



# TRANSFORMATION REPORT 2004-2014



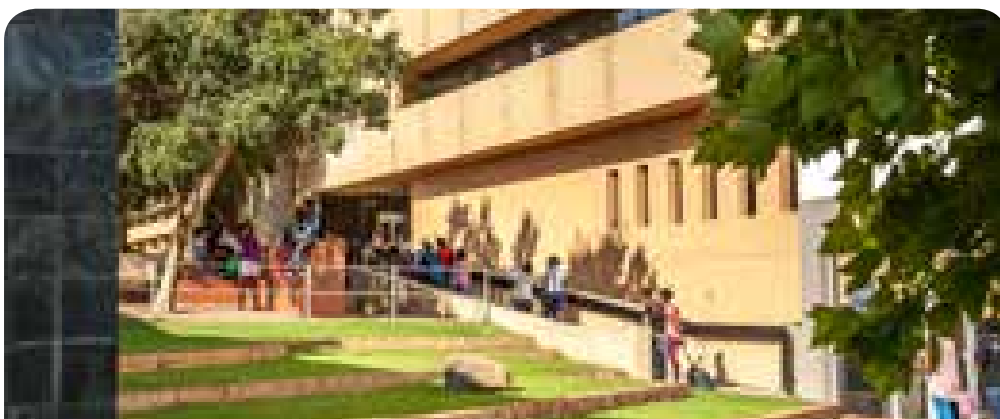
# CONTENT

Introduction .....	5
1. The UFS's history .....	11
2. Transformation in figures: the implications of the changes in the UFS's student profile 1990-2014 .....	15
3. The complexities of transformation: the HEQC Audit Report .....	21
4. Towards a new sense of self: UFS transformation 2009-2014 .....	25
5. Social life at UFS: the human project .....	49
6. In summary: current initiatives and future direction .....	59
References .....	63



# INTRODUCTION

This account of transformation at the University of the Free State (UFS) is framed by a number of assessments, most notably the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) Audit Report of the UFS and the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in South Africa's Public Higher Education Institutions (generally referred to as the Soudien Report), both published in 2008. It also considers, critically, the first report of the Ministerial Oversight Committee on the Transformation of Higher Education in South Africa, established in 2013.





The racist incident that took place at the UFS's Reitz residence in 2008 provided the catalyst for system wide processes that culminated in the Soudien Report. In relation to the UFS, the findings of the Soudien Report had already been foreseen in the challenges revealed by the HEQC audit. In 2008 'Reitz' became a reference point for framing the need for transformation in higher education. It stubbornly, though productively, set itself up as *the* signifier for any engagement on higher education transformation. Today 'Reitz' is invoked in the higher education system as simultaneously measuring non-transformation and progress-in-transformation. Yet, 'Reitz' does not *per se* reflect the transformative movements of *all* universities in South Africa. Rather, it reflects the massive investment of the UFS in its own academic and social transformation project. Since 2009 this project continues to capture national and international attention.

The sustained interest in researching the UFS and in being part of the institution's projects and programmes are an indication that the UFS is modelling institutional and social transformation in South Africa. This is the result, as evidenced in this report, of a well-defined commitment to the complexities of transformation. The UFS grapples in its day-to-day activities with these complexities and in its own effort to constantly re-think and re-invent transformation away from uni-dimensional platitudes. This report demonstrates the attempts that the university is making at multilayered transformation. These include the significance of the student voice and student lived realities; the dynamic relationship between knowledge, equity, power and politics; the diversification of the knowledge base and its producers together with the analysis of the social structure of the academy; the interplay between excellence and diversity; the centrality of pedagogy and curriculum in the transformation processes; the importance of university intellectual and social

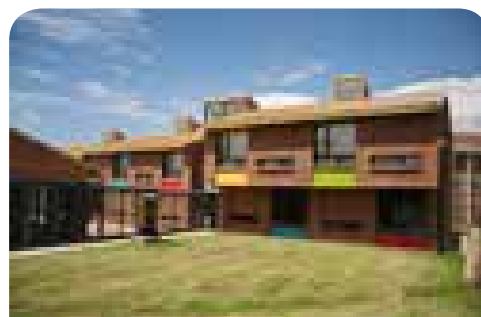
cultures; and an allegiance to a definition of a university not as a place where one belongs and feels comfortable but, on the contrary, as a place where knowledge(s) and certainties are disrupted. In this sense the UFS works against the numbness that has befallen the South African democratic project as a way to define, via its own space and academic mission, a politics of inclusivity, decency and proximity.

At a time in which the country prepares to celebrate 20 years of democracy, it seems appropriate for all social institutions involved in the development of democracy to assess themselves against the principles and objectives laid out by the South African Constitution, in particular its Bill of Rights, and sector-specific policy.

According to the Reconstruction and Development Programme White Paper (1994: 1.1), the purpose of all policy in the country was the transformation of South Africa into a stable, participatory, non-racist and non-sexist democracy. Policy in this context was premised, discursively at least, on a principled view of development. At the implementation level this often meant the transformation of the normative perspectives and policy practices of the different government institutions responsible for leading the transformation of South African society. As the White Paper 3 for higher education transformation produced by the Department of Education put it, the democratic transition required that “all existing practices, institutions and values are viewed anew and rethought in terms of their fitness for the new era” (DoE, 1997: 1.1.).



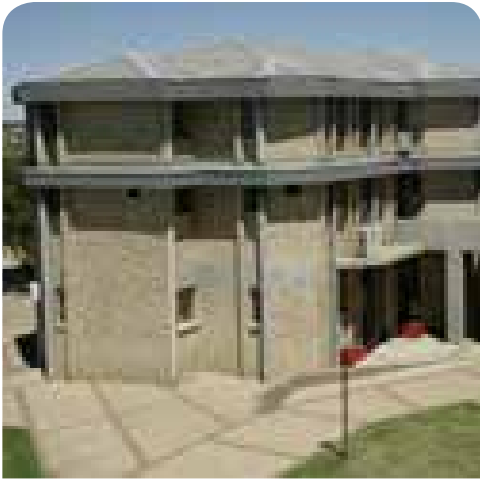
This provides a point of entry into a conceptualisation of transformation against which higher education institutions can assess their performance. Thus to understand the extent to which a university has changed we need to look at different elements of its organisation, student and staff composition, institutional culture, orientation towards society, the diversification of its knowledge base, the types of knowledge it produces and how it contributes to the overall democratisation of society through the facilitation and support of expanded access.



Each South African university has a unique history and trajectory in relation to its understanding and realisation of the national transformation objectives. This report looks at the UFS from the 1990s to see the extent and depth of the changes experienced and promoted by the institution and to point out the crucial moments in which fundamental decisions about transformation were made and with what results.



The report is organised in six sections. Section 1 presents a brief history of the university in order to contextualise its current position. Section 2 looks at transformation in figures to show the change in student demographics. Section 3 focuses on the findings of the HEQC Audit Report. Section 4 looks at the UFS's current transformation project and explores its academic dimension. Section 5 looks at the social dimension of the UFS's transformation project and Section 6 provides a summary of the most important achievements in the last four years and flags some of the challenges ahead.





# 1. The UFS's history

The history of the UFS can be periodised in a variety of ways. This report makes shifts in institutional identity, both in terms how the university defined itself and how it was perceived, as the axis for a four-phase periodisation.

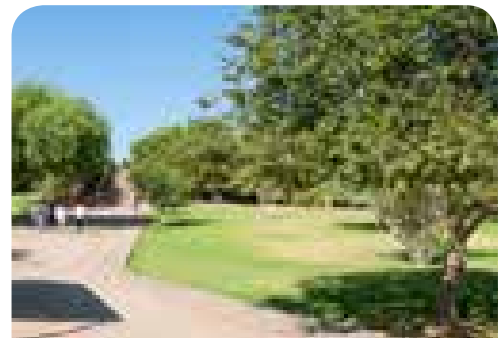
The first period sees the origins of the UFS in the creation of Grey College School in Bloemfontein, on 28 January 1904, two years after the end of the South African War. It started off with six students in a two-roomed building. In 1906, the name was changed to the Grey University College and in 1910 legislation was passed by the Parliament of the Orange River Colony to declare the college an official educational institution in the fields of Arts and Sciences.



