



31 March 2025

Dear Staff and Students

The first meeting of Council took place on 18 March 2025 and Council welcomed four new members, Associate Professor Mfanelo Ntsobi (appointed by the Premier), Prof. Jason Cohen (Deans' electee), Prof. Joel Quirk (academic electee) and Mr James Teeger (donor electee).

At the meeting, Council unanimously agreed to offer a second and final term of office to the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof. Zebulon Vilakazi, for a period of five years, commencing from January 2026. This followed an extensive consultation process with stakeholders, in line with the University's policy. Congratulations, Vice-Chancellor, we look forward to working with you over the next five years.

Council **noted** the:

- University's presentation to the Higher Education Parliamentary Portfolio Committee,
- Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training's visit in February,
- Resolutions taken at the SET's strategic planning session,
- University Forum Chairperson's Report,
- 2025 Institutional Scorecard, and
- Enrolment Targets for 2025.

Council **approved** the proposal to hood diplomates at future graduation ceremonies.

## KEY MATTERS UNDER DISCUSSION

Council discussed the following salient matters:

### Wits Dental Hospital

The Vice-Chancellor and Principal reported on the history and ongoing challenges around the Wits Dental Hospital, its potential relocation, the need for investment into the Hospital, and the administration of the Hospital.

### Impact of the US Presidential Directives

The Wits Health Consortium (Pty) Ltd (WHC) presented to Council on the impact of the stop work orders for programmes supported through the Presidential Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR), USAID and the Centre for Disease Control (CDC). It was noted that USAID will no longer fund any programmes in South Africa, which impacts on the prevention, treatment, research and care programmes funded by these entities. Continued funding from the National Institutes for Health (NIH) and the CDC hangs in the balance.

The suspension of funding has significant implications for the communities that the WHC serve and will especially affect those who hail from vulnerable and marginalised communities who rely on the WHC's treatment programmes, clinics and care, which give them hope and a better quality of life.



The stop work orders will also impact on the livelihoods of dedicated staff employed in these grant-funded programmes, who are committed to improving and saving lives. They are on the frontline, giving of themselves, for the benefit of others. The WHC is making every effort to manage this matter with the necessary care, diligence and sensitivity required. Representatives of the WHC, including senior academics, have reached out to government and to other donors to appeal for interim funding. Universities South Africa has also issued a statement calling for strong lobbying by our research partners in the United States, to impress upon the current US administration, the importance of collaboration and the interdependence of nations.

### Investment in the University Technology Fund II

Wits has committed to joining the University Technology Fund's (UTF) as a Limited Partner in the same way as other universities in the sector are participating. The UTF is a venture fund specifically focussed on commercialising technology, intellectual property, and research originating from South African universities. This means that Wits innovators will have access to a pool of seed funding, key networks as well as commercial and financial acumen and the goal is to have many more Wits innovations benefitting from the UTF.

### Frankenwald

Council received feedback on the status of the Township Release Agreements relating to the Frankenwald Development and given the unanticipated and stringent timelines associated with its conclusion, agreed to consider the matter more fully via email correspondence.

### VICE-CHANCELLOR'S UPDATE

The Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof. Zebulon Vilakazi reported on the start of the academic year, Welcome Day, the Gateway to Success Programme and the Postgraduate Orientation programme. He spoke on the implementation of the six focus areas of the Teaching and Learning Plan, AI, WESAF and AFRETEC, and provided an update on postgraduate curriculum development, the launch of the Wits Doctoral Academy and the revamped Graduate Online Learning and Development Programme (GOLD).

Council learnt that 800 academically talented students registered on the discretionary funding portal had their fees paid to the value of R63 million and also received a report on the agreement with the Students' Representative Council, and the concessions made. It was acknowledged that funding of the "missing middle" remains a challenge and that the University had to balance the demands for access against its responsibility to ensure the overall sustainability of the institution.

The VC reported on the achievements of staff and students, and the hosting of events including a lecture by Sir David King who spoke at Wits on the impacts of climate change.

### PEOPLE, DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE MATTERS

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Garth Stevens, provided a verbal update on **salary negotiations**, reiterating that Wits was in the third year of its salary agreement with ASAWU, and that an agreement had been reached with ALTA for 2025, which would be extended to non-unionised staff in Grades 5 – 17. He added that engagements with NEHAWU continue.



Council received a report on the **Wits@100 Institutional Cultures Study** - the survey results are available to all staff on the Wits Intranet although the report is still being finalised.

A presentation on Wits' staff **transformation** targets was received, as well as a report on the first year of the **Language** Implementation Plan. A discussion on Wits' **BBEEE** rating was held, including ways in which the University could potentially improve its rating, particularly through recording and reporting on Wits' skills development efforts. The Gender Equity Office report focused on addressing recommendations from the Ministerial Task Team on **gender based harm**, the Sexual Offences Register and Related Matters Act, and the implementation of a new electronic complaints database and tracking system. **Management guides** on poor work performance and ill-health incapacity were also tabled.

Council was appraised of the 3 – 5 year rolling plans to **increase academic staffing**, and the Executive's decision to strategically redirect resources to faculties to support the academic project. The support to faculties is intended to address student staff ratios, workload distribution, and professional body compliance in professional programmes.

#### FINANCE UPDATE

Council **approved** the:

- Preliminary, Unaudited Council Controlled Results for the Financial Year Ended 31 December 2024,
- Preliminary, Unaudited Capital Expenditure Results for the Financial Year Ended 31 December 2024,
- Preliminary, Unaudited Wits Entities Results for the Financial Year Ended 31 December 2024,
- Renewal of FNB as the University's primary banking contractors,
- Amendment to the Student Fees Policy, and
- All Contracts Exceeding 5 Years and/or Purchases or Procurement Exceeding R70 Million.

#### NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Council takes place on 5 June 2025.

Thank you

**Ms Carol Crosley**  
**Secretary to Council**  
**25 March 2025**