



Social Support Office

STRATEGIC PLAN DOCUMENT

2025

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

VISION130
Renew and Reimagine
for 2034

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



UFS
STUDENT AFFAIRS
STUDENTESAKE
DITABA TSA BATHUTI
SOCIAL SUPPORT OFFICE

CONTENTS

1 | INTRODUCTION | 2

2 | THE JOURNEY | 4

3 | THE VISION | 6

4 | KEY STRATEGIC AREAS | 8

4.1 | PROMOTING HOLISTIC STUDENT WELL-BEING | 8

4.2 | FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS | 8

4.3 | FOSTERING SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND INCLUSIVITY | 9

4.4 | SUPPORTING THE STUDENT JOURNEY | 9

5 | SWOT ANALYSIS | 10

6 | THE 2025 PROGRAMMES | 12

6.1 | STRATEGIC AREA 1: PROMOTING HOLISTIC STUDENT WELL-BEING PROGRAMMES | 12

6.2 | STRATEGIC AREA 2: FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS PROGRAMMES | 13

6.3 | STRATEGIC AREA 3: FOSTERING SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND INCLUSIVITY PROGRAMMES | 14

6.4 | STRATEGIC AREA 4: SUPPORTING THE STUDENT JOURNEY PROGRAMMES | 15

7 | CONCLUSION | 16

1 | INTRODUCTION

The Fees Must Fall Movement presented many challenges faced by students in institutions of higher learning, such as the University of the Free State (UFS). The discussions of food insecurity and the challenges of the 'missing middle' prompted the Dean: Student Affairs in 2019 to launch the Social Support Unit to accommodate, address, and nimbly respond to the diverse and ever-growing needs of students. The unit was launched with two staff members servicing one campus.

In 2022, the Social Support Office (SSO) experienced a significant structural change, with social workers integrated into Student Counselling and Development (SCD) – currently known as Health and Wellness. This structural change prompted the SSO to review its functioning and required realignment with the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) Strategic Plan 2028 in a new light. In the past two years of reconfiguration, the SSO has ensured that there are permanent SSO personnel present on all three campuses. The SSO has undergone an intensive process of reconfiguration, the result of which is this document.



2 | THE JOURNEY



Launch of the SSO

In April the SSO was launched as a social support unit (SSU) with one official, Mojaki Mothibi, aided by one social worker, Elizabeth Msadu, on the Bloemfontein Campus. The unit primarily serviced Bloemfontein students. The unit offered social work services and social support to students (in the form of financial support and food interventions addressing food insecurity).



Online support

During the COVID-19 years, the unit functioned primarily online to reach all campuses aided by SCD and the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG).



New appointment

In December Nothando Hlophe joined the unit, replacing Mojaki Mothibi as the sole SSO official.



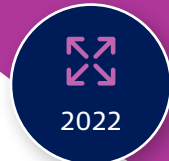
Integration of all campuses

Discussions on the integration of all campus social workers commenced. At this stage, only the Qwaqwa Campus (Selloane Phoofolo) and the Bloemfontein Campus had social workers. The Bloemfontein social worker serviced the South Campus as well, assisted by Masabatha Borotho from Student Governance, who administered certain SSU services.



Increased capacity

In July two interns assisted the Bloemfontein and South campuses, namely Katlego Kodisang and Ntshepi Lesenyeho. This increased the capacity and reach of the unit's services.



New appointment

In September the need for the South Campus to have its own social worker was assessed, and Neo Ravhuhali was appointed.



SSO rebranding

In October, restructuring after the expansion of the unit resulted in the unit being rebranded as the Social Support Office (SSO). Furthermore, the social workers were integrated into SCD leaving only SSO officials from all three campuses.



Regrouped and aligned

Earlier in 2023, the SSO regrouped to reconfigure its direction. This was evident in the overall DSA strategy addressing well-being. The SSO needs to further investigate its focus area, which will be discussed in detail under key strategic areas in this document.



