State (UFS) proudly celebrates the remarkable achievements of alumnus Nkosana Shadrack Kheswa, whose journey from a child-headed household in Bohlakong, Bethlehem, to a nationally recognised education specialist exemplifies resilience, dedication, and the transformative power of education.

Born and raised in challenging circumstances, Kheswa's early life was marked by hardship. He attended Nthute Primary School, LK Ntlabathi Secondary School, and Tiisetsang High School. As part of a child-headed family, his elder sister, Nomasonto Xaba, played a pivotal role in raising him and his siblings. To contribute to his family's well-being, Kheswa undertook various jobs, including working as a gardener, a general cleaner, and on farms around Bethlehem.

A path forged by support and academia

Despite the early challenges, Kheswa's innate potential was recognised and nurtured by key individuals who steered him towards academia. He credits Mrs Masondo, Mrs Makhalenyane, and Nicolette van der Merwe for their unwavering support and encouragement. Their belief in his abilities propelled him towards higher education.

Kheswa's academic journey at the UFS was extensive and impactful. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), and a



Postgraduate Diploma. Beyond his studies, he was an active member of the university community, working in the Computer Lab (ICT) and A-Step. He also served as a senior tutor for the faculties of Education and The Humanities, specialising in English Literature and Linguistics, and was a dedicated postgraduate representative. His commitment to student support extended to working with UFS 101, assisting students with Economics and Astronomy modules.

A star in science education

Kheswa's passion for education truly shone through in his career as a Science and Technology teacher at The Sentinel Primary School. His innovative teaching methods and dedication to his students quickly garnered national attention. He was a prominent participant in the National Teaching Awards (NTA), where his exceptional talent was recognised with a string of prestigious accolades.

He received the Excellence in Teaching Science Award, first as a TMED winner and then as the Free State Provincial winner. His remarkable contributions culminated in receiving the National Silver Honour Award in Science, placing him as the second-best Science teacher in South Africa. This achievement led to his qualification for the highly esteemed Commonwealth Awards in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Further demonstrating his pedagogical prowess, Kheswa also secured the National Best Teacher Award (TMED winner) and the National Best Teacher Award (second place in the Free State). His lifetime commitment to education was further celebrated with the Golden Key Lifetime Achievement Award from the UFS-Qwaqwa Chapter in 2023, and he was named the Eastern Free State Issue Teacher of the Year.

Shaping the future of education

Today, Kheswa continues to make significant contributions to the education sector. He serves as a Senior Education Specialist for the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District and the Free State Department of Education. In this vital role, he oversees the curriculum and development for Natural Sciences and Technology (Grades 4-6), Coding and Robotics (Grades 4-7), Technology (Grade 7), and Natural Sciences (Grade 7).

Beyond his official duties, Kheswa is a vocal advocate for youth empowerment and career development. He hosts a youth career corner on Qwaqwa Radio and is a proud brand ambassador for Master Maths and Master Science, inspiring the next generation of learners.

Kheswa's story is a testament to the power of perseverance, the impact of strong mentorship, and the profound difference one individual can make in the lives of many. The UFS is incredibly proud of this alumnus, whose journey embodies the university's commitment to academic excellence and societal impact. **K**

SA-UK USDP Phase 2 programme: fostering doctoral success and global collaboration

The SA-UK University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP) Phase 2 is making significant strides in strengthening doctoral education in South Africa. This vital initiative, a collaboration between the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the British Embassy, is dedicated to increasing the number of permanently employed South African university staff who achieve doctoral degrees. The programme's unique joint supervision model, pairing South African institutions with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) in the United Kingdom, is proving instrumental in this endeavour.

At the University of the Free State (UFS), the programme currently champions three scholars in the advanced stages of their PhD studies. This collaboration extends beyond supervision, offering both scholars and their supervisors' invaluable opportunities to visit the UHI. These visits are crucial in fostering international collaboration, strengthening academic networks, and enriching research interests. Phase 2 of the programme is expertly led by Dr Grey Magaiza, supported by a dedicated steering committee, with Lethiwe Sokhela diligently managing finance and administration.