Although the college was dual medium, in practice English predominated over Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. This did not satisfy the needs of the mainly Afrikaans speaking population in the area and in the late 1940s Afrikaans became the official language of instruction and remained so until 1993 when the university became a parallel-medium institution. This half century constitutes a second fundamental period in which the UFS defined itself in relation to its Afrikaner constituency and the National Party project.

On 18 March 1950 the already renamed University College of the Free State was declared an independent university and the name was changed to the University of the Orange Free State. The faculties of Law, Education and Social Sciences were established in 1945, followed by Economics and Administrative Sciences (1954), Agriculture (1958), Medicine (1969) and Theology in 1980.

The third period started off in the late 1990s and was marked by growth in student numbers subsequent to the adoption of a parallel-medium language policy in 1993 and the introduction of a new university statute in 1999. In February 2001 the institution was renamed the University of the Free State. On the recommendations of the National Working Group on Higher Education, the Qwaqwa Campus of the then University of the North was incorporated into the UFS on 1 January 2003 while the Vista (Bloemfontein) campus was incorporated in January 2004, which further increased student headcount. The period up to 2004 was marked by the implementation of the University Turnaround Strategy and by a number of measures aimed at dealing with the demands that an increasingly diverse student body posed to the university as a whole, while at the same time the university was trying to define transformation for itself.

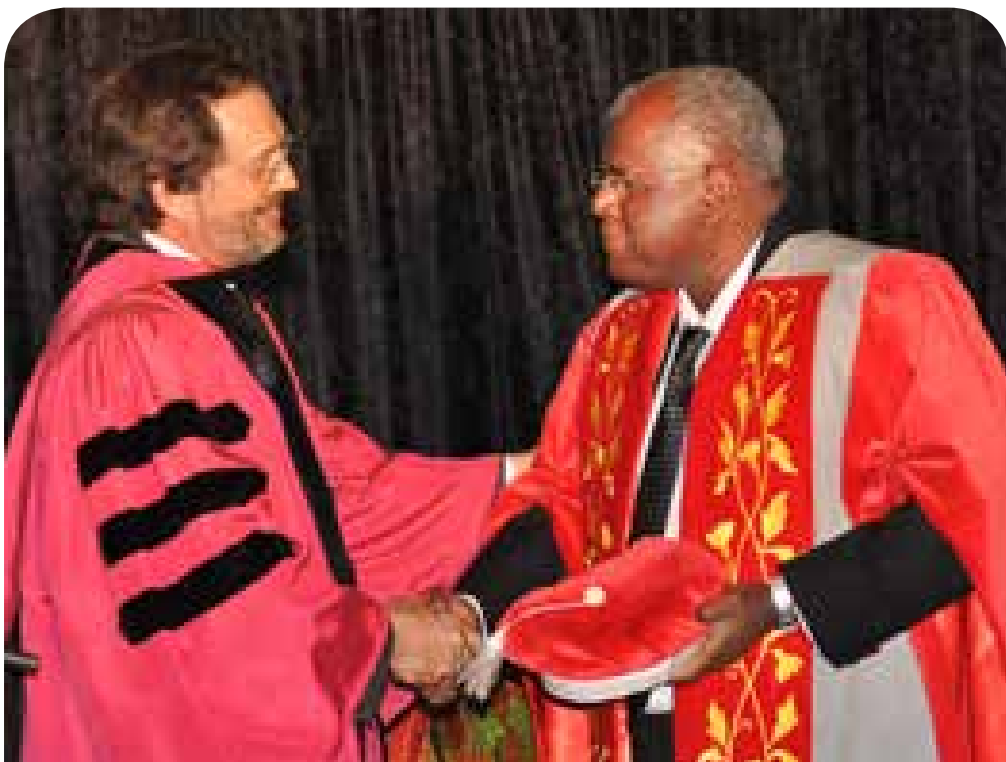


Two important events, although of very different order, close this period: the HEQC institutional audit in 2006 and the Reitz incident in 2008. The university

was audited by the HEQC of the Council on Higher Education, as was the case with all other public higher education institutions in South Africa. The audit looked at the full spectrum of the organisation of the university and in particular at the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. With the Reitz incident, the university achieved national and international notoriety, after a racist video made at one of its male residences went viral. The reputation of the university was in tatters and the institution's leadership had to act swiftly to deal with a multiplicity of problems.



In 2009 the UFS Council appointed a new Rector who proposed a new vision for the university, inaugurating the fourth period in the history of the UFS. During this period transformation acquired yet another institutional meaning: it was about moving away from a public image of the UFS as a racist university to the UFS as a place of reconciliation, where the human embrace and democracy were possible as a backdrop to academic excellence.

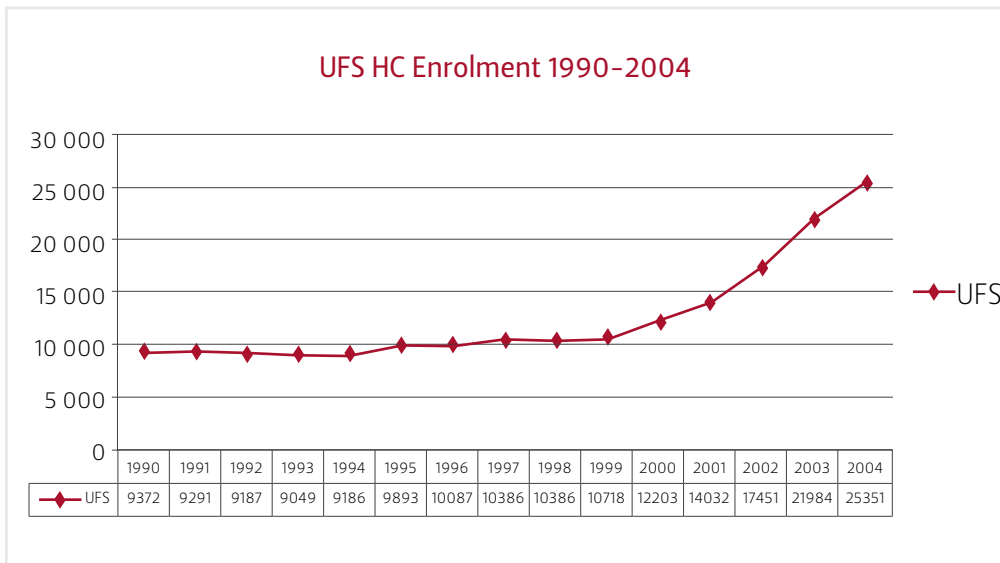




## 2. Transformation in figures: the implications of the changes in the UFS's student profile 1990-2014

The expansion of the student body at the UFS in the period 1990-2004 was extraordinary.

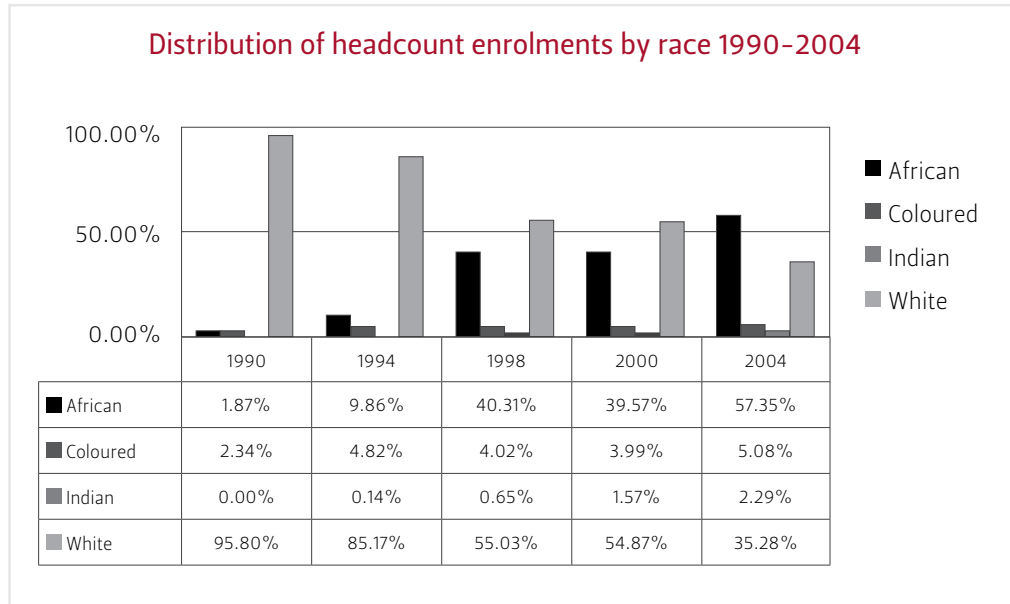
Figure 1: Headcount enrolments 1990-2004 (DoE SAPSE and HEMIS Data)



