

# TRANSFORMATION SUMMIT 2017

Report of the Alumni Working group

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Volunteers for the Alumni Working Group consisted of:

- **Ms Ujala Satgoor (Chair)** – Director: Library Services
- Ms Joyce Sewry – Deputy Dean: Chemistry, and Alumna of Rhodes University.
- Ms Cindy Deutschmann – Data Services Co-ordinator: Communications & Advancement and Alumna of Rhodes University
- Prof James Gambiza – Senior Lecturer: Environmental Science - Warden of Gold Fields House, Hall Warden of Kimberley Hall and Alumnus of Rhodes University
- Mr Guillaume Jakobus Bezuidenhout – Alumnus and current PhD student of Rhodes University
- Mr Leroy Maisiri – Alumnus and current PhD student of Rhodes University
- Ms Terryl Mc Carthy – Alumni Relations Officer: Communications & Advancement

Rhodes University Alumni are the largest stakeholder group, who have meaningful insight of the institution. Due to the various discussion themes, the working group wanted to ensure that the process was thorough and widely inclusive. To this end, a consultative approach was adopted, which resulted in data being gathered via the following three methods:

### 1. An Online Survey

The Survey was designed to encompass the discussion themes set for the Transformation Summit. 2013 alumni participated in the survey.

### 2. Alumni Transformation Consultations

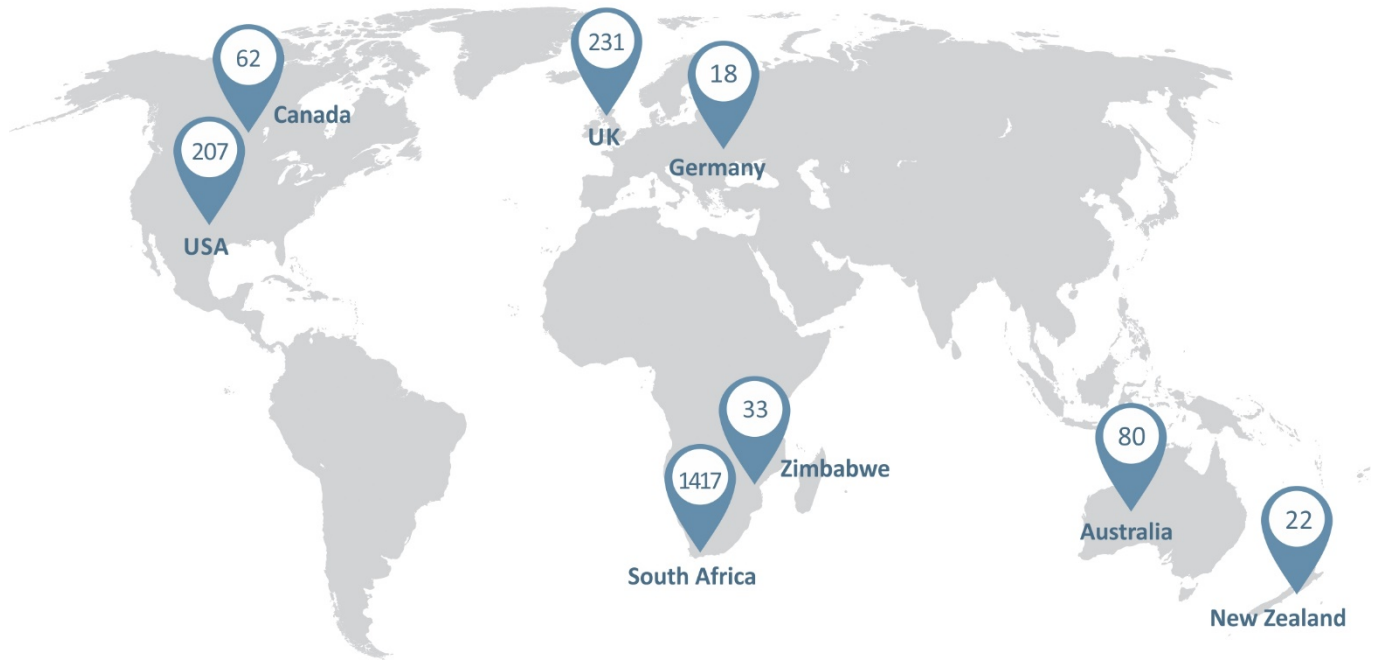
Engagement via the consultative process involved approximately 525 alumni who attended 13 events. Data was gathered via:

- Questionnaires designed to encompass the discussion themes set for the Transformation Summit. 254 alumni completed questionnaires.
- Recordings of focus groups at the consultations. Pertinent observations will be noted in this report.

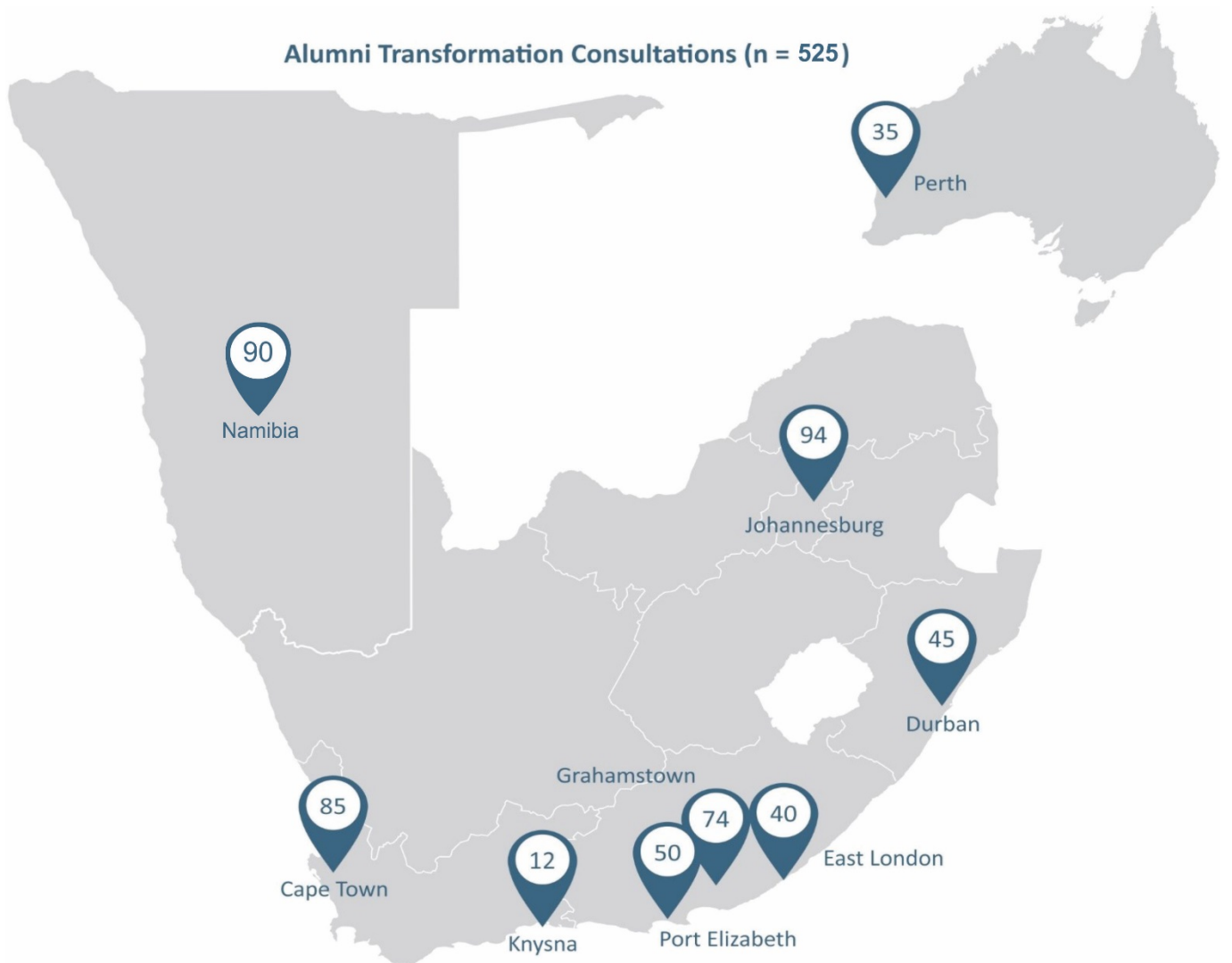
### 3. Emails and articles submitted to the alumni office.