Figure 1: SSO journey between 2019 and 2023.

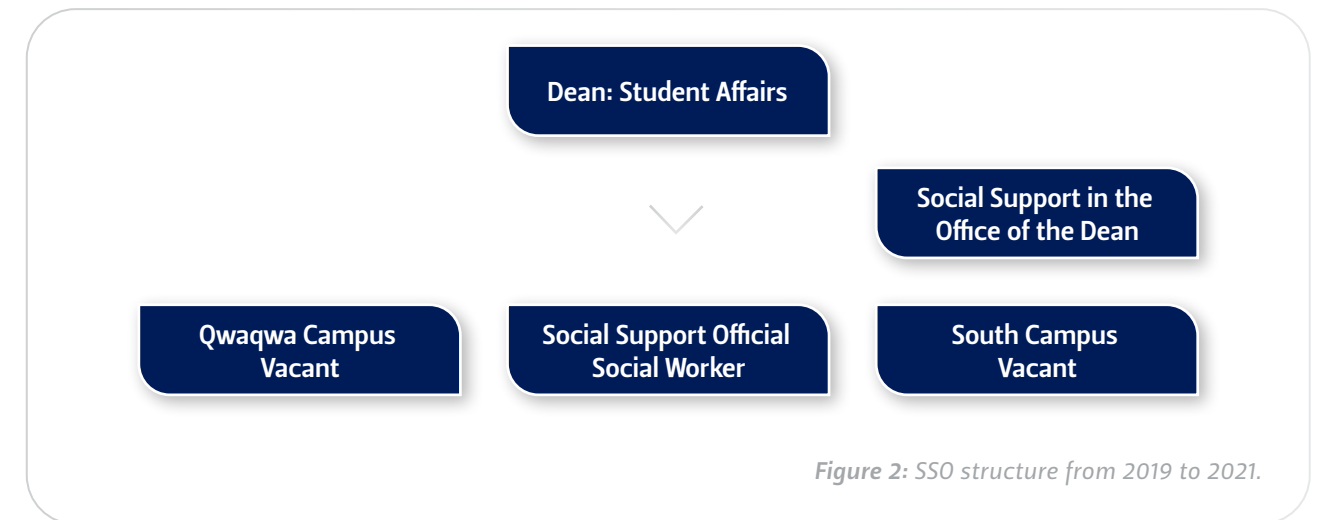


Figure 2: SSO structure from 2019 to 2021.

