

# Independent

THINKING Lifelong Learning Curves

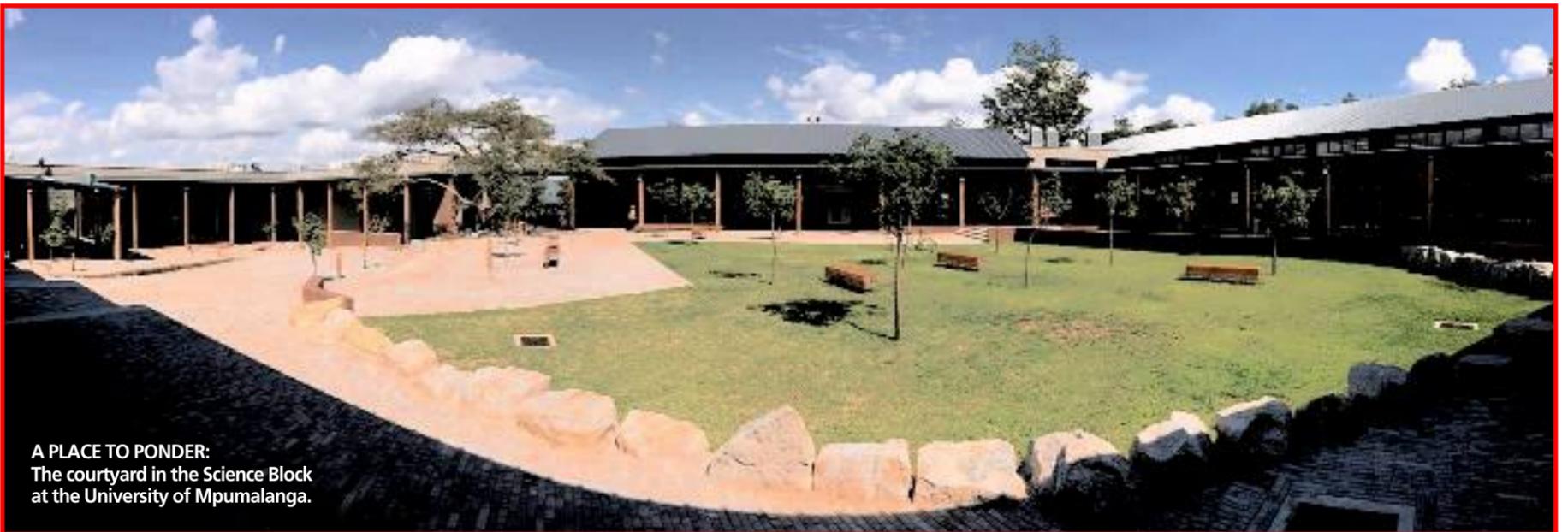
APRIL 2016

EXPLORING THE POST-SCHOOL TERRAIN: A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

## THE TALE

# of two universities

### Growing and transforming university education



**A PLACE TO PONDER:**  
The courtyard in the Science Block at the University of Mpumalanga.

**DIANE PARKER**

**O**VER the past six months, public Higher Education has been in the spotlight. It has been severely challenged. Its relevance has been questioned. It has been accused of not transforming, of not listening to its students, of being too costly.

Calls for the “decolonisation of universities” and for free higher education and adequate student housing abound. Mixed into this is the language of instruction, as well as workers’ issues and the demand for insourcing of all services.

What has government done to develop the South African public higher education sector over the past 15 years or so?

What is our vision for the future and how do we collectively make that happen?

The vision for the Post-School Education and Training system (PSET) is clearly articulated in the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training, published in October 2013. A process is already underway to develop a PSET sector plan.

On reflection, earlier policy decisions expressed in White Paper 3: A Programme for the

Transformation of Higher Education (1997), given expression in legislation in the Higher Education Act (104 of 1997) and implemented through the National Plan on Higher Education (2001), identified transformation of the apartheid higher education landscape as a priority.

Two mechanisms to enable this transformation were: the merger process, which combined institutions that had served different groups under apartheid and introduced three types of universities (traditional, comprehensive and Universities of Technology); and the establishment of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which supported increased access to those who could not afford higher education, mainly poor previously disadvantaged groups.

In addition a new performance-based funding framework for universities, linked to enrolment planning and institutional programme and qualification mixes (PQMs) was introduced.

These changes had a major impact on the higher education landscape.

By 2007 the system had grown substantially – especially through distance, education, which

accounted for more than a third of all enrolments. Infrastructure in many universities was inadequate and groaning under the weight of the increased enrolments.

Government introduced the infrastructure efficiency programme in 2007, which led to a major infrastructural renewal process across all university campuses.

To date over R13-billion has been invested across the system in a variety of infrastructure programmes, some of which were celebrated in the book “WozaSizokwakha – Building Higher Education: Infrastructure Renewal, Revitalisation and Development”, published in November 2014, which showcases a selection of infrastructure projects across the university sector.

Has the system transformed? Yes it has!

Has it gone far enough and are there still challenges?

No it hasn’t and yes there are! Government has acknowledged this and the two Higher Education Summits held (one in 2010 and the second in October 2015) identified the challenges.

**Among other imperatives, we need to:**

Grow the system to meet the increasing demand for spaces from academically capable

young people exiting the schooling system;

Better support students who enter higher education to succeed;

Find ways of improving the funding of Higher Education to ensure its sustainability in the long term;

Ensure that students are not denied access to higher education due to their inability to pay, especially the working and lower middle classes;

Ensure decent student housing, especially for first-year undergraduate students;

Transform the professoriate and ensure that black academic staff are developed and retained; and,

Deal with the issue of curriculum – which must be responsive to the needs of our students and the country, inclusive of diverse forms of knowledge production, including indigenous knowledge systems.

All of these are being worked on through different targeted programmes.

In 2009, the new administration recognised that to grow the system in response to increasing numbers of school leavers demanding higher education we needed new institutions.

Hence a decision was made to consider the feasibility of establishing two new universities in the country, and in provinces that did not have universities – the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga.

The initial establishment of these two universities was achieved through a combination of three critical aspects: planning, partnership and passion.

In November 2011 we approached the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) to host the DHET’s New Universities Project Management Team (NUPMT) in its Campus Development and Planning Unit.

Wits availed its technical capability acquired through its own capital development expansion programme to assist us, and over the years Wits has provided full support to assist in procuring all the required professional resources needed to develop the start-up plan for the academic and institutional aspects of establishing the new universities and to manage phase 1 of the massive 10- to 15-year infrastructure development programme for each institution. An article in this supplement by Ludwig Hansen gives details of some of this (see pages 4-5).

TURN TO PAGE 2

APPEARING IN ALL THE FOLLOWING PUBLICATIONS

THE **independent** SUNDAY

**SUNDAY TRIBUNE**

*Weekend Argus*

**AFRICAN INDEPENDENT**

**The initial establishment of these two universities was achieved through a combination of three critical aspects: planning, partnership and passion.**