As Figure 1 shows, in 15 years the university grew from 9 300 student enrolments to 25 351. The complexity of this process in terms of institutional change cannot be stressed enough. In the space of 15 years the UFS changed from being an Afrikaans-medium historically white institution to becoming a parallel-medium university with a majority of African student enrolments. While this change took place in the context of a systemic expansion in South African higher education, the UFS aided the transition by adopting in 1993 a language policy which opened the university to black students.

A breakdown of headcount enrolments by race (Figure 2) shows that in 1990 fewer than 2% of the students enrolled at the UFS were African, roughly 2% were coloured, and 95.8% were white. There were no Indian students enrolled at the UFS in 1990. Between 1990 and 2004 the UFS's headcount enrolment grew by 170.5% and its demographic profile changed so that the university stopped being a predominantly white institution.

Figure 2: Distribution of headcount enrolments by race, 1990–2004 (DoE SAPSE and HEMIS data)





The expansion of the enrolments was distributed across all fields of study. However, throughout the period 1990–2004, the two most important areas of enrolment at the UFS were Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) and Science, Engineering and Technology (SET), with HSS consistently being the largest area of enrolment. Between 1990 and 2004, Education was the fastest growing discipline with 740% growth, followed by Business, Commerce and Management (BCM) with 444.4% growth during the same period.



In 1990 the majority of African enrolments were concentrated in HSS, with the smallest number of African students enrolled in BCM. By 2004 there was a marked increase in the enrolment of African students in BCM and SET, at the expense of Education and HSS. In 2004, African students constituted 84.29% of the enrolments in Education. White student enrolments during this period were concentrated, in order of importance, in HSS, SET, BCM and Education.

Between the HEQC audit in 2006 and 2011 the university saw a 10.2% increase in the proportion of African students. By 2012, African students accounted for 66% of the student body and white students 28%. Today the university has approximately 72% black student enrolments with a total student enrolment of approximately 33 000 students.

With respect to gender, at the UFS (like many other universities in the country)<sup>1</sup> there has been a much larger growth in the enrolment of female students compared to male students (also mirrored in the application trends) for the whole period. This increase in women students poses a series of very specific challenges for the provision of student services (residences, wellness, safety, etc.) as well as

1 See CHE Vital Statistics 2010

in terms of the university's ability to provide appropriate role models at all levels for these young women.

The diversification of students presents substantive challenges for the definition of the UFS institutional identity. First, the UFS is, in terms of student numbers, a predominantly 'black' university, but it remains a predominantly 'white' university in terms of staff and institutional culture. To this end the challenge of 'equity' and 'excellence' has priority status within the university. The Transformation Oversight Committee's assessment of the UFS (2013) as one of the higher education institutions with the highest number of weak 'white' academics (in terms of research productivity) is confirmed by our own research statistics. It has to be added here that compared with the committee's findings, based on 2010 figures, a different picture is now taking shape. As a result of a conscious drive to improve the quality and quantity of knowledge outputs in relation to black and white academics, an upward trend in all major indicators is noticeable (see figures and discussion on pages 35-36).



Second, student diversity and growing staff diversity require inclusive and diverse intellectual cultures where a variety of modes and forms of knowing and engaging with the world can be advanced. The ability of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century university to realise its role in the democratisation of knowledge is tied to its capacity to change and leverage intellectual and institutional cultures for equity measures to 'fall into place'. This is a demanding and lifelong task, but one which the UFS believes to be crucial for the sustainability and deepening of the transformation project and of its own existence as a university. There are tell-tale indications that the UFS is slowly moving in this direction.



Third, these changes require platforms on which students and staff can build forms of interaction that advance the ‘human embrace’ and the ‘academic project’ as part of the essence of being a university. This is not simply a project of toleration but it reflects the university’s commitment to enact its responsibility to cultivate humanity within and across its own communities. In this respect, the university is a leading laboratory space in the construction of a more real ‘new’ South Africa. The UFS is working consciously to redefine the knowledge and human projects at the heart of the definition of the university as a social institution.



### 3. The complexities of transformation: the HEQC Audit Report

The framework used by the HEQC to assess the effectiveness of quality arrangements at higher education institutions in South Africa was based on an understanding of quality as fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose within the framework of transformation (HEQC, 2001). This latter component allowed the HEQC audit panels to focus on how institutions understood their role in building a democratic society as defined in the new Constitution and how this was translated into the core functions of universities (HEQC, 2008a).



The 2008 HEQC Audit Report on the UFS is illuminating in the characterisation of the university in general and in its assessment of the conceptualisation of its teaching and learning and research functions. At the same time, because the audit methodology focused on providing a longer view of institutions' trajectories,

the HEQC report provides the historical context necessary to understand the institution's present at the time of the audit, and the institution's present in 2014.

According to the Audit Report (HEQC, 2008b), the rapid expansion of the institution between the 1990s and 2004 was due to both the need to make the university financially viable through increasing student numbers and to an institutional decision to adapt to the requirements of a new political dispensation in the country. The fast expansion of the institution and the flooding, particularly of the Bloemfontein Campus, with African students, the majority of whom did not speak Afrikaans, provoked complex reactions among the overwhelmingly white and Afrikaans-speaking staff. Stress and different manifestations of racial conflict were heightened to such an extent that a Wellness Committee was established with the subsequent launch of a wellness programme (HEQC, 2008b:40).



In order to satisfy the demands of such an enrolment expansion the UFS became a parallel-medium university offering lectures in Afrikaans and English in the same subjects. This not only had an impact on the workload of the staff who now had to teach twice as much, but also, as the Audit Report points out, forced Afrikaans-first language academics to lecture in English. The fact that many staff members were not sufficiently comfortable in English to lecture in this language created an academic problem (the quality of lectures and materials in English and Afrikaans was different) and an emotional and psychological problem (staff felt insecure and exposed while students felt hard done by). Moreover, the fact that white students attended Afrikaans-medium lectures and black students attended English-medium lectures created two universities within the UFS. In the report's own words:

*With regard to the academic dimensions of the language policy, the Panel learnt from interviews with students that not all Afrikaans-speaking lecturers were sufficiently proficient in English and that this sometimes resulted in some lecturers reading from textbooks rather than actually lecturing. The Panel is of the view that this situation poses two major risks for the institution. The first is the possible development of two universities inside UFS, one that is black English-medium and operates at night, and another that is white, Afrikaans-medium and operates during the day. The second (risk) is the possible development of a two-tier education at UFS in which lack of proficiency in the language of instruction on the part of both students and lecturers undermines the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and therefore produces two classes of graduates for the labour market (HEQC, 2008b: 39).*

The audit panel's remarks about the quality of teaching at the UFS need to be read against its concern with the quality of the UFS's academic offerings more broadly. The expansion of enrolment at the university was achieved at a high cost for academic standards at programme level (HEQC, 2008b: 32) and at the time of the audit the internal mechanisms of quality assurance for programme approval were regarded as insufficient to address what the panel viewed as fundamental problems with curriculum design and assessment (HEQC. 2008: 55, 56, 65, 66, and 70).