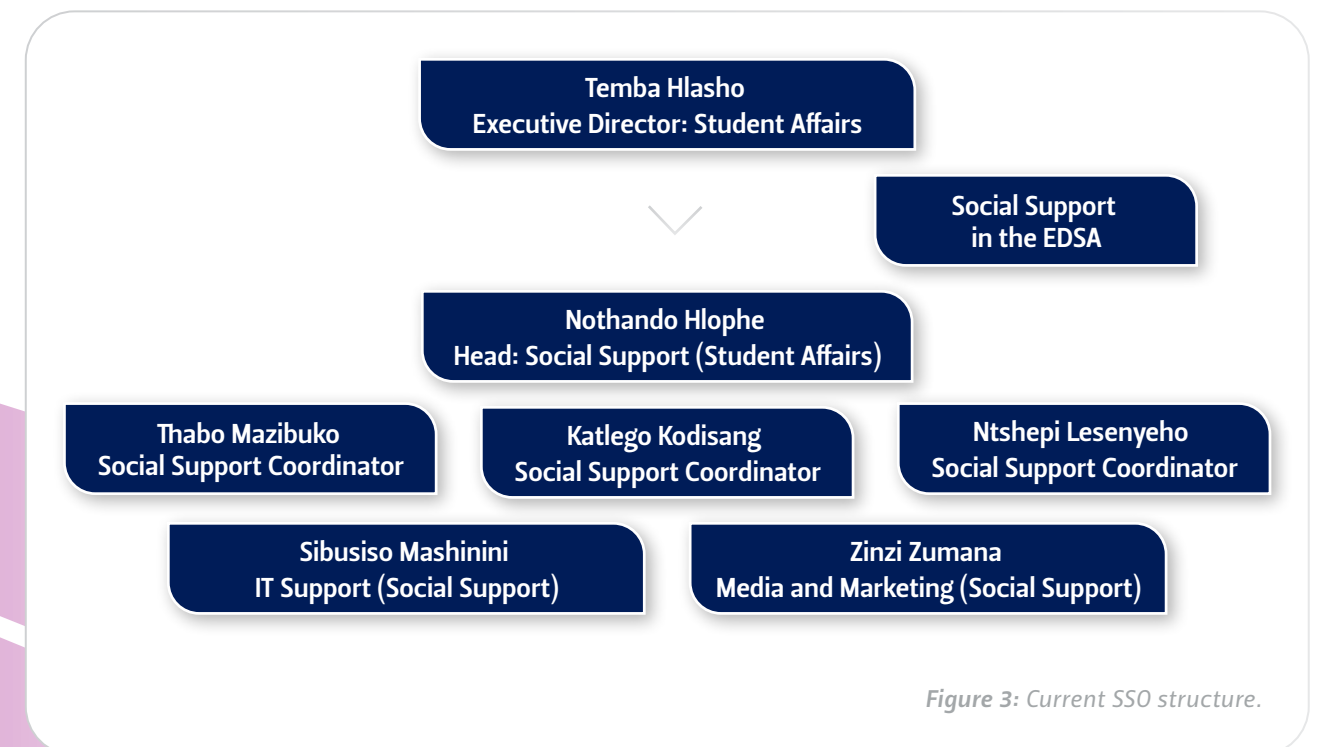


Figure 3: Current SSO structure.

Wherever you get to is **better than where you started**. To stay on the road is a **massive achievement**.

ANTHONY JOSHUA



THREE

3 | THE VISION

The SSO vision aligns with the **DSA Student Well-being Goal 2**, which is consistent with the *University of the Free State Strategic Plan 2028, objective 4.1, to ensure the efficiency of the non-academic support structures and systems*. Within the **DSA Goal 2**, social support is an indicator that contributes to *enhancing an environment conducive to the biopsychosocial well-being of students*.

The vision of the SSO is to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance student success and well-being through social support interventions. These interventions are implemented, guided by SSO strategic areas as outlined in section four of this document.



FOUR

4 | KEY STRATEGIC AREAS

4.1 Promoting Holistic Student Well-being

The SSO at the UFS is dedicated to fostering a conducive environment for holistic student well-being. Through various programmes and initiatives, the office addresses the diverse needs of students, providing essential resources that enhance their overall well-being. This comprehensive approach ensures that students are successful in their academic pursuits and supported in their emotional and social development.

In alignment with contemporary strategies for student support, the office focuses on creating a balanced university experience that integrates academic success with personal growth and social engagement. This holistic approach recognises the interconnectedness of various aspects of student life, from academic challenges to personal and social dynamics.

4.2 Financial Support for Academic Success

Recognising the economic challenges that many students face, the SSO provides limited financial assistance through recommendations from a Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) registered professional and other assessments. This support allows students to focus on their studies. Additionally, the office offers co-curricular sponsorships for innovative and developmental programmes, evaluated on a case-by-case basis. These sponsorships encourage students to engage in enriching out-of-classroom experiences that contribute to their personal and academic growth.

This financial support strategy aligns with modern best practices in student support, which emphasise the importance of alleviating financial barriers to enhance academic success and overall well-being. The office helps students navigate economic challenges and achieve their academic goals by providing limited financial assistance for any hardship mediation.



4.3 Fostering Social Integration and Inclusivity

A key focus of the SSO is fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity among students. To this end, the office organises social activities, events, and cultural celebrations that promote interaction and the formation of meaningful connections. These initiatives are designed to create a vibrant and inclusive campus community where all students feel valued and supported.