Since the commencement of the transformation imperative in 2015, 188 emails were received by the Alumni Office from 2015 to 2017. A further 10 website submissions have been received this year.

### Online Alumni Transformation Survey (n = 2013)



### Alumni Transformation Consultations (n = 525)



POPULATION GROUP BREAKDOWN	
African	18.87%
Coloured	2.52%
Indian	2.77%
White	71.70%
Other	4.15%

The online survey and questionnaire focused on:

1. Institutional identity as determined by its purpose, vision, mission and values
2. The future of the name of the Institution
  - The impact of the name change
  - Rhodes University's Reputation and Global Brand
3. Institutional Culture including visual culture and institutional rituals/traditions
4. Student experience
5. Curriculum
6. Staff
7. Finance

## 2. INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY (PURPOSE, VISION, VALUES AND NAME)

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### 2.1 VISION AND MISSION

The Rhodes University vision and mission statements have been in place for the last 10 years.

<b>Vision</b>	<i>Rhodes University's vision is to be an outstanding, internationally respected academic institution which proudly affirms its African identity and which is committed to democratic ideals, academic freedom, rigorous scholarship, sound moral values and social responsibility</i>
<b>Mission</b>	<i>In pursuit of its vision, the university will strive to produce outstanding, internationally accredited graduates who are innovative, analytical, articulate, balanced and adaptable, with a lifelong love of learning; and will endeavour, through teaching, research and community service, to contribute to the advancement of international scholarship and the development of the Eastern Cape and Southern Africa.</i>

In this section of the Survey and Questionnaire participants were asked whether practices at Rhodes University currently reflect its vision and mission.

Agree	88%
Disagree	11.4%

This reaffirms the governance as the mission and vision are seen to be fulfilling its direction and values.

The survey and questionnaire continued to ask alumni if the university had accordingly succeeded in making Rhodes University an environment that is inclusive of all.

Agree	83.5%
Disagree	16%

This reinforces the Mission and Vision statement and the positive response to the questions show that the institution has been seen to be successful in addressing transformation, having an inclusive academic environment and in achieving its moral obligation to environmental affairs, and in its interactions with the Eastern Cape Region:

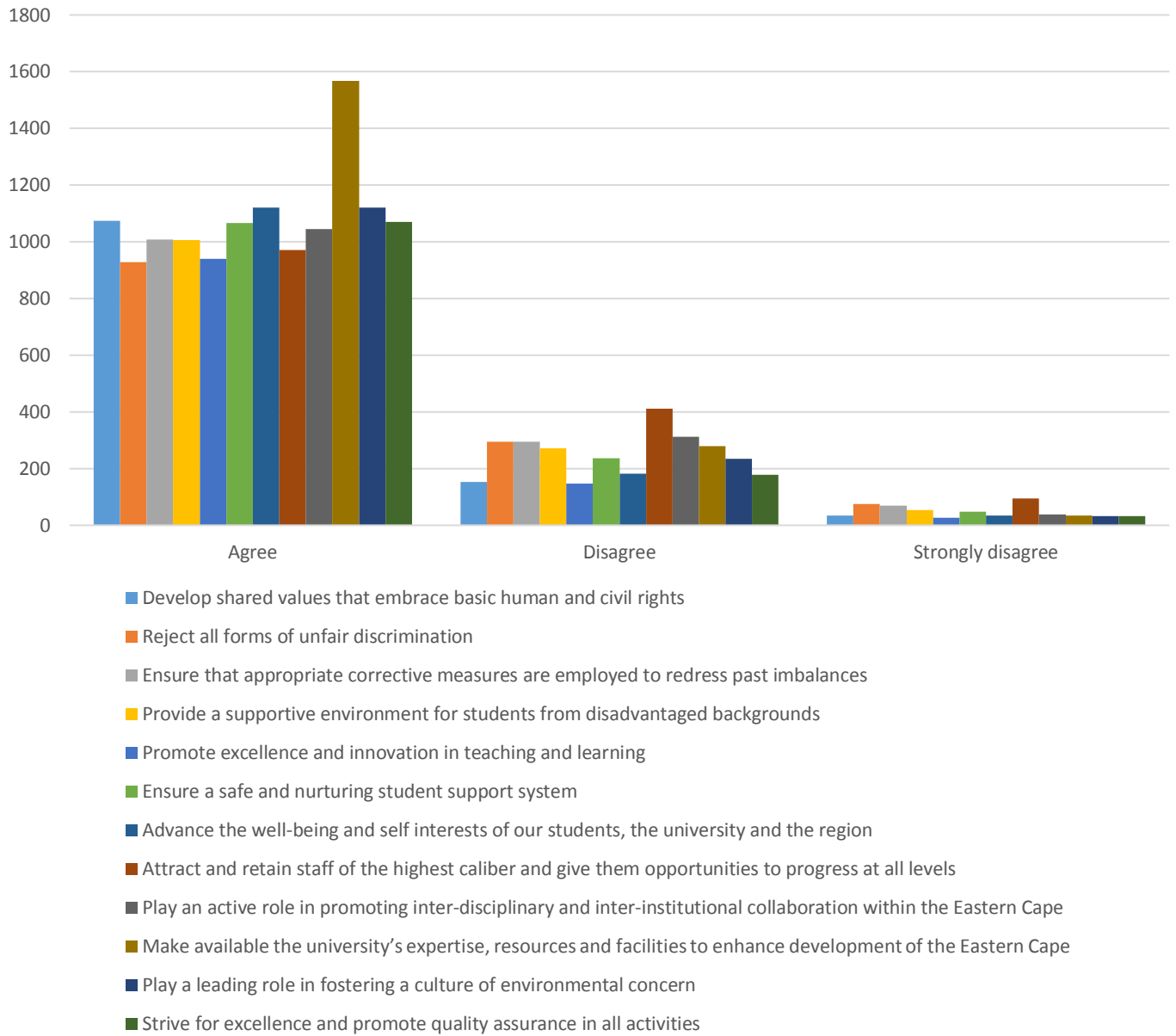


Figure 1: Does Rhodes University embody its Mission and Vision?

## 2.2 THE FUTURE OF THE NAME OF THE INSTITUTION

The question as to whether Rhodes University should change its name was asked in two instances:

1. Whether alumni believed the name should change, 75.29% percent voted no and 14.5 percent voted yes, with a further 10.21 percent unsure. The results depict the opinions from both the online survey and the questionnaires. (Figure 2)
2. Whether changing the name would achieve transformation, 79.4% percent voted no and 12.56% voted yes, with a further 8.04% not sure. This was asked on the online survey only (Figure 3).

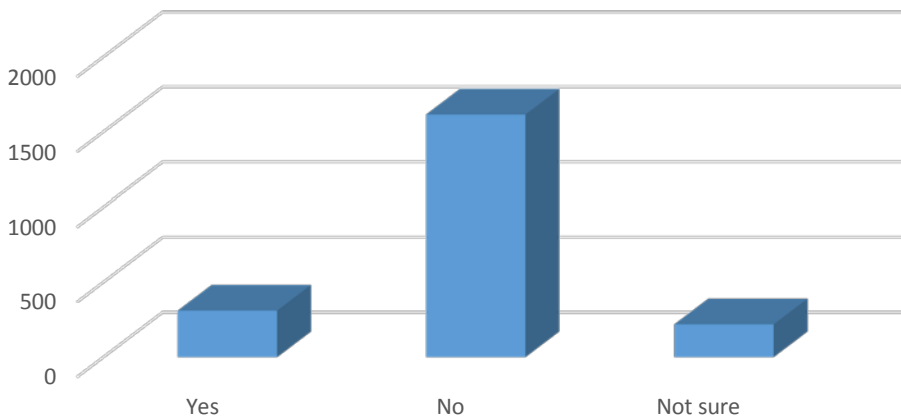


Figure 2. Should the University change its name?