The audit panel also commented on the overall social life at the university and the risks that the existing conceptualisations and practices posed for the quality of education offered at the UFS:

*Social life is a crucial aspect of the total student experience at a university and it defines the quality of education as much as curricular experiences do. The Panel is concerned that some of the academic staff who were interviewed did not see a connection between the curricular and the non-curricular aspects of education, such as institutional culture, and therefore, did not consider the current state of affairs a risk to the University's core activities (HEQC, 2008b: 42).*

These quotations serve to frame the three most important problems a new leadership would have to face: the quality of the academic offerings of the institution, the quality of the social life at the university and the conceptualisation of the interface between these two.

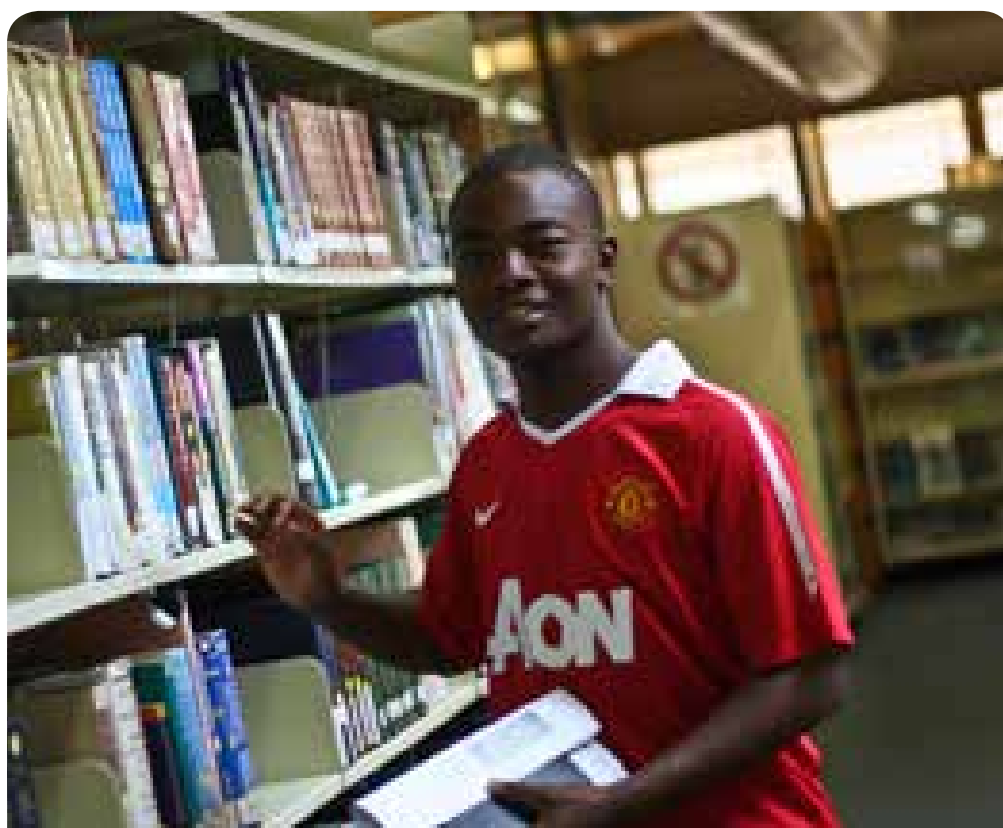






## 4. Towards a new sense of self: UFS transformation 2009-2014

In many respects the new vision and mission of the UFS as well as its Strategic Plan respond to the three problems pointed out by the Audit Report. “A university known locally and internationally for excellence in human reconciliation and academic achievement” is a vision that was given expression by the UFS’s leadership as well as internal and external UFS stakeholders in the notion of a human project and an academic project integrated in the day-to-day life of the university. As the university is also a complex organisation whose academic functions are underpinned by a multiplicity of systems, the new strategy also focused on the importance of a sound support services base. This section of the report looks at transformation at the UFS in relation to the different components of the academic project.



### The academic project: excellence in teaching and learning and research

Technically speaking the UFS is a medium-sized residential university operating across three campuses that offers higher education programmes from undergraduate diploma to postgraduate level. In 2006 the institution defined itself as a broad-based teaching and research university (HEQC, 2008: 30) with its enrolments concentrated at undergraduate level. Today its nearly 33 000 students are distributed across seven faculties (in decreasing size of enrolment) Education, Humanities, Natural and Agricultural Sciences, Economic and Management Sciences, Health Sciences, Law and Theology. The bulk of the research outputs of the university is concentrated in the fields of natural sciences and humanities.

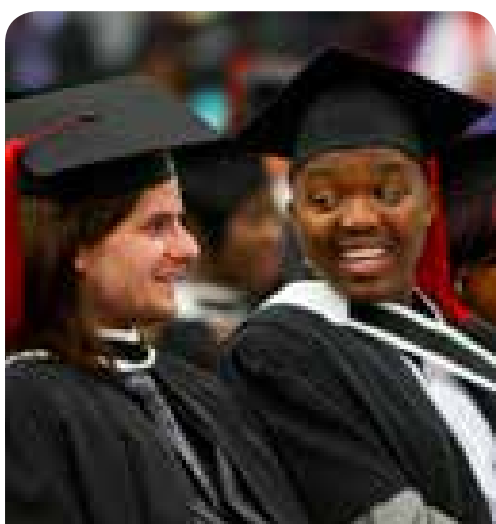


An analysis of the South African public higher education system through a clustering methodology situated the UFS in a group of nine institutions whose performances are acceptable against a number of indicators but whose purpose or academic identity are unclear (CHET 2010, 2012). This characterisation is certainly true in the case of the UFS. Despite the existence of some excellent programmes and excellent researchers, the UFS is neither an excellent undergraduate teaching university nor an excellent research university.



A fundamental aspect of the change brought about by the new leadership was to focus the institutional mind on its identity by announcing that UFS was going to become “one of the top three research and teaching universities in the country thereby laying the initial groundwork for academic excellence and competitiveness on a worldwide scale” (UFS Strategic Plan, 2012: 51).

The realisation of this vision requires a distribution of enrolments of 74.48% at undergraduate level, 20.46% at postgraduate level and 5.06% occasional students, and a suite of academic offerings that reflect an appropriate distribution of vocational, professional and general programme offerings in support of a new academic identity. This implies a substantive change in the current institutional profile and performance and, fundamentally, requires a change in the sense of self of both the university as a collective and of individual academics; it requires a change in the manner in which the UFS recruits and selects students, and a change in the type and quality of programmes offered at different faculties. In order to achieve this, the university has had to develop the necessary instruments to produce intelligence about its progress and to critically assess its programme offerings. Considerable work has been devoted in the last four years to make this possible.



## Teaching and learning

The strategy of enrolment expansion in order to solve the UFS's financial problems had a considerable effect on the organisation of, particularly, the undergraduate curriculum. The HEQC Audit Report repeatedly mentioned the negative impact that rapid expansion had had on the quality of UFS academic offerings, as well as the difficulties found in the institutional arrangements to ensure coherence and consistency in the organisation of modularised programmes (HEQC, 2008: 55, 65, 66).

Although this manifests itself differently in each faculty, and notwithstanding examples to the contrary, an analysis of the UFS curriculum done in 2011 showed that the university still had to counter some of the problems posed by the modularisation of the curriculum. Among other problems the study showed that programmes were often not structured around rules of combination and progression that indicate a purposeful organisation of knowledge and that there was a proliferation of elective modules without specifying learning paths. The volume and level of learning expected of students, in many instances, did not meet what is required in national policy. In particular, some formative general degrees were seen as lacking disciplinary coherence, which in turn undermines the concept of majors. Two further issues observed in this analysis made disciplinary knowledge into a crucial challenge for the university, particularly in the area of humanities. First, the undergraduate curriculum did not always reflect the current state of knowledge in the disciplines and, second, the knowledge conveyed in the curriculum tended to reinforce students' acquired truth claims about history, politics and society.



In this context the institution proposed two interventions: the development of a core undergraduate curriculum (UFS101) built around the notion of pedagogic disruption; and a process of review of the curriculum with a two-pronged focus: technical (streamlining the curriculum and aligning it with the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework) and conceptual (benchmarking of the curriculum against international and national disciplinary standards).