Reflecting contemporary insights into student engagement, these social integration efforts are crucial for creating a supportive campus environment. By facilitating opportunities for students to connect and engage, the office helps build a strong sense of community that enhances students' overall university experience.

4.4 Supporting the Student Journey

The SSO at the UFS is a cornerstone of the university's commitment to student success and inclusion. By addressing the diverse needs of students, the office provides vital resources and fosters a nurturing environment that supports students throughout their academic journey. This commitment to holistic support ensures that students have the tools and opportunities they need to succeed both academically and personally.

Through its comprehensive approach to student well-being, the Office of Social Support contributes significantly to the vibrancy and well-being of the UFS campus community. The office's efforts reflect the university's dedication to creating an environment where all students can thrive and achieve their full potential.

5 | SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Staff competence and resilience
- Increased staff capacity (BFN and SC)
- Shared accountability
- Effective commitment to student well-being
- Providing student support
- Accessibility and availability
- Increased stakeholder collaboration
- Flexibility and strong emotional intelligence

OPPORTUNITIES

- External funding – sponsorship
- Develop a mechanism for verification
- Workflow optimisation (financial system, case management)
- Data-driven programmes
- Increased use of technology for student engagement
- External marketing stakeholder collaboration

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of staff capacity (QQ)
- Mechanism for verification (institutional)
- SSO fleet (institutional)
- Lack of digitalisation (institutional)

THREATS

- Ever-changing/evolving student needs
- Conditions of society – socio-economic issues (QQ)
- Staff fatigue/well-being/burnout
- Temporary staff
- Student volunteer retention

*The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling,
but in **rising every time we fall.***

NELSON MANDELA



6 | THE 2025 PROGRAMMES

This section of the report accounts for the 2025 SSO programmes according to the key strategic areas.

6.1 Strategic Area 1: Promoting Holistic Student Well-being Programmes

No	DSA Alignment	Objective	Action	Responsibility	Date
1	DSA Goal 2, objective 2.1 and 2.2	Our project aims to improve well-being within the UFS student community and inspire a culture that promotes men's well-being.	Lekgotla Programme – Imbizo	All campuses	15 March 2025
2	DSA Goal 2, objective 2.2 and 2.3	A courageous conversation series on well-being of male students.	Lekgotla Programme – Dialogue	All campuses	12 April 2025 – first semester 6 September 2025 – second semester
3	DSA Goal 2, objective 2.2	The primary goal is to equip students with essential financial literacy skills and to address the prevalent challenges they face in managing their finances.	Financial Literacy Series	South Campus Bloemfontein Campus Qwaqwa Campus	5 March 2025 6 March 2025 7 March 2025
4	DSA Goal 2, objective 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3	The event aims to foster a sense of community and address critical issues related to women's safety, health, financial literacy, and career advancement at UFS.	Safety in Sisterhood	All campuses	30–31 August 2025
5	DSA Goal 2, objective 2.2	The summit is dedicated to fostering a culture of awareness among students. It also encourages courageous conversation about their well-being (physical, mental, emotional, and social). Additionally, it creates awareness of the importance of holistic well-being.	Global Student Well-being Summit	Bloemfontein Campus	11–12 September 2025
6	DSA Goal 2, objectives 2.1, 2.2, 2.3	To address the socio-economic surroundings of UFS female students throughout their university journey	Izimbhokodo Hiking Pledge	Qwaqwa Campus	1 August 2025
7	DSA Goal 2, objective 2.2 and 2.3	The event raised awareness, created a sense of community, and equipped students with coping mechanisms. It marked a significant step in combating bullying and promoting a culture of empathy on campus.	Anti-bullying and Cybersecurity Awareness	All campuses	8 October 2025