A platform for growth and global exchange

Nkopane Miya, a Business Management lecturer and participant in the programme, highlights the invaluable interactions it provides. "This pro-

gramme gave me the opportunity to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds about our research journey and challenges encountered," says Miya. He further emphasises the rich learning experience gained from both local and international supervisors who brought diverse skills, expertise, and experience to his research journey. For Miya, the bi-annual presentations were a standout feature, "as they help to monitor progress, identify challenges, and put interventions in place to help students succeed in their studies".

Pathways to impactful research: Gcina Mtengwane's journey

Gcina Mtengwane, a PhD candidate in Sociology under the UK-USDP programme, exemplifies the programme's profound impact. His PhD, supervised and mentored by


both the University of the Free State and the University of the Highlands and Islands, is titled *Pathways to successful youth transitions in the former homeland of Qwaqwa*.

Mtengwane's research seeks to develop a framework that guides policy and practical interventions to address the social and economic challenges faced by youth striving for independence in an area grappling with high unemployment, rurality, and limited livelihood opportunities.

"The programme exposed me to world-class experts in my field and introduced me to multidisciplinary expertise regarding my study," Mtengwane shares. He also values the scholarly network, composed of both early-career and established global researchers. "Upon completion of the PhD programme, I certainly plan on leveraging these networks for future collaborations." He expresses gratitude to Prof Jared MacDonald for introducing him to this opportunity, Dr Grey Magaiza for his unwavering support, and Dr Divane Nzima and Prof Vicki Johnson for their invaluable mentorship. Mtengwane eagerly anticipates his time in the United Kingdom, planning to finalise his thesis for submission and examination, and to immerse himself in the local culture.

Collaborative supervision and a nurturing environment

Dr Divane Nzima, Senior Lecturer and Subject Head in the Department of Sociology at the UFS, stresses the programme's benefits for supervisors. "The UK-USDP presents opportunities for international collaboration in knowledge exchange through collaborative supervision of PhD students by colleagues in the Global North and Global South," Dr Nzima states. He highlights the personal growth experienced, "As part of this programme, I have gained supervision skills from all the participating supervisors."

Routine sessions allow supervisors to reflect on their progress and experiences with students. Dr Nzima praises the platform created by the programme, which "ensures that the PhD students have a support system where they share and benchmark their progress against fellow students, while supervisors share notes on best practices". This collegial atmosphere, he notes, empowers students to openly share their PhD journey, benefiting from the collective expertise of supervisors who are eager to share their knowledge and experiences. Dr Nzima concludes by observing the significant growth of the students, who are also emerging scholars working in academia since joining the programme. 



'The great green panic' amusing read

By Prof Patricks Otomo

It was a cool spring morning in 2023. Sunrays pierced through the clouds as the morning fog slowly dissipated. Early morning frost was a thing of the recent past. The new season had brought warmer temperatures and a timid breath of renewed life. Staff and students entering the UFS Qwaqwa Campus seemed rushed but determined to face the day ahead. I had just stepped into the old Science Building, which houses the Department of Zoology and Entomology, when I sensed the commotion on the floor above. Up the flight of stairs to the middle floor, several female colleagues were peering anxiously into a storeroom used to store cleaning materials and supplies.

'Ai, ai, ai, if you say it's just a baby, the mother must be there somewhere,' said one of the colleagues.

'What is it?' I chipped in curiously.

'They say there is a baby snake in there, but we are too afraid to go in,' replied the same colleague.

'A baby snake?' I asked with excitement.

'Yes, a green one,' another colleague confirmed.

I dropped my backpack in one motion and went full Steve Irwin mode. Typically, we go to nature to have moments like these. However, on this sunny spring morning, a green 'baby snake' had shown up on a floor below the Department of Zoology and Entomology in the old Science Building. Borrowing the broom that one of the ladies was nervously clutching, I asked as I stepped into the storeroom:

'Where did you last see it?'

'There in the corner,' someone pointed hesitantly without entering the room.

The corner in question was not exposed. Several detergent bottles, along with an assortment of buckets and mops, were strewn about the storeroom. Fortunately, as I slowly approached the corner, I caught sight of the snake slithering fearfully between the items on the floor. It was indeed a small green-looking snake, which was as afraid of me as the ladies were of

it. I grabbed a small white empty bucket from the floor and, using the broom, I ushered the snake into it. In about a minute, I had caught the dreaded tiny serpent and was about to exit the storeroom when someone shouted:

'Where is the mother? Look for the mother.'