The fourth cohort of UFS101 students started their course this year. Experiences in the pilot year with a group of selected students, as well as during the first year of its roll-out as part of the UFS undergraduate curriculum for all programmes, have been built on to adjust, replace and change some of the content, modify the level of demand and introduce variations and improvements where necessary. The overall outcomes of this module have been very positive. Among the strategic goals behind the modules is the conviction that students exposed to different, more interesting and more challenging types of learning will themselves demand better curriculum and better teaching from their lecturers, thus becoming themselves catalysts of change. At the same time the lecturers who participated in UFS101 are modelling teaching and learning for the rest of the university at a variety of levels. UFS101 has from 2014 become part of the obligatory undergraduate curriculum of the university conceptually, administratively and financially, thus becoming subsidised by the DHET funding.

The process of curriculum review started with the approval of a conceptual framework by the UFS Senate in 2012 and engagements with academics at programme and departmental level in all faculties. It is envisaged that the focus on intellectual coherence and knowledge progression combined with throwing open the knowledge content in a process of benchmarking and peer review will help renew the UFS's undergraduate curriculum. This process has just started with the main formative programmes offered in the Faculty of Humanities being benchmarked through the interaction of our academics with peers from

other institutions. One aspect of this renewal is to look at the articulation between the undergraduate and postgraduate curricula knowledge bases and develop appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the research orientation of the university filters down to the undergraduate curriculum while improving postgraduate education.

Interesting examples of the reflection on curriculum include the process that the Faculty of Education underwent in the redesign of its BEd programmes in foundation, intermediate and senior phases, and the series of seminars held by the Faculty of Theology about its curriculum, which resulted in the publication of the book *Transforming Theological Knowledge. Reflections on theology and the university after apartheid* (2012).

The process of change at this level will take one more year to be completed and we will not be able to assess its impact until programmes have run for at least three years. The technical aspects of the curriculum review will be completed by the second half of 2014.

The curriculum review as well as a number of initiatives in the area of teaching and learning have as their main focus the improvement of the student educational experience and therefore the improvement of student success and graduation numbers.

Success rates<sup>1</sup> are an indication of how well students do as they progress in their studies and can be seen as proxy for the quality of teaching and learning. The current success rate for the South African higher education system is 75%, with the best performing universities showing success rates of up to 85% (University of Cape Town).

In the early 2000s, the UFS success rate was among the lowest in the country (68% in 2003/4, rising to 70% in 2005); a source of particular concern has been the difference between white and black students' success rates (a problem which is far from unique to the UFS).<sup>2</sup> Since 2008 the university has put in place a number of interventions to improve success rates, some of which, like the tutorial system, have shown very positive results.

The UFS current overall success rate for contact students is 73.5%. In its strategic planning, the UFS has set 79% as the target success rate by 2016. This planned improvement is underpinned by a series of initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the UFS.

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1 FTE degree credits divided by FTE enrolments.

2 See CHE (2013). *Vital Statistics 2010*.

In this regard it is important to note that much has changed since 2009. Commenting on the UFS situation in 2006 the HEQC audit report indicated that

*Despite the fact that UFS seems to be putting mechanisms in place to support students academically, the Panel did not find evidence that the institution has an equally critical and proactive approach to the need to improve the quality of teaching. (HEQC, 2008:54)*

This quote brings to the fore an issue which is common to most South African universities: the notion that the problem with our education system is exclusively located in the lack of preparedness of school leavers. This assumption has a number of consequences for the measures put in place to solve the problem; for example stressing the need for student support, class attendance, extended curriculum, and a greater focus on the first-year experience than in any other stage of students' careers.

In the last few years the UFS has put in place several measures aimed at addressing its own unawareness of the quality of teaching of its staff and by implication the lack of educationally productive communication in the classroom. The lecture hall, the tutorial, the laboratory are pre-eminent spaces of interaction between different people, different perceptions of the world and each other, different knowledge(s), different personal vulnerabilities. The ability of the university to address these issues in the process of teaching and learning depends on improving the quality of teaching and being able to disrupt not only students' knowledge of themselves and of the world but also lecturing staff's approach to both knowledge and their approach to teaching.

The creation of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in 2012 was an important step forward in the university's ability to help staff to reflect on, change



and improve their teaching.<sup>3</sup> The approach is based on the importance of research to provide evidence not only of the effectiveness of suggested practices but also of the impact of current practices. Particularly important in this regard is the research undertaken in the area of student engagement in order to determine the quality and outcomes of the student experience from the perspective of both staff and students (Strydom et al., 2010 and 2012). The findings of this research inform concrete interventions to improve teaching and learning at the university.

Among other important projects, the CTL, in collaboration with the Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice, has set up a 'Difficult Dialogues' project, an initiative aimed at equipping lecturers and facilitators to engage students in difficult dialogues in the classroom. Although the Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice is not directly involved in issues of teaching and learning, its critical conversation series, and collaborations with other academic units at the UFS, is providing a constant stimulus for UFS staff and students to work together in recognising and understanding each other in a context of diversity and inclusivity.



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3 The improvement of teaching and learning also includes the innovative use of technology, drawing on a theoretical model of teaching and learning practice that moves along a continuum from traditional lectures to the flipped classroom in which students use technology to view recorded lectures outside of class time and during class spend time on enquiry-based learning. CTL defines an educationally effective classroom as a place where students are actively engaged in the learning process and are motivated to learn. The UFS makes use of Blackboard as the learning management system that underpins the various e-learning initiatives.



The inclusion of the scholarship of teaching and learning in the criteria for academic staff promotion has heightened the profile of teaching at the university, aided by the showcasing and reward of good teaching in the rigorous process of the selection of the best teacher in the Vice-Chancellor's Teaching Excellence Award, run annually.



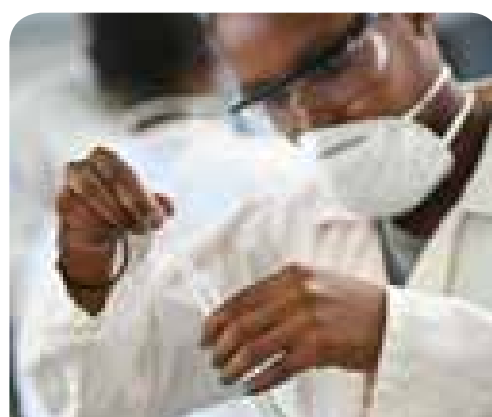
The CTL developed and released after comment a Strategy for Teaching and Learning in 2013; driving its implementation constitutes one crucial aspect in the transformation of teaching and learning at the UFS.