The online survey asked if the name change was necessary to achieve transformation, 79.4 percent voted no, 12.56% voted yes, and a further 8.04 percent were undecided (Figure 3).

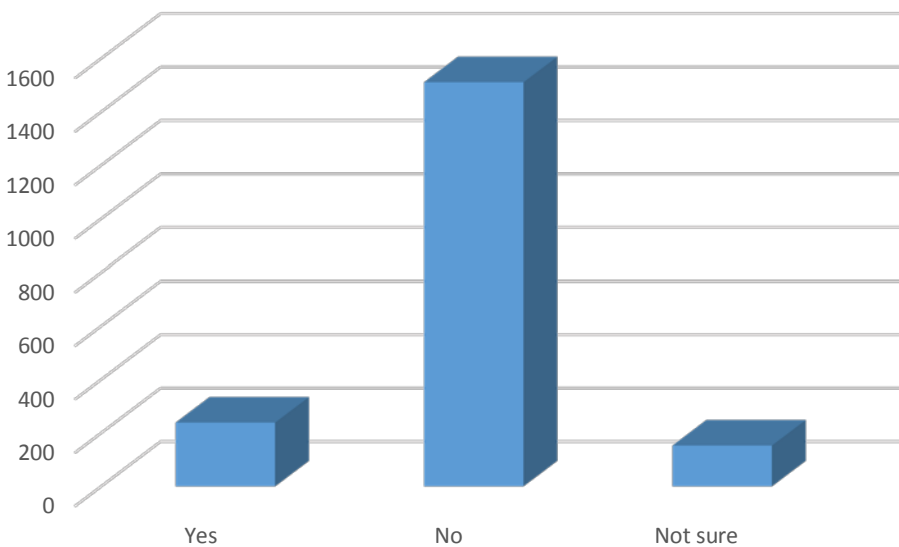


Figure 3. Online Survey whether it is necessary to change the name for transformation.

### 2.3 IMPACT OF NAME CHANGE

The online survey asked in what areas a name change would impact the relationship of alumni with the University (Figure 4). Of the given list, the three most popular selections were: ‘less likely to remain proud of my alma mater’, ‘less likely to recommend or advocate the institution’ and ‘less likely to make a donation’.

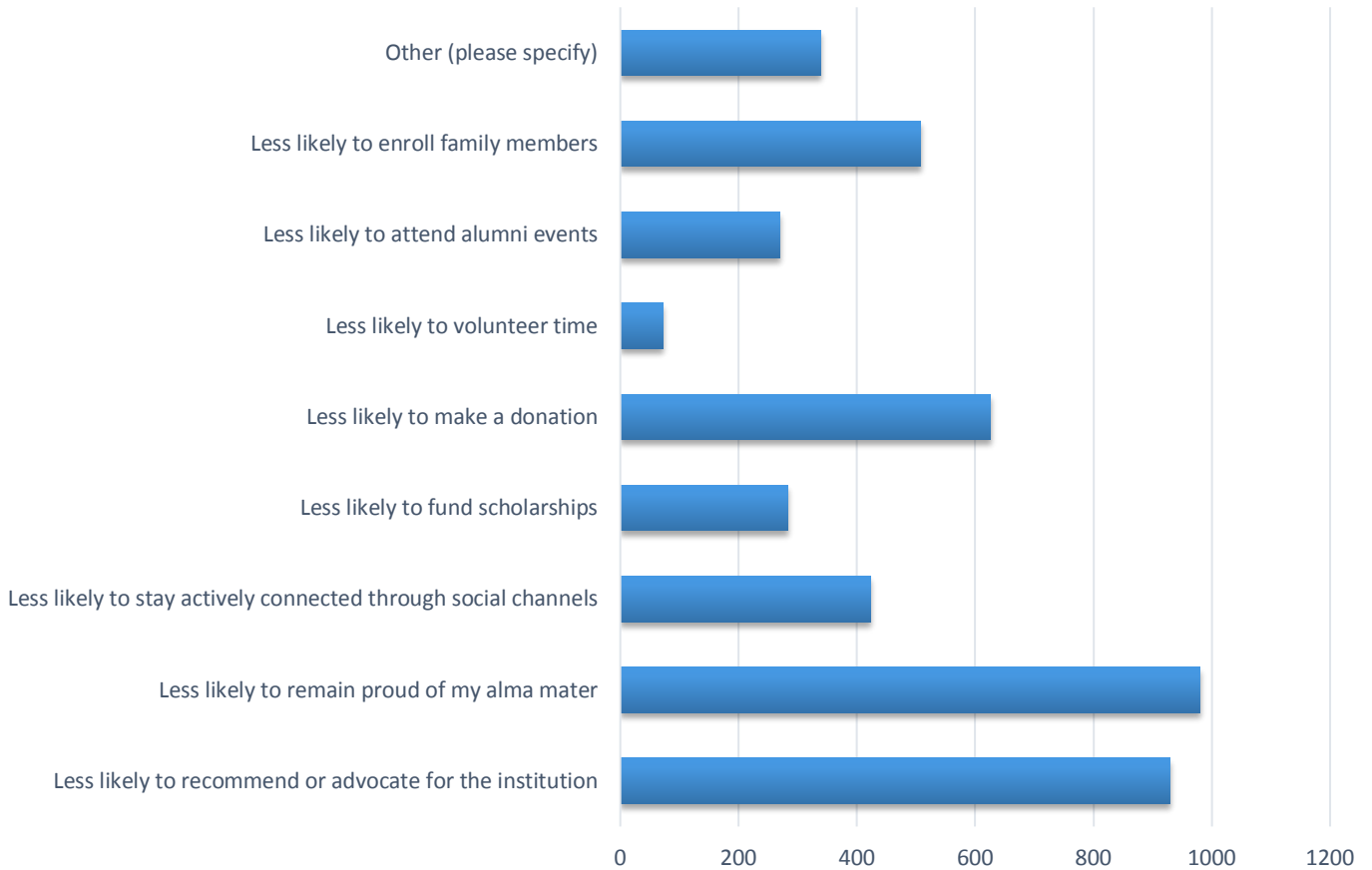


Figure 4. How might a name change impact your relationship with the University?

Under “Other”, the following points were made.

- In no way at all, I just don't support the name change.*
- It would not affect my current relationship with the university*
- A sense of loss - loss of identity with the institution from which I graduated.*
- I would happily do the reverse of all of the above if the name change was affected*
- It will be more of a disappointment but won't necessarily change how I feel about my time there or my future ideas of it*
- I would be less likely to give funds, time or assist with scholarships*
- Would feel proud of the university*
- I will feel less connected with the University*



*None - think Rhodes should keep with the times*

*If the quality and ethos changes then this would negatively impact my association with the university. If it's just a superficial name change and the good work and vision continues, then my support would continue regardless*

*Rhodes will no longer be Rhodes if the name is changed. Transformation can still take place without destroying what Rhodes is. Transformation should not be an outright rejection of everything a person may disagree with. It is named Rhodes for a reason and that should be accepted as part of transformation.*

*More likely to be proud of being the alumni of proudly African, academically excellent institution*

*No impact, the institution will continue to be successful (if not more so) with a carefully thought out name change*

## 2.4 RHODES UNIVERSITY'S REPUTATION AND GLOBAL BRAND

In considering the name change, it was necessary to ask alumni what they thought of the reputation and global brand of Rhodes University.

It is clear from the results that the positive aspects of the institution are the academic and research reputation with the strong embodiment of higher learning excellence, as well as being internationally renowned. The impression that the Institution is battered by bad press and community problems is a cause of concern, especially if our graduates are applying for positions internationally (Figure 5).