I quickly scanned the room visually, finding no sign of the mother or any other snake. I explained to the colleagues that it was unlikely that any other snake would be in the storeroom. The ladies created a two-metre safety radius around me as I stepped out. A colleague whose office was adjacent to the storeroom queried:

'Where am I going to work today? Kill it. Where are you taking it?'

'I will release it at the back, outside the campus fence.'

'Ai, ai, ai, Dokotela! Yoh, yoh, yoh, what if it comes back? I am going home!' she lamented.

As I went back downstairs, she followed me from a distance, urging me to kill it instead. I could not. Too many harmless snakes unfortunately die at the hands of misinformed people. In South Africa, roughly 10% of snakes are highly venomous and potentially dangerous to humans. The rest are either mildly venomous or completely harmless, and I suspected that our visitor of the day fell into the latter category. Probably an eastern Natal green snake that had found its way into the storeroom via an open window after climbing the tapestry of common ivy adorning the west wall of the building.

As I returned after releasing the snake, the colleague with the office near the storeroom was already negotiating a 'work-from-home' deal with her line manager, who was kind enough to agree to her request. K

The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) recently hosted its Annual Winter Boot Camp on the UFS Qwaqwa Campus, delivering a powerful message of empowerment and opportunity to students from all backgrounds. The core takeaway? No matter where you come from – private or public school, any walk of life – you have the potential to conquer challenges and change the world.

A key theme that was emphasised was the importance of resourcefulness. In today's digital age, information is readily available. Do not underestimate your potential; instead, leverage platforms such as social media, streaming services, and YouTube for self-empowerment. These are not just for entertainment; they are valuable tools for learning and growth.

Understanding SETAs and their role

The boot camp also shed light on the crucial role of sector education and training authorities (SETAs). These are integral to the South African government's efforts to alleviate poverty and inequality. As part of the Department of Higher Education and Training, there are 21 SETAs, each focusing on specific sectors.

One prominent example is FASSET (Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority), which works closely with SAICA. Other SETAs include BANKSETA, MINE SETA, SERVICES SETA, and MICT SETA (formerly MISETA), which focuses on technology. The primary mandate of SETAs, including FASSET, is to develop and bring skills that address shortages within South Africa, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and prosperous society.

Cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset

A significant piece of advice for students was to think beyond just securing a job. While gaining experience is vital, cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset is equally important. The speaker urged attendees not to solely focus on becoming employees, but to aspire to be job creators. "Don't be like us," they cautioned, referring to those who pursued degrees and focused on a single career path. Instead, students were encouraged to

Unlock your potential: a message from SAICA and FASSET



develop innovative solutions and actively contribute to reducing the high unemployment rate in the country. This means actively seeking ways to transform the accounting and auditing space and embracing innovation to create jobs and boost the economy.

Navigating tertiary education and beyond

FASSET, with its mandate to educate and provide sponsorships (often with the help of NSFAS), highlighted its commitment to nurturing future talent. The message was clear: students possess immense potential, and FASSET sees their energy and brightness as catalysts for positive change in the world.

However, the transition to tertiary education comes with its own set of challenges. The boot camp emphasised the prevalence of distractions when students gain newfound freedom away from home. The critical advice was to stay focused on your goals, remember the reason you embarked on your degree, and study diligently. Surrounding yourself with like-minded friends who share your academic aspirations can also provide invaluable support.

Finally, students were encouraged to plan meticulously and develop effective study methods. Crucially, when faced with challenges, they were advised not to suffer in silence but to seek help and support.

This empowering message from SAICA and FASSET underscores the belief in the potential of South African youth to not only succeed in their chosen fields, but also to be agents of positive change in the nation's economic landscape. K

Qwaqwa Campus unveils Staff Well-Being Ambassadors

The University of the Free State (UFS) Qwaqwa Campus has officially introduced its eight dedicated Staff Well-Being Ambassadors. This team of committed individuals will play a pivotal role in fostering a supportive and healthy work environment for all staff members.

The inaugural group of ambassadors includes Motshabi Tau, Matseliso Lesenyeho, Naledi Mogotsi, Diphate Dimo, Mpiayipheli Vezi, Thabiso Moteka, Vuyisa Dineka, and Matshediso Motsheku. These individuals were selected for their consistent engagement in well-being workshops, demonstrated leadership qualities, and a genuine interest in promoting staff welfare. The ambassador roles are voluntary, with plans for annual rotation of some positions to ensure broader participation.