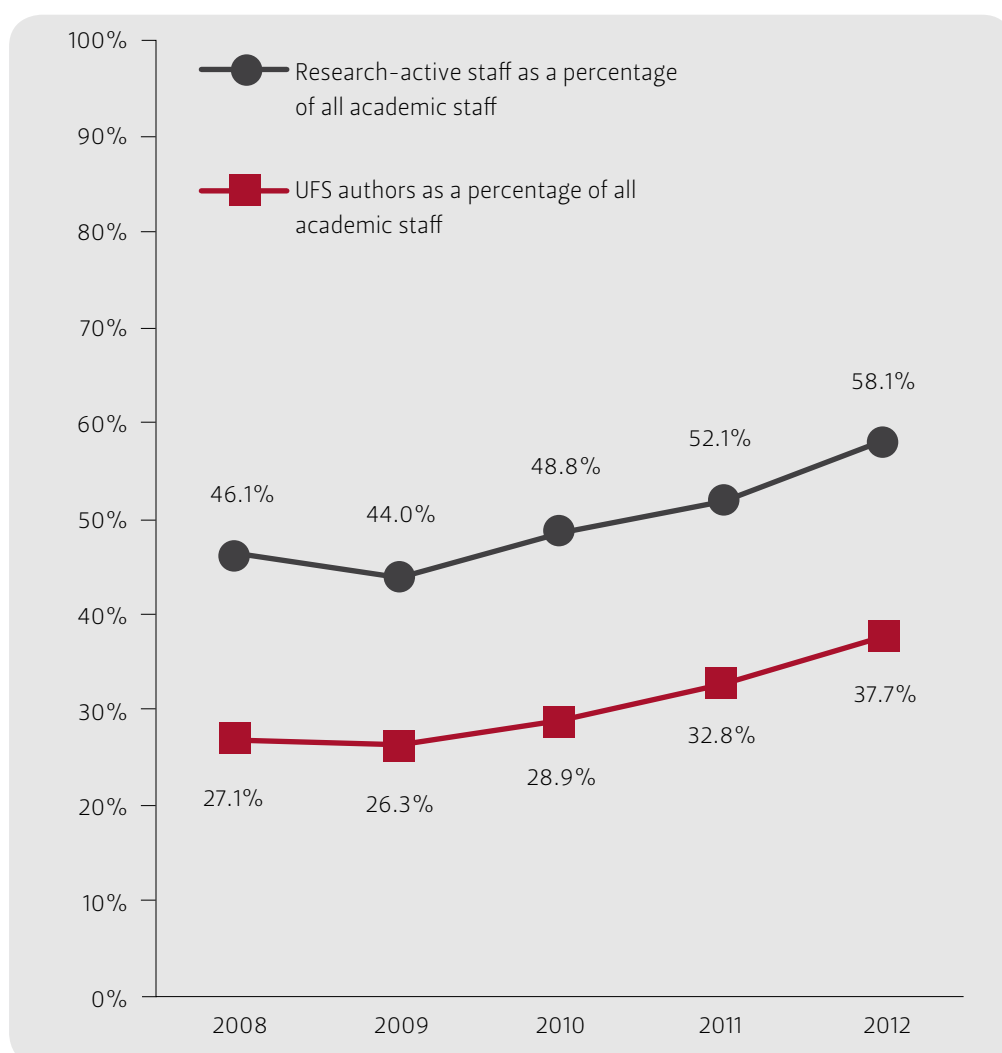
The fact that the university does have good and excellent teachers does not detract from the fact that much needs to change in this area if the institution is to meet a 79% success rate by 2016. Part of this change depends on the UFS's ability to confront and engage academics with their own perceptions and practices. The university has initiated a research project that investigates how staff perceptions

of students influence the manner in which the students are taught, and thus could help to increase student success but also to have passes that reflect the institution's stated drive for excellence. As such, the overall aim of this study is directed at precisely the challenge of transforming personal relations within the classroom space.

### Research and postgraduate education

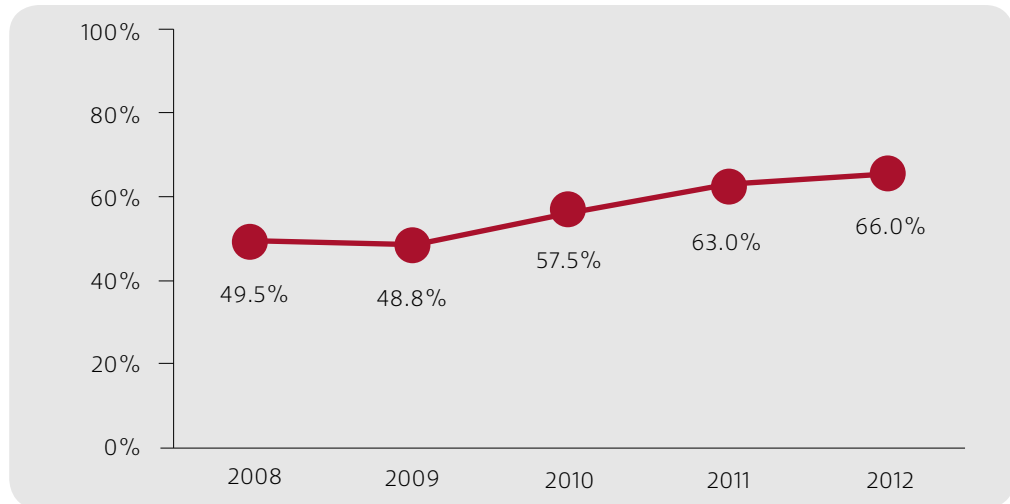
Despite the fact that the UFS is still clustered nationally with a group of institutions that are not defined as research intensive, there is indication that we are moving in the right direction in this area. Encouraging trends include an increase in nationally recognised researchers (i.e. NRF-rated researchers); an increase in the share of academic staff members who are research-active (i.e. who publish in accredited scholarly journals and who supervise research-based postgraduates to successful graduation (see Figure 3); increased publication outputs; as well as increases in the number of research-based postgraduates delivered per supervisor especially in terms of master's graduates. The latter is also evidenced in increasing shares of subsidy-bearing research output units generated from graduates. Most encouraging, though, is the change in the pattern of publications in some of the faculties, especially in the choice of journals for the publication of research (see Figure 4).





**Figure 3:** Research-active<sup>4</sup> staff members as a percentage of all academic staff, 2008-2012

4 Research-active staff members are defined as authors and postgraduate supervisors who produce government-subsidised research output units in the form of scholarly publications and/or research-based graduates. Authors are staff members who published in DHET subsidy-bearing publications (i.e. journals, books, and conference proceedings).



**Figure 4:** Percentage of research output units from articles published in internationally indexed journals, 2008-2012

The leadership of the UFS has sought to tackle the challenge of increasing research productivity by focusing on academic staff members completing doctorates. The fact that in most cases this has meant staff completing doctorates in their respective departments undermines the simultaneous pursuit of intellectual diversity. Therefore, a much more complex set of strategies has been implemented to bring new intellectual life into the institution.

One such strategy is the new policy for academic appointment and promotion, which also formalised the new aspirations of the university by increasing the demand on academics' performance in all core functions (instead of promotion being a function of the length of service at the institution). However, policies are not enough to change behaviour. New policies have to be supported by an environment that helps in shifting behaviour. Particularly important in this regard is the appointment of senior professors in key areas of research and curricular endeavour. The impact of some of these appointments in terms of increased postgraduate students and research outputs is being computed in the 2013 submission of research outputs.

But the impact of these academics' presence on campus is already felt. International visitors, and symposia and seminars with invited academics from other South African and African universities, are some of the indicators of a new intellectual



atmosphere on campus. In any week the calendar of non-curricular academic activities of the university is such that it is difficult for any one person to attend all that is on offer. Moreover, senior professors have attracted large numbers of PhD and post-doctoral students who are helping to increase postgraduate enrolments and transform the demographics of our cohorts of doctoral students.



While the work of the newly-established Postgraduate School is dealing with the quality of postgraduate education at the institution by focusing on the education of postgraduate students as researchers and at the same time improving the quality of supervision, the UFS also devised a strategy to address the critical issue of the generational replacement of ageing academics. The Prestige Scholars Programme (PSP), located in the office of the Rector, has as its purpose making a concentrated intellectual and material investment in young and upcoming academics who are

to become the new university professors. This programme was implemented with a first cohort of young researchers during 2011 and 2012. A second cohort started in 2013. Among the successes of the programme are the achievement of Y1 and Y2 National Research Foundation (NRF) ratings by academics, the securing of different types of NRF funding, the appointment of two PSP academics to the Fulbright programme and the completion of PhDs in the few cases in which participants did not already hold doctoral degrees. This aside, these young scholars have been exposed to a variety of intellectual experiences in order to receive advice in the planning of their academic trajectory to the professoriate.



The conferring of honorary doctoral degrees is a sign of the intellectual and public stature that the university values and in that sense every honorary degree is a model to emulate. At the same time the acceptance of honorary doctorates from the university gives an indication of who is interested in the UFS. In 2012 the university conferred an honorary doctorate on internationally-renowned philosopher Prof Martha Nussbaum, among others. This event was accompanied by a week of public lectures, seminars and discussions with Prof Nussbaum that allowed UFS students and academics to interact with one of the top academics in the world in the area of humanities.

Besides big events that by their very nature are unique, any given day the university hosts a variety of opportunities for staff and students to enter into dialogue among themselves and with a range of international academics who are associated with different research programmes and projects at the university. This goes a long way to building a culture of debate and a pedagogy that engages critically teachers, students and knowledge.