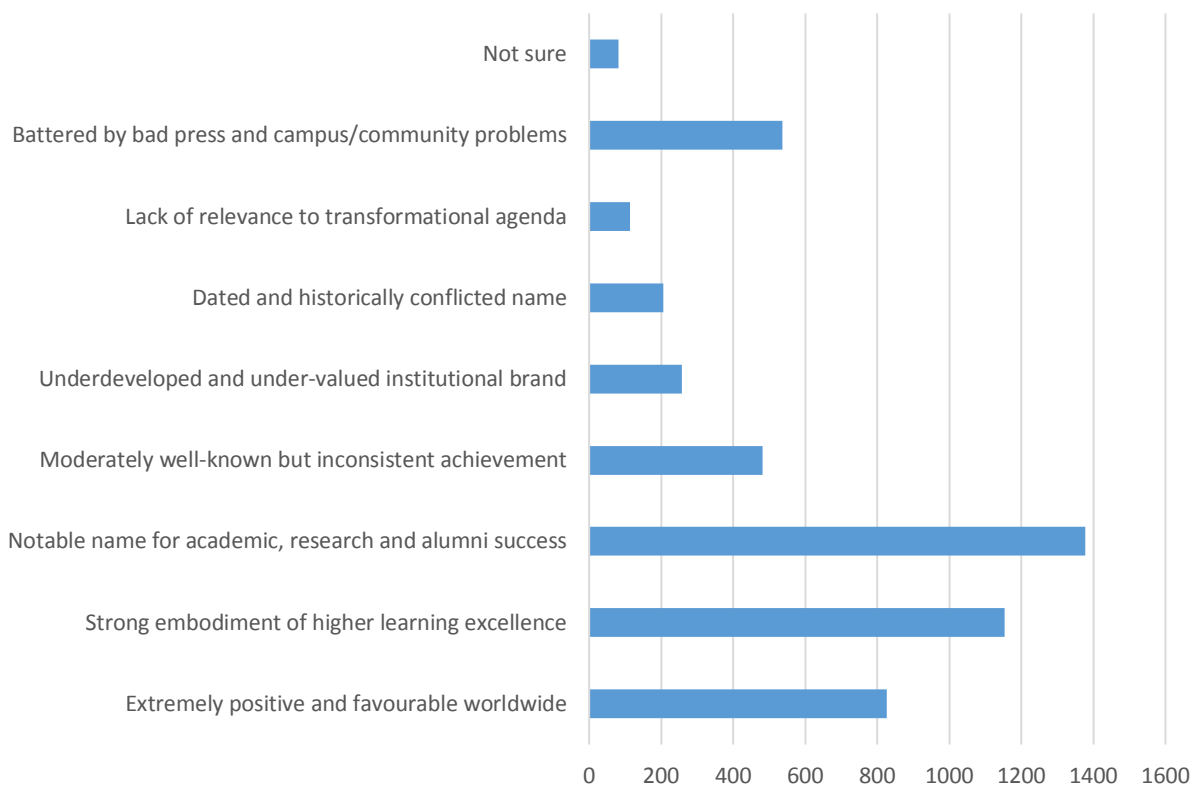


Figure 5. Reputation and Global Brand

Email submission: 2017

As a graduate from the 1970's who has lived in Australia for the last 30 years, I was up until recently a proud Old Rhodian and fundamentally opposed to any change of the name of the university. My reason for adopting this position was simply that I am a Rhodes alumnus and will never be an alumnus of a university which has another name and which happens to occupy the campus on which I studied.

However, since reading the news of student behaviour last year in the "fees must fall campaign" (including attempts to wilfully damage university property), I have become disillusioned about the standing of my alma mater and I am now drifting into the space of being indifferent to whether the university retains or changes its name.

The majority of participants of the Focus Groups across the country were in agreement that the man Cecil John Rhodes, was imperialistic, racist and definitely not someone to be proud of. However, general opinion of renaming and possibly starting to build the reputation from scratch, was dangerous and detrimental to graduates seeking jobs.

One suggestion at the Johannesburg Focus Group was to possibly use Rhodes University as an example of acknowledging the history that has taken place and to build a monument to show that obstacles were overcome and eventual success is possible in a country where the past actions seems insurmountable. Let's use the Institution as an example to other nations, of showing how peace and reconciliation can be achieved.

## 2.5 UNIVERSUM TALENT RESEARCH 2017

Universum is a company with a presence in 60 countries and partners with more than 1.3 million career-seekers, partnering with thousands of universities and organisations. They are thought leaders in Employer Branding, and help the world's 'leading organisations in strengthening their Employer Brands'. Their client list consists of the most attractive employers and they help higher educational institutions through their market research, consulting and media solutions. They aim to close the gap between the expectations of employers and talent, as well as supporting Higher Education Institutions in their roles. From September 2016 – March 2017 an online survey was distributed via university and alumni networks, communities, the Universum Panel and different local and global partners.

### Rhodes University Brand Perception

Alumni were asked what their associations were of Rhodes University's attractiveness. Excellence, Leadership and Prestige were the top three associations (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Universum summary of Rhodes University brand perception

## Reputation and Image

Figure 7 shows the attributes that our alumni associate with Rhodes University. In comparison with the other South African Universities, the positivity towards the tradition of academic excellence, being internationally acclaimed and having successful alumni were highly ranked. The lower figures point towards costs of accommodation, tuition, living expenses and the availability of financial aid and scholarships.

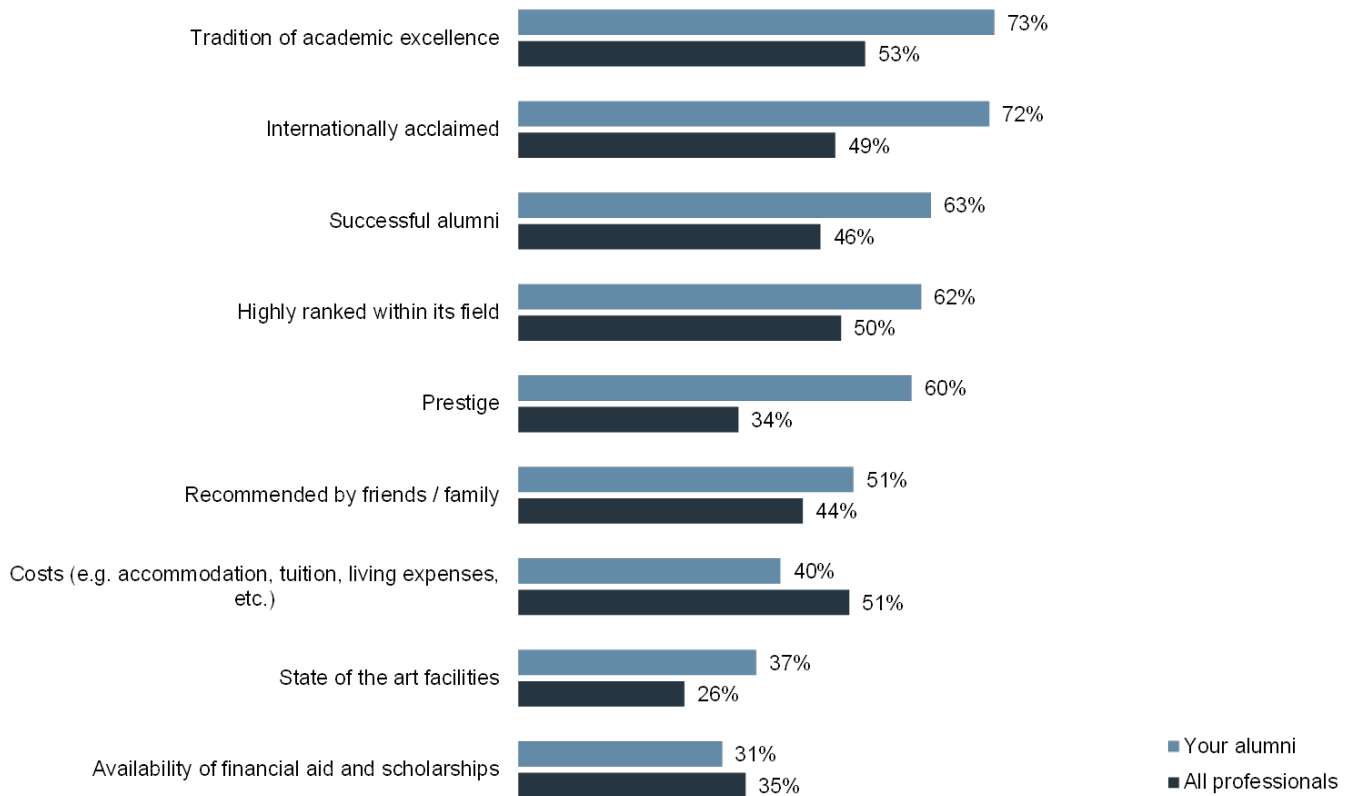


Figure 7. Universum summary of Rhodes University reputation & image

## Employability and Future Opportunities

Regarding employability and future opportunities, alumni were asked which attributes they associate with Rhodes University. Figure 8 highlights the most frequent associations:

