



23 November 2018

BACKGROUND AND TIMELINE

REVIEW OF THE POSITION OF THE MT STEYN STATUE

- Discussions regarding the repositioning of the MT Steyn statue situated in front of the Main Building on the Bloemfontein Campus date as far back as 2003, and the issue was again raised during a University Assembly on 28 April 2015. In January 2018, the Integrated Transformation Plan's (ITP) work stream dealing with 'Names, Symbols and Spaces' embarked on a process of reviewing how space and symbolic representation facilitates or hinders social inclusion in a diverse community. The MT Steyn statue was identified as a priority to be dealt with within the mandate of the work stream.
- After a student engagement on 8 March 2018, the student community, through the Student Representative Council (SRC), again asked for the MT Steyn statue to be removed. The Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Francis Petersen, acknowledged the urgency of this matter and appointed a Special Task Team to focus specifically on reviewing the position of the statue in front of the Main Building. The Task Team consisted of members of the ITP work stream on Names, Symbols, and Spaces and included subject experts, a representative of the SRC, heritage experts, and a representative from the executive management.
- The role of the Special Task Team was advisory, and its brief was to develop and implement a framework on engaging with the matter of the MT Steyn statue in a way that is transparent, consultative, and based on debate. Since there are no precedents for such a process in South Africa under current legislation, this process could result in the development of a protocol to be adopted by any institution to facilitate similar challenges in the future.
- The Special Task Team had to consider four options during the review process: (i) retention of the statue in its current position; (ii) reinterpretation of the statue and the space around it; (iii) relocation of the statue on campus; (iv) relocation of the statue to a site off campus. The Special Task Team was also to submit a report with recommendations to the executive management after the completion of the process.
- The Special Task Team applied its mind to the brief in order to develop an appropriate methodology informed by the ITP, which is the implementation tool of the UFS Strategic Plan (2018-2022). This had to be done within the parameters of the National Heritage Resources Act, no. 25 of 1999. The different stakeholders were kept informed throughout the process and clear time frames on key

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deliverables were communicated to the community of the University of the Free State (UFS) throughout the process. The Special Task Team was committed to conduct its work with the appropriate urgency but was always cognisant of what is required in terms of legislation and the heritage authorities.

- As part of the review process, the Special Task Team made a submission to the Free State Provincial Heritage Resources Authority (FSPHRA) in April 2018 for advice on how to make the MT Steyn statue topical in a way that would convey the seriousness and urgency of the review process and stimulate engagement on the issue. This came after the SRC requested the Special Task Team to apply for a permit to cover the MT Steyn statue while the review process was conducted and until an outcome has been reached.
- In preparing the application for a permit to the FSPHRA, the Special Task Team engaged with all relevant stakeholders by requesting them to make oral and written submissions, indicating if they agreed or disagreed with the covering of the statue. An alternative to covering the statue was also presented, after which the submissions were analysed by an independent consultant. On 20 April 2018, the Permit Committee of the FSPHRA granted the UFS a permit to make the MT Steyn statue topical, as it cultivated opportunities for scholarly engagement. The Permit Committee indicated that the statue should still be visible, 'uncovered', and accessible while the review process was underway.
- The Special Task Team appointed an independent heritage consultant to conduct a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) as required by the heritage authorities and as part of the Framework of Engagement on the MT Steyn statue. The final HIA was received by the Special Task Team on 5 October 2018.
- Part of the HIA included a public participation process with the aim of achieving better, more reliable data to inform decisions. The public participation process began on 9 July 2018 and continued until 9 September 2018. During this process, the university community had several opportunities to submit oral and written submissions regarding the position of the statue and to comment on the draft HIA.
- The submissions received during the public participation process were analysed by an independent analyst. The broad themes that emerged from the public participation process included: support for, as well as opposition to the current location and removal of the statue; removal to alternative positions off campus; and the addition of other statues. The public participation process was not a voting poll on the matter. The aim of the process was to obtain as many opinions and comments about the position of the statue as possible, as it formed part of a broader endeavour to review the position of the statue.
- The permit granted by the Permit Committee of the FSPHRA to make the statue more topical, allowed for an exhibition consisting of a reflective triangular column to be erected in front of the statue. The exhibition was set up in early July 2018 to contribute to the Special Task Team's purpose of keeping the statue topical while its current position was under review, and to demonstrate the start of the public participation process. The triangular column effectively edited the statue out of its power position if viewed from the east along the main axis from the City of

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Bloemfontein. Other components were a suggestion box in which comments about the position of the statue could be deposited, and a group of encircling concrete benches.

- To elevate engagement and solicit comments from the university community, visitors to the campus, and other interested parties, the following questions appeared in English, Afrikaans, and Sesotho on the smooth boards of the reflective triangle, each linked to its own unique QR Code:
 - Who was President Marthinus Theunis Steyn?
 - Why is this statue standing here?
 - How is the statue connected to the UFS?
 - Is this statue still relevant in the current position, particularly its prominence in the transforming socio-political milieu?
 - Should the statue stay where it is, and if not, what alternative space will serve the MT Steyn statue's heritage narrative best?
 - Why does your opinion matter?
 - How does participating in this consultation process make you feel?
- During the public participation process, a broad stakeholder engagement approach was followed. This included public notices and advertisements placed in both local and national newspapers, public lectures, seminars, and panel discussions were also held to stimulate debate. The Rector and Vice-Chancellor participated in numerous radio and television interviews, staff members wrote opinion pieces for newspapers, and programmes on the statue were aired on television. The Rector and Vice-Chancellor also discussed the issue in person with different internal and external university stakeholders, including Afrikaans-speaking staff and students, alumni, the SRC, and other individuals, some of whom are experts in the field of artworks, symbols, and heritage.
- The Special Task Team submitted the final report and its recommendation regarding the position of the statue to the Rector and Vice-Chancellor on 26 October 2018. The university's executive management discussed the report during its meeting on 31 October 2018, and a final recommendation on the position of the statue was made by the Rector and Vice-Chancellor to the UFS Council to deliberate during its meeting on 23 November 2018.