### The UFS engaging its context

As a multi-campus institution, the result of the process of incorporation of two historically black campuses (South Campus and Qwaqwa Campus) with the historically white Bloemfontein Campus, the UFS has taken a long time to find a satisfactory model to ensure the structural integration of the three campuses into one shared and understood institutional project. While in the last three years the identity and contribution of the South Campus to the institution have been defined as the School for Open Learning, which seems to be prospering with growing numbers of enrolments, the Qwaqwa Campus presented a more complex situation. Its geographic location, entrenched prejudice and mistrust as well as real



concerns about academic performance in some areas created a sense of “second classness” about Qwaqwa academics that undermined their relationship with their Bloemfontein colleagues (DIRAP, 2012). The university leadership embarked during 2012 on a rigorous process of analysing and synthesising different research conducted on Qwaqwa, including the views of the campus staff and leadership. Currently the campus has a reconfigured management, and a stronger relationship with and insertion into the university leadership. New academic initiatives, CTL-supported programmes for the improvement of teaching and learning and a new academic leadership on the campus constitute firm foundations for embedding transformation in the Qwaqwa Campus too.





In 2007 the UFS started a research project to determine the sense of belonging<sup>5</sup> of staff and students to the institution. This was interrupted by the events at Reitz. In 2009 the research was resumed and a Sense of Belonging Report was presented to the institution in December 2010. Despite the fact that the participation rate of staff was very low, and that therefore results cannot be read at face value, the study offered useful findings and raises important questions that need to be pursued further.



It seems that both staff and students have a sense of belonging at the university. However, who feels what in each group provides a more nuanced picture of the university community. Staff members, for example, reported a greater sense of belonging and of being recognised and valued at the level of the academic department than institutionally. This fits perfectly with international research on academic identity done in the last decade. But, at the same time, at the UFS, given the inevitable tension between the vision of the university proposed by the new leadership and the comfort zones of academic departments, it is unsurprising that academics felt more at home in the departments. Similarly, it is not surprising that older staff who have spent most of their careers at the UFS have a greater sense of belonging than staff aged 21-30 who are relative newcomers, may not speak Afrikaans, and might feel out of kilter with the more patriarchal and hierarchical

5 In the study, sense of belonging was defined as “the extent to which members of the UFS (management, academic and support staff, and students) feel personally accepted, respected, included, supported, and valued in the University’s academic, social, and physical environments” (UFS, 2010).

ethos of some departments. Yet, if the development of a new academic workforce is one of the goals of the UFS, it might be necessary to explore inter-generational relationships at departmental level to ensure that the university provides an enabling environment for young academics. In terms of the diversity, it is unsurprising that, given the subterranean concerns about race in particular in our society, staff across the board still feel partially dissatisfied in relation to this. We need to understand more and better what kind of perceptions are at play and in what context they arise in order to be able to act on this information.

From the undergraduate student perspective, overall this group expressed the strongest sense of belonging; however, there were differences by race group and home language. White students tended to be most positive about their satisfaction and sense of belonging, and Afrikaans home language speakers were also more positive about the institution than students with other home languages. In particular, students with isiZulu as a home language emerged as the grouping with the lowest scores on all the measures of sense of belonging used. It is likely that this is a function of the complex politics and culture at the Qwaqwa Campus, where the majority of the isiZulu home language students are based. As previously mentioned, some of these issues are already being tackled in the context of the Qwaqwa plan of action.

Despite sampling and response rate difficulties, the study offers a better institutional understanding of how knowledge of the other plays out at the level of campus cultures and provides additional evidence for several of the challenges related to understandings of the other mentioned in earlier sections of this report. The university leadership is looking into a different type of approach to assess its institutional culture, as “belonging” is not the kind of emotion university education and university “culture” should elicit among students and staff.

So far this report has focused on an insider view of the institution, looking at programmes, staff and students in relation to the academic functions of the university. We would like to turn now to the identity of the institution as a public university.

Institutional culture, institutional ethos, are usually the concepts used to refer to institutional behaviour and values (whether tacit or explicit) but these are more often than not restricted to what happens inside the university. However, institutions’ identities are also shaped by how universities define their position in society. From a historic point of view, the chosen racial exclusivity of Afrikaans-medium institutions produced a certain inwardness in their ethos. This was accompanied by narrow conceptualisations of the community(ies) they served and how these communities were served.

The new democratic dispensation as well as global trends in higher education compelled all universities to look more carefully into their responsibilities to the broader society and to redefine their relationship with their hinterland. However, looking outward means different things for different types of institutions depending on their mission, position and aspirations. The research intention of the UFS suggests the global/international as both a necessary condition in achieving its new identity and as the prize of having achieved its desired research status. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the very nature of the university has to be thought in global terms; this however does not detract from the role of universities regionally, nationally and continentally, depending on the context.

During the course of 2010 the UFS actively considered its role within the province and region through participation in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Higher Education in Regional and City Development project. This involved the compilation of a comprehensive self-review report, a series of interviews conducted by the OECD peer review team with multiple stakeholders within and outside the university, and culminated in a review report by the OECD. Among the recommendations made by the OECD review team was the need for much greater interaction between the university and the labour market in meeting the human capital needs of the region. A series of useful recommendations about knowledge production and innovation and the use thereof to benefit the region also emerged. Although the UFS has been more focused on turning around the institutional culture and opening itself up internationally, the importance of a strong and focused regional presence and contribution is recognised.





In recent years, the UFS has opened itself to the world in exciting and multifaceted ways: first-year students travelling abroad, academic and research exchanges, international agreements, a constant stream of visitors while the number of foreign students is slowly growing. The Leadership for Change project (study abroad programme) requires specific mention in relation to how the UFS is opening up internationally. In 2010, the first cohort of 71 first-year students were placed at nine universities in the US, as a capstone to a year-long intensive programme in which students of all races were exposed to opportunities to



experience integration across lines of culture, colour and language. Based on the success of the 2010 programme, the scope was expanded in 2011 when 150 first-year students were placed at universities in the US, Europe and Japan. Mentors, carefully selected from academic and support staff at the UFS, accompany the students to facilitate the learning experiences for the students while abroad. During 2012, the UFS hosted the Global Leadership Summit which was attended by students and staff from 20 universities across three continents. New cohorts of students participated in 2013 and in 2014. Initial indications of the impact this programme is having are positive, with participants playing an important role as volunteers in student life programmes, as peer mentors during the Gateway First-Years' College, and through other extra-curricular activities, such as the launching of debating societies at all three campuses. The impact of the programme will be evaluated in the course of 2014 in order to review its objective and scope.



Locally, the UFS has also opened itself to specific needs of the Free State province, building on a strong tradition of community engagement. The external relations portfolio in the Rectorate has oversight over a variety of projects including faculty-level community engagement activities. The schooling system in the province has been the focus of a variety of interventions in the context of MoUs signed between the UFS and the provincial government (involving 22 schools) and the UFS and municipalities (involving nine schools). The programmes include the improvement of infrastructure, help with enhancing learning in specific Grade 12 subjects and the early identification of young talented school leavers. The success rate in the 2013 senior certificate examination in the Free State province can be partially attributed to the strong cooperation between the MEC for Education and passionate and committed UFS staff led by the Rector. While the university is doing very well in this area, there is still some way to go for the institution to emerge as a proactive, systematic and critical contributor to public debate and social development based on sound scholarship for both the province and the country.









## 5. Social life at UFS: the human project

The differences between the UFS in 2004 and 2014 are not only in the size and composition of its student body and in the manner in which teaching and learning and research are being approached. Life at the university, particularly student life, is remarkably different. As already mentioned, two important moments in the process of UFS transformation were the release of the HEQC Audit Report and the Reitz incident, which was followed at national level by the Soudien Report.