- Good reference for future career and/or education
- High employment among graduates
- Teachers transferable and practical skills employers are looking for

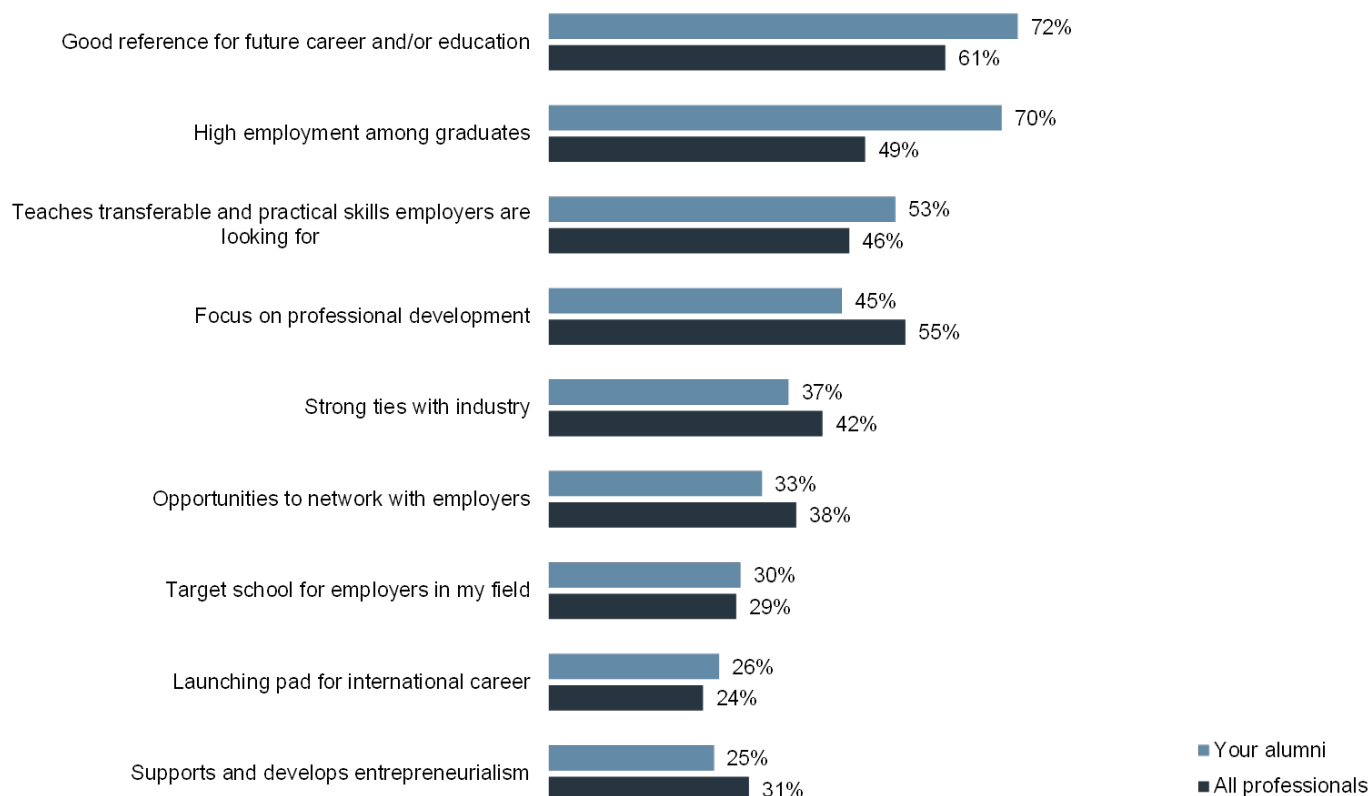


Figure 8. Universum summary of employability and future opportunities

### 3. INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE INCLUDING VISUAL CULTURE AND INSTITUTIONAL RITUALS/TRADITIONS

#### 3.1 ACQUISITION OF NEW ART

When alumni were asked whether they think that new artworks that reflect the rich diversity of the university community should be acquired, the response was extremely positive (Figure 9).

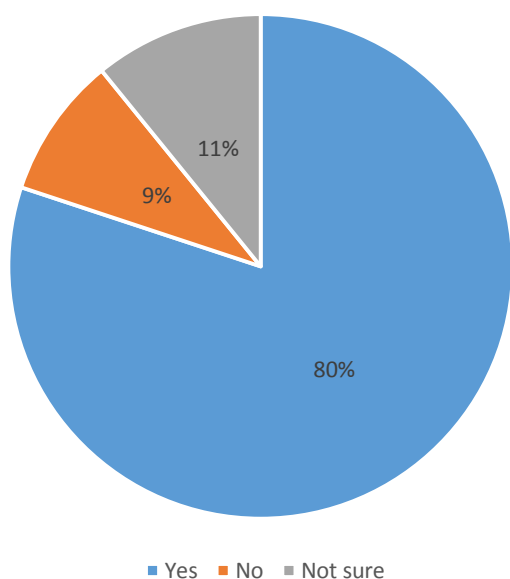


Figure 9. The acquisition of new artworks reflecting diversity

### 3.2 Graduation

With 48% of participants attending a graduation after 2007 (22% between 1996 and 2006 and 25% before 1995), the majority of respondents felt the ceremonies should not be changed while a significant number was not sure. Most of the comments were directed at the structure of the ceremony, like acoustics i.e. being able to hear speeches, the formality and length of the event, the length and calibre of speeches and the dress code. Graduation ceremonies were discussed at the consultations, and the general consensus was that the students loved graduation. It was felt to be a celebratory and happy occasion for the family.

Agree	10.36%
Disagree	54.36%
Not Sure	35.12%

Of a total of 2 076 respondents figure 10 shows how the “numbers stacked up” on the question of changing the graduation ceremonies.

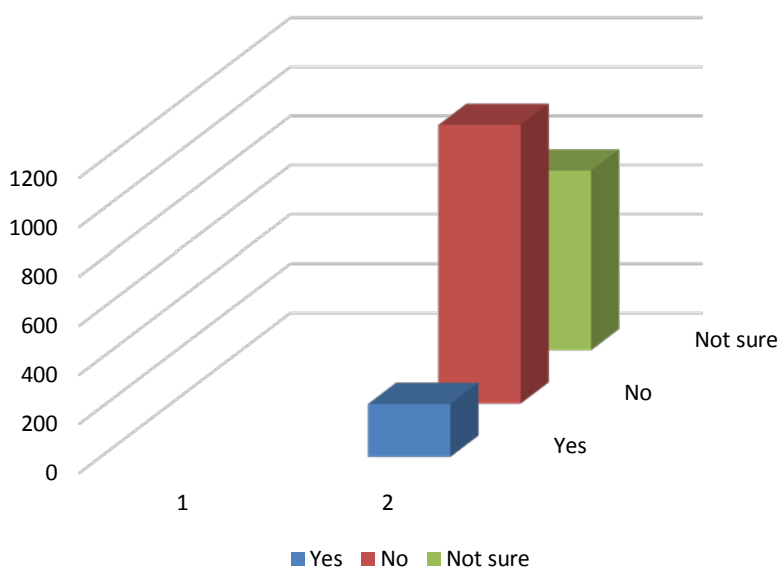


Figure 10. Should the Graduation Ceremony be changed?

