

## **INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN : THINKPIECE**

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### **Purpose**

To outline the context in which an Institutional Development Plan is being considered, and to indicate the major areas which require discussion and consensus before the IDP can proceed to the implementation phase.

### **Background**

As one of the oldest higher education institutions in South Africa, Rhodes University has been both strengthened and constrained by its history. Coordinated, 'green fields' strategic planning has generally not featured in the development of the institution given its deep-rooted traditions and stable, if relatively uniform character. Over the years, planning and resource allocation at Rhodes University were undertaken in an *ad hoc* fashion as adequate State funding enabled resources to be allocated on a need-to-have basis. As Government funding began decreasing in relative terms during the 1990's however, dissatisfied departments pressurised Senate for a change in the system. A University thinktank held in 1994 agreed that decision-making structures should be revised and a formal academic plan developed. The first 'institutional plan' was produced following reviews of academic departments in 1997, and again in 2005. The goals and outcomes of these plans were generally to maintain the status quo and ensure Rhodes remained financially sustainable and retained its strong reputation for academic excellence.

The character of the University changed very little over the years, and the only major threat to the University's existence over the past few decades came during the national restructuring of the higher education landscape discussions in the early 2000's, when serious consideration was given to merging Rhodes with another Eastern Cape university or alternatively, downgrading its status to a 'bedrock' institution. However, while Rhodes emerged from the process intact as a non-merged university, its fast-growing East London campus was incorporated into the University of Fort Hare in 2004, which had a significant impact on Rhodes' size and shape, and future trajectory.

In line with the National Plan for HE adopted in 2001, three mechanisms were introduced by the State to 'steer' the higher education sector viz: quality assurance, funding and planning. QA developments required institutions to reconsider (or in some cases develop) vision and mission statements, a new funding framework<sup>1</sup> required institutions to reconsider how their

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<sup>1</sup>The new funding framework, which flowed from the 1997 White Paper, replaced the demand-driven funding formula for universities and technikons which had been in operation up to 2003. The new framework is primarily a goal-directed, distributive mechanism which relates government funds to academic activity and output and "emphasises that government funds higher education institutions for the delivery of those teaching-related and research-related services which lead to improvements in the social and economic conditions of the country." The framework is currently undergoing a further review (2011).

income was earned and distributed, and a formal student enrolment planning process required institutions to predict in advance how many and what kinds of students they planned to admit into which courses – and indicate how they would contribute to specific national goals.

In line with these developments as well as the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor, Dr Saleem Badat, an institution-wide discussion on the most appropriate size and shape for Rhodes University got underway during 2006. This exercise did not produce the ‘blue-sky’ thinking and bold new directions which some had envisaged, although student numbers continued to grow beyond enrolment plan predictions and pressure on the institution’s – and the town’s – infrastructure began to reach unacceptable levels. A new element of national funding was introduced in 2007, where institutions were invited to bid for earmarked funding for capital infrastructure (according to specific conditions which supported the achievement of national goals). This resulted in a much-needed injection of funds (R142.5 million for Rhodes in the first two cycles) which enabled a number of major projects to be undertaken including the new Library, new Education buildings and several new residences. It is hoped that this bidding process will continue in the medium term as much of the campus development plans currently under consideration will only be viable if significant external funding is available.

### **Current IDP Process**

Both the University’s 2006 size and shape exercise and the ‘Quality Improvement Plan’ of 2009<sup>2</sup> aimed to produce an Institutional Development Plan which would ‘inspire, conceptualise, manage, communicate and effectively implement change’ (VC, *Planning the Years and Decade Ahead*, 24 Feb 2011). An IDP Framework was debated during 2009 and while progress on finalizing the details of the plan itself has been slow, many initiatives which have already received institutional support are well underway. The intention of a formal IDP is not to be an inflexible blueprint, but a ‘compass that guides developments, prioritization, decision-making and implementation at Rhodes while leaving room for pursuing new imperatives and exploiting possible new opportunities.’ (ibid)

Following this 2011 Imbizo, it is intended to produce a final draft of the RU IDP Vision 2020 for consideration by Faculties, Senate, the Institutional Forum, and Council. Thereafter the document will be annually revisited and revised, and progress reports made widely available on a regular basis.

### **Challenges and Priorities**

Many institutions have contracted external consultants at great cost, who have produced impressive documentation of great detail and theoretical substance, which has ended up as little more than weighty bookshelf adornment. Setting forth idealistic goals without the financial means, human capacity or widespread support to achieve them, is a futile exercise in frustration and disillusionment. On the other hand, not allowing space for re-imagining

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<sup>2</sup> Following the 2005 HEQC Institutional Audit

the future and exploring outrageous possibilities, will consign us to intellectual stagnation, increasing irrelevance, and potential extinction.

The intention of this session, therefore, is to crystallize the main planning issues requiring debate and decisions, and to suggest how the resulting objectives can be prioritized, implemented and monitored. We need to decide where we want to be in the foreseeable future, and how we are going to get there.

### **IDP Vision 2020 Framework**

1. The **introduction** sets out the process, context and background of the IDP including a summary of recent developments which have influenced the University's strategic direction:
  - HEQC Audit (2005)
  - Institutional Imbizo (2006)
  - Size and Shape Exercise (2007/8)
  - National Enrolment Planning Process (2006-2013)
  - Infrastructure Development Grants (2007-2012)
  - Campus Spatial Development Plan (2009)
  - Quality Improvement Plan (2009)
  - Institutional Culture Colloquium (2009) and
  - National HE Transformation Report (2009-2010)

This section attempts to capture the institution's values and expound on the terms 'research intensive', 'liberal arts institution' and the contentious logo 'where leaders learn'. A table outlining strengths, opportunities and challenges is also included.

2. '**Vision 2020**' discusses the University's current vision (adopted by Council in 2001 following 18 months of institutional debate) and proposes an expanded vision.
3. **Strategic Objectives 2010-2020** sets out possible examples of characteristics which make Rhodes unique and/or which we do not wish to compromise on in pursuing specific goals, before proposing possible strategic objectives for the forthcoming decade – objectives which, once agreed upon, would provide the key reference points for the entire IDP.
4. **Monitoring, Reporting and Communication** strategies are covered in this section.
5. The **Implementation Plan 2011-2015** only covers a five year period as long-term detailed planning is seldom feasible. A new implementation plan would be prepared in 2014 for the period 2016-2020, taking into account what has been achieved and also accommodating unpredicted developments and external influences. The implementation plan sets out strategies and time frames and allocates implementation responsibilities for each strategic objective according to a particular priority area:
  - Development and sustainability
  - Equity

- Size and shape
- Teaching and learning
- Research
- Community engagement

### **Points to Ponder**

What is the purpose of higher education, and what role should a publicly funded institution play in the pursuit of national goals?

What kind of institution does RU wish to be in twenty years time? (Harvard University plans in 50 year cycles...) e.g. Do we want to always be the smallest university in the country, with a majority of students in residence and from middle to upper class homes, teaching mostly undergraduates in six faculties?

How do we counter the view of some that Rhodes is a 'delightful irrelevance' in the national context, having less than 1% of the entire HE student body?

How do we motivate for a share of national infrastructure funding when our students live in luxury while students at some institutions sleep 8 in a double room, or wander the campus with their belongings in plastic bags because they cannot afford accommodation?

What aspects of our 'institutional culture' are essential to protect and which are necessary to change in order to achieve the academic and social goals we set ourselves as a university community?

What is Rhodes' 'educational paradigm' and does it need revising?

(Sir Ken Robinson video "Changing Educational Paradigms"

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcdGpL4U&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcdGpL4U&feature=player_embedded))