In 2006 the HEQC, based on the findings of its audit panel, recommended that the UFS had to develop mechanisms to monitor the impact that different aspects of its institutional culture were having on the university's ability to discharge its core functions and the extent to which existing interventions were actually "effective in the face of resistance to change on the part of some students, staff and parents" (HEQC, 2008b:42). More specifically, the HEQC report recommended that the UFS should review all policies related to student residences that allowed for a lack of racial integration (HEQC, 2008b:41).



The racist incident in the Reitz residence in 2008 blew open a deep old undercurrent at the university. At that stage the UFS was a racially, linguistically and emotionally polarised institution.

Five years into the implementation of a new project, the university has improved in all these areas and offers a very different image to the world. The shift in social life at the university, where human complexities and challenges specify and model life arrangements for staff and students in a changing university, country and world, is supported by a range of initiatives documented in this report.

A policy of residential integration has been supported by purposeful activities focused on the development of student leadership and careful and constant

attention to student feelings and needs as well as to all staff views and feelings. For the last five years, through directed interventions, the UFS has been educating for diversity and has provided four new intakes of first-year students with a different sense of themselves, their fellow students and the university. Student political participation is being normalised along non-party lines and a non-racialised SRC has been recently voted for in an election that had one of the highest participation rates in the country.

Thanks to key interventions and appointments at the UFS new spaces for dialogue, reflection and justice have been developed on campus. No small part in this has been played by the common curriculum offered in UFS101. But structures such as the Human Rights Desk of the Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice also provide safe spaces for staff and students to make their voices heard. UFS students are more at ease with each other: they learn together, they play sports together; they work together in the non-curricular space and they create beautiful expressions of their sensibilities in the arts and drama.



Residences that were the focus of attention back in 2008 show a new profile with all male and female residences, especially on the Bloemfontein Campus, showing higher signs of diversity. The Gateway College programme takes care of the introduction and follow-up of students as they progress through their university careers.



But student life at the university goes beyond residence life and the launch of the new College project, which looks at the integration of residential and commuting students into a supportive and structured space of learning outside the formal curriculum and provides the basis to help educate UFS graduates inside and outside the lecture halls and laboratories.



Care and communication are fundamental elements of how “excellence in human reconciliation” manifests itself at the UFS. The *No student hungry programme*, which was started in 2011 to address the problem of poor students unable to feed themselves appropriately to perform in their studies, has grown considerably since. A food bursary, secured through donations, is allocated to hungry students on the basis of academic excellence and commitment to public duty. In addition the programme offers food directly to many students as a result of donations from large supermarkets. Currently the programme caters for 150 students and is constantly aiming to increase funds in order to expand its reach.

Communication has a variety of forms at the university. From the Monday Bulletin, sent out by the Rector every week to inform on and explain decisions, or to put questions to staff as to how to proceed in specific matters, to the direct interpersonal relation between students and senior leadership there are a range of activities that support dialogue at the UFS. In 2011 the Rector introduced a campaign called ‘Talk to me’ first on the Bloemfontein Campus, then on the Qwaqwa and South Campuses. The programme entails the Rector regularly spending about one to one-and-a-half hours sitting in various open spaces on campus giving staff and students the opportunity to talk/interact with him. In 2013 the ‘Talk to me’

campaign received a special United Nations (UN) Award from the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) as the campaign that best supports human development in line with the UN objectives. It also received an Excellence Award from the national association for Marketing, Communication and Advancement in Education (MACE).



The interplay between social and intellectual cultures is advanced by a range of high profile lectures, discussion and projects. Prime among these is the annual reconciliation lecture (the first three having been delivered by Nadine Gordimer, Beverly Daniel Tatum and Martha Minow). Others include the science and society lectures, faculty-based prestige lectures and departmental open seminars, the critical conversations series of the Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice, the open-mic session of the Student Representative Council, the plays and events driven by Student Life, the Winter School on Dignity and Difference, and the Arts and Social Justice week events. Other events include visits by reputable scholars and activists. These include regular visits by Bishop Tutu and his family, the ANC centenary lecture series, and lectures and visits by Ngugi wa' Thiong'o, Thuli Madonsela (the Public Protector), Neville Alexander, Jay Naidoo and Izzeldin Abuelaish.



Nadine Gordimer



Beverly Daniel Tatum





Martha Minow



Thuli Madonsela



Neville Alexander



## 6. In summary: current initiatives and future direction

The language of higher education transformation in South Africa is, to a large extent, pre-determined by the grammar of equity targets that constrain the development of a broader and deeper understanding of transformation's challenges and the variety of responses needed. Although equity targets are extremely important, they should be seen as the results of a variety of other transformative initiatives and not as a process in themselves.



Focusing on what universities should actually do is the basis on which the transformation of the UFS is premised. Providing expanded opportunities for students; creating a supportive learning environment; reviewing the curriculum; developing staff; and raising the quality of teaching, learning, research and community engagement against the backdrop of a vision of academic excellence

and the human embrace, are the substantive leverage points for transformation at the university. Needless to say, this is a complex enterprise.



There are clear signs at the UFS that the spaces for human interaction across various 'boundaries' are enlarging: an intellectual culture of contested knowledges is taking shape; consciously designed programmes in staff development are being implemented; students' critical disposition is being nurtured; critical teaching and learning strategies are employed to change traditional approaches; 'epistemology' itself is under reconstruction; academic life is being rethought; and student life re-imagined. Quality, the subtext of transformation, is pursued across the various functions and mandates of the university.

Substantive investments are tied to staff development and the development of an internationally comparable academic profile in terms of the professoriate, which, at the same, creates quality opportunities for equity targets to be met. The UFS101 and Leadership for Change programmes provide for a different sense of the attributes of a UFS graduate. A myriad projects with schools and other public entities have the interplay between quality, diversity, equity and social responsibility at the heart of their conceptualisation. Existing academic 'forms' in dissonance with the broader human project are disrupted; and ample space for self-reflexive processes are created.

The university's external relationships with the state and political organs moderate the various mandates it is expected to fulfil and allows the UFS to be responsive to national and regional imperatives within the context of academic freedom. Together with its internationalisation drive, the links with external stakeholders support the diversification of institutional partners thus ensuring that an institutional culture that is open to a diversity of knowledge(s) and world-frames.

At the UFS, a corresponding number of initiatives respond directly to the recommendations of the 2008 Soudien Report: the standard transformation mechanisms are in place; and procurement and corporate processes have empowerment dimensions. These are undergirded by practices that provide for the interaction and proximities of cultures; the contestation of knowledge(s); respect in one's capacity as a knower (epistemic justice); and an understanding of shared complicities and responsibilities.

In relation to equity and staff development corresponding actions and initiatives on a policy and practice level are in place. These include research support; research investment; training and capacity building opportunities; teaching and learning staff development programmes; and others. They constitute an integrated response to staff development and equity in relation to black and female staff. The Rector and the institution's senior leadership steer the appropriate institutional mechanisms available, such as the promotions and employment equity committees. Checks and balances exist to probe questionable patterns of behaviour. A human rights desk is operational for dealing with discrimination-related complaints from staff and students.

With regard to programmes that engage with sensitivity training for students and staff, interventions find expression across the faculties, units and academic departments; and in policy. The CTL is the hub which coordinates the strategy. Though there is not a compulsory training programme, a range of staff development programmes are in place. Some, such as the Difficult Dialogues programme, are unique to the South African landscape. A range of projects on higher education pedagogy are under way; all geared towards responding to the diverse learning needs of students. Gender equality receives particular attention not only through the Human Rights Desk but also through a series of activities that foreground gender equality. The Gender Studies programme is both an academic project and a transformative intervention at institutional level. The orientation programmes of the university are continuously reviewed and developed in relation to the principles of inclusivity and dignity. The disability programme at the university is at the cutting edge of the inclusive education field with respect to the intellectual environment and support provided for students and staff.

In the last five years the UFS has made important inroads in defining, reviewing and realising a complex process of transformation. There is still much work to be done to embed further what has been achieved and to keep on redefining the object, purpose and modalities of transformation as the institutional and national contexts change. But the UFS counts on the commitment and ingenuity of its staff and students as well as on the support of its South African and international friends to succeed in a task that is important beyond our university.



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UFS Strategic Plan 2012-2016