## 4. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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Respondents were very positive about their general life experiences at the university (Figure 11). A significant factor is the residential system which is conducive to fostering lifelong friendships and facilitates exposure to different cultures and opinions. Social and recreational activities as well as sports were also factored as positive.

Alumni focus groups touched on their experiences at Rhodes University noting that it was the best experience of their life. Exposure to various cultures and the large contingency of international students made for a diverse and enriched experience.

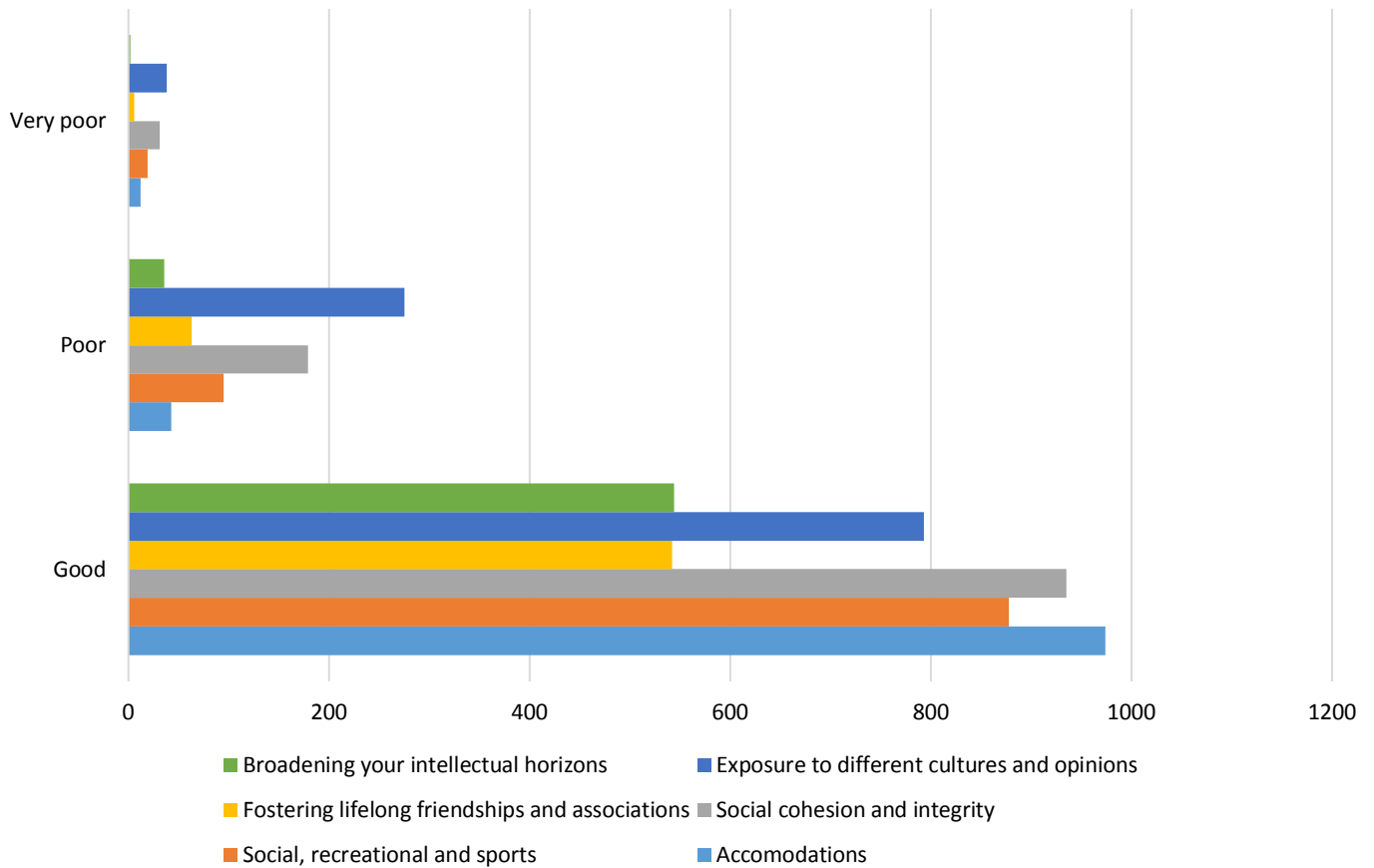


Figure 11. Alumni experience as students

Universum included Culture and Student Life in their survey (Figure 12). In comparison to the other Universities, the results for Rhodes University were extremely positive. Top results were:

- Friendly and open environment
- Creative and dynamic atmosphere
- Secure Campus environment

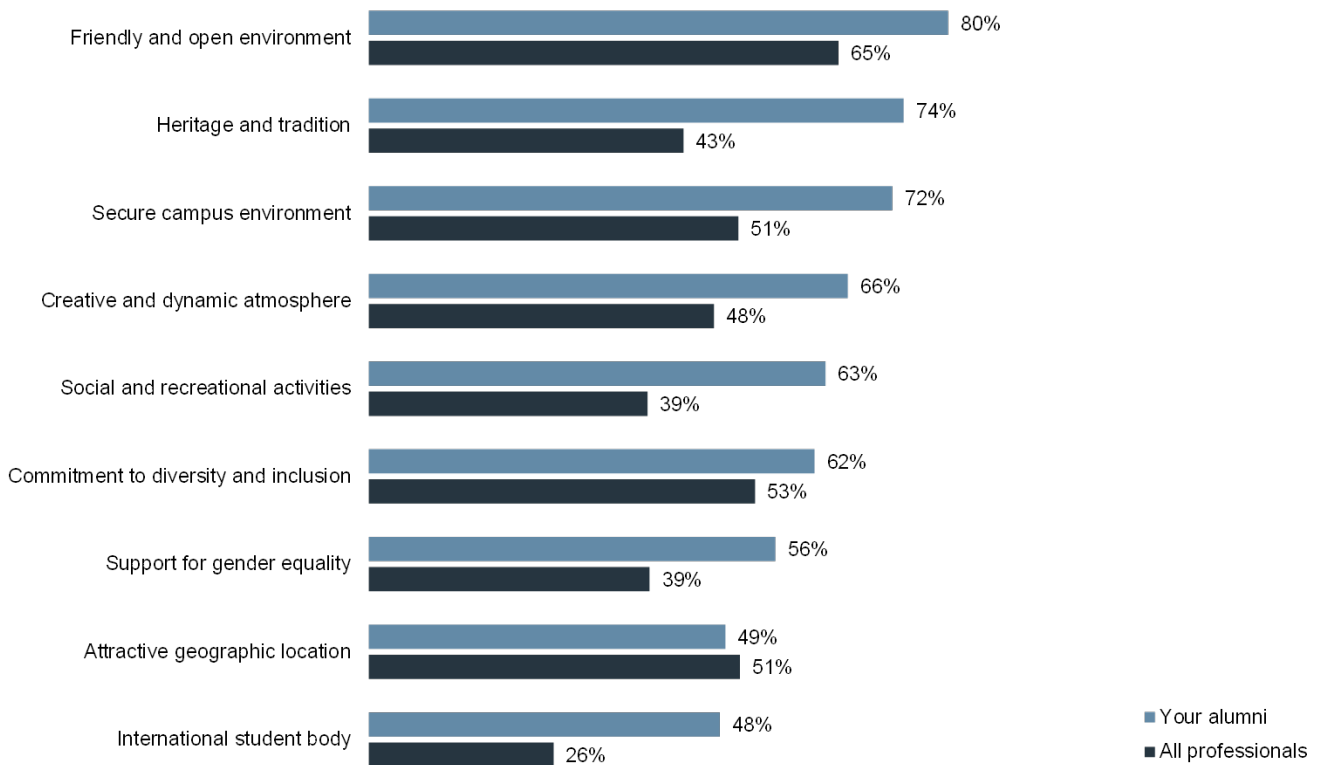


Figure 12. Culture and Student Life

## 5. CURRICULUM

Both the on-line survey and the questionnaire asked alumni to rate their experience of the curriculum and Faculty (teaching and learning experience). The three statements highlighted in the graph below, are reflective of alumni impressions hereof. It is encouraging to see the high numbers of respondents who feel that the curriculum was/is challenging and workplace appropriate.