6.2 Strategic Area 2: Financial Support for Academic Success Programmes

No	DSA Alignment	Objective	Action	Responsibility	Date
1	DSA Goal 2 and Goal 4	To provide a humane and agile experience to destitute students during registration.	Temporary accommodation	All campuses	13 January–7 February
2	DSA Goal 1, objective 1.1 and 1.3.	To develop an integrated incident management system for cases to improve the turnaround time To develop a financial reporting system that streamlines tracking and reporting of quotations, purchase orders, invoices, and payments, improving transparency and efficiency within the Social Support Office. To create a platform for students to share impactful stories, fostering trust and engagement, with selections based on relevance and positivity.	Incident Management System Financial Reporting System/Office Financial Tracker Testimonial Section	Sibusiso Mashinini	Continuing 2025 February 2025 February 2025
3	DSA Goal 2	To align the bereavement needs with SSO capabilities.	Review of Bereavement Protocol	Nothando Hlophe	February 2025
4	Goal1, objective 1.2.2	To better facilitate requested support during student protests.	SSO Standard Operating Procedure for Protests	Thabo Mazibuko	February 2025
5	DSA goal 2, objective 2.1	To increase awareness about policies related to pregnancy.	Pregnancy Policy Review	Katlego Kodisang	August 2025



6.3 Strategic Area 3: Fostering Social Integration and Inclusivity Programmes

No	DSA Alignment	Objective	Action	Responsibility	Date
1	DSA Goal 3, objective 3.2	Increasing the accessibility of SSO for all students. Increasing the accessibility, keeping students informed and engaged with SSO activities.	Developing SSO social media pages Sharing SSO newsletters, blogs, and magazine	Zinzi Zumana	February 2025 March 2025
2	DSA Goal 2 and Goal 3, objectives 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1 and 3.2.	The Mx and Mxss UFS pageant at the University of the Free State aims to foster a sense of unity and celebrate diversity across its three campuses. This initiative is aligned with the university's Vision 130, emphasising excellence, care, impact, and partnerships. This inaugural project will create more opportunities for students to interface sharing experiences, and networking to meet and make new friends.	Mx and Mxss UFS 2025 (second edition)	Qwaqwa South Campus Bloemfontein	26 July 2025 2 August 2025 8 August 2025
3	DSA Goal 2 and 3, objectives 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 3.2	Raising awareness about SSO services among off-campus students.	Roadshow for DSA Integration	Bloemfontein	17–22 March 2025
4	DSA Goals 1, 2, 3, 4 All DSA objectives	Raising awareness about all services offered in DSA.	SSO and DSA Services Week	All campuses	15–24 April 2025
5	DSA Goal 2, objective 2.1 and 2.2	A continuation of the men's wellbeing program promoting physical wellbeing.	Lekgotla Programme – Sports Day	All campuses	10 May 2025
6	DSA Goal 3, objective 3.1	This project is essential to provide greater excess to services and opportunities that will promote the physical and mental well-being of students.	UFS Spring Fun Day	All campuses	5 September 2025

6.4 Strategic Area 4: Supporting the Student Journey Programmes

No	DSA Alignment	Objective	Action	Responsibility	Date
1	DSA Goal 2, objectives 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3	The event aims to equip ambassadors with essential skills and knowledge to effectively support their peers and enhance the student experience within the university. The training covers various topics, including leadership development, communication strategies, and resources available through the SSO.	Ambassador training	All campuses	28 February–1 March
2	DSA Goal 2 and 3, objectives 2.2 and 2.3, 3.1, 3.2	Ambassadors determine a program per campus that they will initiate in the second semester.	Ambassador campus-level programmes	All campuses	Second semester

The journey is never ending. There's always gonna be **growth, improvement, adversity**; you just gotta take it all in and do what's right, **continue to grow, continue to live in the moment.**

ANTONIO BROWN

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7 | CONCLUSION

The SSO has made great strides in addressing the holistic well-being of students at the UFS on all three campuses. The 2024 annual report will outline the success and challenges facing the office. The SSO makes a significant contribution to various objectives of the DSA with the intended strategies, as outlined above.

*Believe in yourself and all that you are. Know that there is **something inside** you that is **greater** than any obstacle.*

CHRISTIAN D. LARSON





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