According to Motshabi Tau – one of the ambassadors – the primary objective of the Staff Well-Being Ambassadors (SWAT members) is to bolster the Division of Organisational Development's (OD) efforts to cultivate a strong culture of well-being across the university.


“As Staff Well-Being Ambassadors, our role is to support the Division of Organisational Development by fostering a culture of well-being across the university,” explained Tau. “This includes promoting OD and well-being initiatives, engaging colleagues in health and wellness activities, and serving as visible, approachable resources within our departments.”

The ambassadors' responsibilities are comprehensive and crucial to the success of the well-being programme. These include the following:

- Raising awareness of available

OD and well-being services and tools.

- Championing and supporting the development and implementation of organisational development and well-being initiatives.
- Providing feedback to OD based on staff engagement, helping to identify and address specific needs.
- Proactively embedding positive attitudes towards well-being within their respective workplaces.
- Referring colleagues to appropriate resources when they face emotional, mental, or physical challenges.
- Collaborating with the broader ambassador network to share best practices and successes.


Each ambassador's appointment has received approval from their respective supervisors, ensuring that their new role complements existing responsibilities. Their collective purpose is to provide integrity-driven support to their divisions, advocate the OD's mission, and make a tangible contribution to overall staff well-being on the UFS Qwaqwa Campus. 

UFS Qwaqwa Campus marks Mandela Day with acts of compassion and collective service

By Teboho Mositi

In celebration of Mandela Day, the Office of the Campus Principal, in collaboration with the Community Engagement Office and the Office for International Affairs on the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus, joined hands with various stakeholders for a meaningful outreach initiative at Team Spirit Orphanage Home in Mmakwane Village. This year's Mandela Day was commemorated under the theme **'Adopt a Child for 67 Minutes'**, a call to action that inspired selfless service and community solidarity. The visit exemplified the spirit of ubuntu.

The Department of Health kicked off the day by providing essential primary health-care services to the children, including health assessments and dental screenings. These services not only ensured the physical well-being of the children but also affirmed the importance of holistic care in vulnerable communities. In a vibrant display of teamwork and compassion, community members and stakeholders took part in revitalising the orphanage. The group painted the home, cleaned the surrounding area, and donated much-needed resources such as clothes, food, and stationery – the Community Engagement office donated **25 mattresses**. These contributions not only gave the orphanage a fresh appearance but also brought comfort and dignity to the children living there. Importantly, the day extended beyond physical contributions. Volunteers spent quality time with the children by playing games, sharing stories, and creating moments of joy and connection. The laughter, smiles, and heartfelt interactions reflected the essence of Nelson Mandela's legacy: service, compassion, and human dignity.


Reflecting on the day, Campus Principal Prof Prince Ngobeni expressed his appreciation for the spirit of collaboration: “We are here to support team spirit as part of our community engagement projects under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). I am pleased to see various stakeholders uniting to make this day a success and to bring happiness to the children. As a university, we are fully behind this initiative. As the African proverb says, ‘Motho ke motho ka batho ba bang’ (‘I am because we are’).” The Mandela Day outreach at Mmakwane Village served as a reminder that lasting change begins with collective action. Through initiatives such as these, the UFS continues to foster a culture of care, responsibility, and shared humanity. 



A new look for a campus landmark

Standing proudly at the heart of Qwaqwa Campus, the Intsika Building has undergone a striking transformation—its revitalised exterior now echoing the energy and ambition of the university it serves. Once a tired cornerstone of administration, it now boasts a sleek, modern facade, enhanced landscaping, and a refreshed entrance that creates a lasting first impression for staff, students, and visitors alike. Inside, updated office spaces and improved functionality have already begun to

elevate day-to-day operations, making it not only more efficient, but also more inviting.

The renovation is more than a visual upgrade—it represents a renewed commitment to excellence, accessibility, and student-centred service. As Campus Principal Prof Prince Ngobeni puts it, “The revamped Intsika Building is not just a building; it’s a symbol of progress, efficiency, and a bright future for our institution.” 



**KE EO
TABA!**