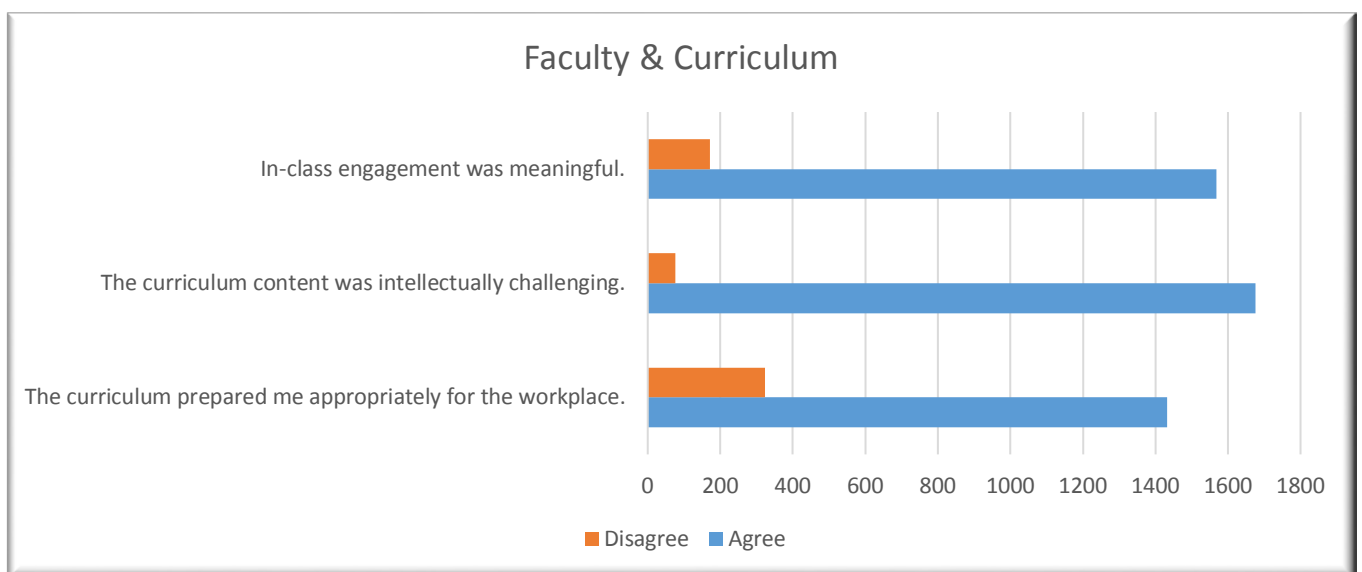


Figure 13. Faculty & Curriculum at Rhodes University

A selection of the comments is given below. These reflect additional thoughts on how the university curriculum could be enhanced and/or improved.

I did journalism, and we focused a lot on feminist theory over two terms over two years taught by the same lecturer. As one of the few males in the class, was it necessary to have the same topic virtually repeated? Not enough emphasis was placed on ethics and basic writing skills, something that should have been focused upon in year two. The most mentally engaging content I found was in politics and philosophy.

Mixed - certain subjects (history, economics) had good content and engagement from both staff and students. Other subjects (music and psychology) not as good - sometime poor, sometimes satisfactory.

I have always been of the opinion that the UED which I did after my degree did nothing practical to prepare me for the experience of teaching. The degree course was good and stimulating, though even there at the time the gap between a matric certificate and first year university was exceedingly challenging and something I was not wholly prepared for. I am speaking of course of nearly 60 years ago, so in this regard my comments are probably not relevant.

We were given a good basic understanding of our subjects which was amazing building blocks for post graduate studies. Went on to PHD level!

Life outside of university, such as preparation for jobs, could be better emphasised/addressed at Rhodes. UCT is a good example of preparation for the workplace, emails about job opportunities and recruiters are constantly being sent out and you feel like you are in less of an "academic bubble" compared to when I attended Rhodes.

More thought leadership from African academics.

More practical aspects and perhaps excursions in the relevant fields can be increased. I also think that a proper in-service training component should be added to in some fields, this would assist students when being recruited once graduated.

needed more exposure to management and business entrepreneurship in healthcare

If high academic standards are not maintained, such that Rhodes graduates cannot compete globally, then the institution's demise is inevitable. While pursuing a transformative agenda, academic standards HAVE to be maintained. In the job market, the quality of a degree obtained at Rhodes in 1975, 1985, 1995, 2005, 2015, 2025 ... must be regarded equally and carry the same respect. If academic standards decline, then SA cannot remain competitive, and it becomes a race to the bottom.

Don't succumb to notions of anti-western paradigms. African learnings and teachings must be incorporated but not to the exclusion of western knowledge.

The curriculum needs to become more in line with the demands of the work place, not what the lecturers think is important or what their favourite subject matter is. More business aspects need to come into the science courses. There needs to be a closer link with business and industry. What are their needs and design the curriculum for this. Look at international curricula and see what is applicable to South Africa's needs



## 6. STAFF

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The online survey requested that participants share additional thoughts on how the university curriculum could be enhanced and/or improved.

Below are some of the comments related to staff.

Weak lecturers need to be removed. In today's environment, there is no room for below standard lecturers. Courses that have a large practical component to them should include "placements", where students work with a firm for anywhere from 2-8 weeks at a time, with focused learning objectives, and properly mentored. Students today are expected to hit the ground running, and this will go a long way to achieving that and making a degree from whatever the university is going to be called a lot more valuable to those who hold it!

I am presently pursuing my PhD at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. I can tell you that what I learnt in my 3rd year is being taught at 4th and 5th year level in Canada!. Rhodes University curriculum engrained in me the very best of what is to be an academic. The same level of dedication from staff is not to be had anywhere else within South Africa or even here in Canada. Please do not change anything. Value your staff and their integrity and protect them from the winds of populists which seek trivial things that add nothing to real world experiences which this university imparts

Rhodes is going through a tough phase and I saw this coming in 2007. However, the eurocentric {sic} nature along with myopic administration/policies has caused enormous damage to the institution. Quality of teaching and learning (Life sciences and Pharmacy) has also suffered mainly due to lack of requisite skills to conduct relevant experiments and reduce costs or even economize on utilities. Major concern is the way departmental budgets are spent - poor planing {sic} and investments have not helped the cause. Inventory/wastage of chemicals and laboratory equipment is high - there is no system of research audits and productivity/outcomes assessment. The costs of equipment maintenance and repairs is eroding the budget of many departments. This has to be looked into by technically qualified/experienced people. Lastly, I should also add that poor supervision has led to complacent student attitude. Current situation can be improved and mitigate losses. However, it needs sincere efforts rather than expert meetings and debates. Lastly - inbreeding of faculty positions and using postgraduate students to lecture/demonstrate has severely impeded the quality of education. MY ALMA MATER needs nourishment - please bring in new blood.

It is important for new knowledge to be incorporated into the curriculum. I think that would occur naturally if you have good lecturers. Tutorials are an important component of learning, where group discussion teaches young people about hearing other ideas and discussing them in a tolerant environment.

The results from the Universum Alumni Report, show that the Rhodes alumni have a higher opinion of the Rhodes educational offerings of professionals compared to other institutions (Figure 14).

