

# THE TALE

## The development of the higher education landscape will not stop with these two universities



**EXPANSIVE SPACES:** The Central Campus Square at Sol Plaatje University provides a focus for surrounding academic and residential buildings.

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Milestones were set that would lead to the establishment of the two institutions. The two new universities had to be up and running by January 2014, a mere two years away.

**All aspects needed for each new institution to begin functioning had to be put in place specifically:**

- A physical address (seat);
- A name;
- The type of institution;
- An interim council; and,
- Sufficient funding from the budget vote to ensure success.

And this was only part of what had to be achieved. This is where the passion and commitment came into it – this required team work, vision, and a punishing schedule.

Not only did all the technical work have to be carried out, but consultations had to be held with all interested and affected parties in terms of the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (PAJA).

By July 2012, the President had been advised on the assessments of possible sites and had announced the seat of each university, one in Nelspruit (Mbombela Municipality), and one in Kimberley (Sol Plaatje Municipality).

By August 2012, we had published the Development Framework for New Universities in the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga Provinces to guide their conceptualisation, design and development; and at the same time interested stakeholders were

requested to comment on the framework and to propose the names for the universities.

Detailed feasibility studies for the new universities were submitted to National Treasury, and in November 2012 funding of more than R2-billion for the 2013/14 -2015/16 MTEF period was approved.

In December 2012, the public was invited to nominate members of the Interim Councils of each of the new universities; and by March 2013 the spatial development framework for both universities was completed, and national, provincial and local government had signed a Record of Intention to Facilitate the Rapid Establishment of the New University and the Transfer and Development of Publicly Owned Land for each university.

On 22 and 23 August 2013 UMP and Sol Plaatje University (SPU) were formally established as juristic persons.

This paved the way for the appointment of their interim management teams and for their development plans to be implemented to enable the first intake of students in 2014.

Prior to the establishment of UMP and SPU, the team had to identify academic programmes that could be utilised to start up the institutions.

We required the expertise of a range of academics as well as partnerships with universities that would allow the new institutions to use their curricula for start-up programmes for the 2014

academic year.

This was more complex than meets the eye: it required that these programmes be accredited in the new institutions' names through the CHE's Higher Education Quality Committee. This was made possible by the CHE's willingness to accept that partner universities would submit the selected programmes for accreditation on behalf of institutions that did not exist at the time!

By forging strong partnerships with a number of institutions, DHET managed to ensure that everything was in place for the successful academic start-up of each institution by January 2014.

The Department, in partnership with Wits, in the first instance, and with important partnerships with the University of the Free State, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) at SPU, and the Universities of Johannesburg, Pretoria and KwaZulu-Natal at UMP, set up formidable planning and development processes for the start-up of the institutions.

The support of the municipality and the province in each case was also of great significance.

The Development Plan of each university is integrated into the development plans of the district and local municipality through intense collaboration.

By August 2013, the new institutions had been established, each with its own 10- to 15-year development plan.

By November 2013, architectural competitions had

resulted in the appointment of key professional resources to transform the spatial development plan into a reality; and work on the refurbishment of existing infrastructure to support the classes of 2014 and 2015 at both universities was underway.

By January 2014 both institutions had programmes accredited by the Council on Higher Education.

By October 2014 work had started on the substantial new infrastructure required for the UMP and SPU classes of 2016.

In January 2014 each institution opened its doors to its first modest cohort of students and began its pioneering journey into the future as the first new universities in our democracy.

By August 2014 each institution had its full Council in place and soon after that had appointed its first Vice-Chancellors.

The institutions are progressing from strength to strength. There are a number of articles in this issue that give an overview of the developments at each institution from these humble beginnings.

Now, in April 2016, we celebrate the progress made in developing these universities with this issue of *Independent Thinking*.

Each institution has grown significantly and is forging its own identity.

There are many aspects of the development story that have not been told here, but what has been told illustrates the commitment of

the DHET to the development and transformation of the system and processes of collaboration, cooperation and partnership that support success.

The transformation imperatives of the system are intertwined within these processes and developments.

The development of the higher education landscape will not stop with these two universities. Already a third new university, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, has been established, opening its doors in January 2015.

It also has a developmental path to follow and a different story can be told about its development and contribution to transforming the system.

As we move forward into the future, the PSET sector plan will set in place developmental pathways for strengthening the higher education system and ensuring its further transformation in line with our vision.

The higher education landscape will not remain static: transformation is not an event, it is a process that takes place over time as we continually identify challenges and move towards a more desirable system, within the constraints of our context and means, and pushed by the demands of the high expectations of our citizens.

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