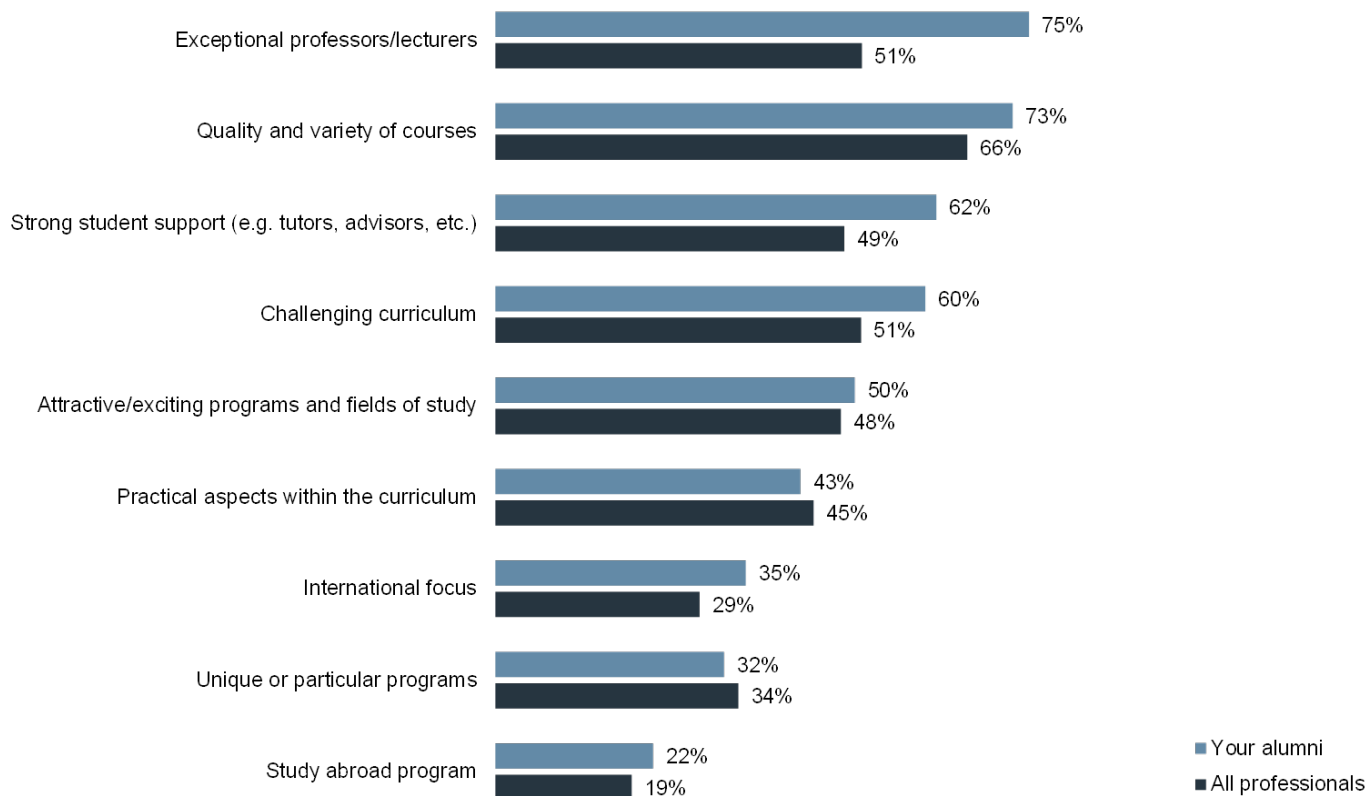


Figure 14. Educational Offering: Most frequent associations

## 7. FINANCE

Alumni were not asked to provide input into this aspect. However, considering the current financial constraints of the University, there are many alumni who could be consulted in respect of the financial sustainability of the University. In fact, some alumni have volunteered their services in plotting a “turnaround/sustainability” strategy for Rhodes University.

Alumni contribute substantially to the third stream income of the University. Annual giving on a personal basis is approximately R1.3 million annually – this excludes direct sponsoring of students such as:

- Alumni Law Association: Programs in place by Old Rhodians who sponsor students to attend Rhodes University are quietly in place but have a huge impact on students’ lives.
- The Bequest program which is relatively new, has brought in approximately R47 million since 2004.

In addition to these programs, the Advancement team works concertedly with alumni on trusts and boards. Influential Old Rhodians in high powered companies continue to donate and support departments, faculties and capital projects via the trusts, boards and companies that they are involved with. The Library, Hamilton Building, Allan Gray House are examples of these substantial contributions. We rely on our pool of alumni for financial support.

Below are excerpts from correspondence with alumni:

I am an alumnus of Rhodes University (PhD 1989). I don't know if you are the person to contact, but I am writing to say that, should Rhodes University decide to change its name, I will no longer feel able to donate to the University or provide for it in my will. I know of a significant number of Rhodes graduates

here in the United Kingdom who were intending to provide for RU in their wills but now feel equally strongly about this issue. (email 2017)

Some years ago I decided not to make contributions to any SA organisation. With the corruption and political problems in SA, combined with student and union activism on the campus, I think the last thing Rhodes should be doing is wasting financial and management resources on even considering a name change. But it seems a name change will be made and to another political person, no matter how well hidden that political agenda appears to be.

The university seems too involved in politics and is beginning to lack the wider vision of where a university should be internationally. (email 2017)

You will know that I severed all ties with UCT and rescinded a bequest I had made to the university. I have subsequently chatted to the Bequests Officer there and he told me that UCT had haemorrhaged money from donors and benefactors in the aftermath of the Rhodes Statue debacle. This will definitely be the fate of RU if there is a name change... (email 2016)

It is with deep regret that I learn that the University is bowing down to political pressure. Should this go forward, my Lawyer and the Executor of my estate have been instructed to ensure that the monies which have been allocated to you will be cancelled.

Just a small note. Should the Rhodes name change, I shall probably stop donating in my very modest way as my own personal protest. It would take too long to go into my reasons.

## 8. CONCLUSION

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Our online survey, questionnaires and focus groups at the consultations, followed the process of the Transformation Summit discussion themes, as closely as possible.

***The Institutional Identity*** addressed the governance of the mission and vision statements and was seen to be fulfilling its direction and values. The survey and questionnaires continued to ask alumni if the university had accordingly succeeded in making Rhodes University an environment that is inclusive of all and 83% of the participants were in agreement. It was clear from the participants that they are against name change and that it was not necessary for the institution to change its name to achieve transformation. In addressing the University's reputation and global brand, the results showed that the positive aspects of the institution are the academic and research reputation with the strong embodiment of higher learning excellence, as well as being internationally renowned. A Rhodes University degree is seen to enhance a good reference for future career, high employment among graduates and has transferable and practical skills that employers are looking for. There was concern that in changing the name, the brand would be lost.

***Institutional Culture including visual culture and institutional rituals*** resulted in an overwhelming majority of alumni advocating for the acquisition of new artworks that reflect the rich diversity of the university community. The graduation ceremony as it is today was seen to be a positive and uplifting experience.

**Student Experience** showed a very positive response from alumni on their general experiences at the university. Our Alumni Focus groups touched on this aspect at the consultations consistently noting that it was the best experience of their life. Exposure to various cultures and the large contingency of international students made for a diverse and enriched experience. The friendly and open environment, a creative and dynamic atmosphere and the residential system were conducive to fostering lifelong friendships and facilitated exposure to different cultures and opinions.

As far as the **Curriculum** is concerned, alumni felt that the content was intellectually challenging and prepared them appropriately for the workplace. The Focus Groups at the consultations were positive to a transformation agenda in the curriculum, as long as the graduates could still compete globally. It is important for new knowledge to be incorporated into the curriculum and the tutorials were seen to be an important component of learning.

**Staff** were seen to be exceptional by alumni, producing courses of quality in a variety courses.

**Finance**, as mentioned in the document, was not addressed in the survey and questionnaires, however due to the emails and submissions it was included in our report. There was a high level of concern expressed at the cost of the name change and also that should a name change occur, financial support would be withdrawn.