



## **REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING BY THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: 10 JULY 2021**

### **INTRODUCTION**

We are gathered here as an alumni body of the institution, glue which will always remind you of your intellectual growth, and a statutory structure whose existence is aligned with the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997. Our mission is aligned to the broader vision of CUT. Our obligation remains the need to represent the interests and aspirations of our members in enhancing the CUT brand.

The then Technikon Orange Free State was established in 1981, which later became known as the Technikon Free State. In 2004 the former Vista Welkom Campus was incorporated into the Technikon Free State, to form the Central University of Technology, Free State. This was part of a broader process for the restructuring and transformation of the Higher Education sector, to ensure the responsiveness of this sector to national human resources and research needs.

We currently have 44 283 alumni members, whereas the Free State has 26 448 graduates representing 59.59% of the total alumni. The rest are from other provinces and outside the country.

On 26 May 2018, we were given the opportunity to lead the CUT Alumni Association as a team of professionals who were eager and committed to serve. We received warm support from the CUT community, and we are thankful for that. We must confess that we unintentionally stepped on a few toes, thus creating unnecessary discomfort in the process of executing our responsibilities. For that we wish to sincerely apologise.

It gives me great pleasure to present this Alumni Association Term Report to you today. We hope this report will spark debates and assist in charting a new course of action for the Executive Committee to enhance our commitment to the CUT brand.

We developed a three-year strategy to guide the Alumni Executive and put it on a path to become an inclusive and responsive association. We agreed to focus on addressing socio-economic challenges hindering progress of our graduates, such as historic debt, blacklisting of students, and unemployability. While we admit these are national challenges, we agreed that universities exist because of societies, hence we have a role to play. We are also emphatic about the need to create a vibrant and accountable association.

President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a national disaster as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic on 15 March 2020. We immediately experienced havoc wreaked by the novel coronavirus. The virus has radically changed the way we relate to one another as human beings. We have lost family members, colleagues, and friends. I wish to invite you to join the Executive Committee in observing a moment of silence. We need to continue to adhere to health protocols as the best way to contain the pandemic until we reach herd immunity.

We are also confronted with the second pandemic of gender-based violence, which has to be defeated. It sometimes manifests in various tendencies such as toxic masculinity, misogyny, biphobia, transphobia, gayphobia, lesbophobia and homophobia. We wish to condemn the rampant acts of violence directed at women, children, and the LGBTQ community. Our graduate attributes enchant us to be champions of an assault against gender-based violence; it must be our first civic duty as citizens of this country.

Vision 2030, as approved by Council, outlines the path our university seeks to take over the next nine years. At the centre of it is the desire to contribute to producing a generation of entrepreneurial leaders, and the use of innovation towards becoming a leading university in Africa. The vision puts the institution in a better position not only to be the university of choice for the best and brightest students of all classes, but to also become an innovation-focused institution that is engaged with communities.

The seven key areas in our three-year plan, intended to repurpose the Alumni Association and ensure effective communication with the institution through the Executive Committee, amongst others, include enhancing the reputation of CUT; deepening our cordial relationship with the institution; and encouraging participation of alumni through programmes, amongst others. We made great strides in achieving our targets, albeit challenges we faced.

## **ALUMNI ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

On 26 May 2018, the CUT Alumni Association held its Elective Annual General Meeting led by Mr Major Cindi as President. Unfortunately, on 6 January 2020, he resigned due to personal reasons, and the Alumni Association Executive Committee confirmed Vice-President Mr Chabana Chabana as President, and Mr Mbuyiselo Frans as Deputy President. The Executive Committee remains intact with the following duly elected Executive Committee members:

### **OFFICE BEARERS**

1. Mr Chabana Chabana (President)
2. Mr Mbuyiselo Eliot Frans (Deputy President)
3. Mr David Atamo Makhoali (Treasurer)

### **ADDITIONAL MEMBERS**

4. Mr Lebohang Paulus Khutlang
5. Mr Kagisho Richard Mmetseng
6. Mr Kabelo Emmanuel Moremi
7. Mr Luyolo Sigqibo Busakwe

## **GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES**

The Alumni Association participates in the following institutional structures:

1. CUT Council
2. Institutional Forum
3. Selection committees for appointment of executive and senior managers within the institution.

We have made a submission to participate in other critical governance structures, and the institution is yet to meet this request. The incoming leadership will oversee the implementation of this resolution. We should also kickstart a motion to increase representation of alumni in the Council. We need two representatives to address historical realities of the then Technikon Free State and Vista University. Once we have greater representation, it should stand to

reason that, since the President has graduated from the then Technikon Free State, the Alumni Association should also nominate a candidate who has graduated from the Welkom campus.

Our representation in governance structures must be about the broader interest of the institution. No one must be allowed to opportunistically use this structure for selfish and narrow interests.

We have a responsibility to hold both the institution and the Alumni Association Executive Committee accountable through regular accountability measures created to engage.

The year 2020 was a difficult year for the governance of the institution. We experienced governance disturbance which threatened the academic project of the university. We are elated that there is fair stability after investigations against some executive managers were concluded. The alumni must always be in the forefront to defend the stability of the institution at all costs.

We are also concerned about the regular disruption of the academic project due to poor management of disputes arising as a result of non-payment of NSFAS allowances, and the inability to exhaust internal dispute measures available within the institution. The university has recently shown signs as a strong candidate emerging as protest capital of the Higher Education sector. We, as the Alumni Association, cannot allow this, and we have raised this matter with the leadership of the institution. The Alumni Association must play a critical role as mediator and assist in mentoring student leaders, so that we can produce more transformational leaders. We should also call on the institution to invoke consequence management tools where there is poor performance disadvantaging students, and a contravention of the policies and prescripts of the university by students.

We have witnessed a lapse in terms of the calibre of appointed Council members. The Alumni Association must make a submission to Council to only appoint qualified, experienced councillors.

## **TRANSFORMATION**

We hosted a Transformation Workshop on 21 November 2019 in an attempt to formulate our position as it relates to the broader transformation agenda of the institution, and how the Alumni Association can embrace the progression thereof.

On 10 June 2021 we participated in the CUT Transformation Summit. We made a commitment to the transformation agenda as it relates to gender representivity and the establishment of diversity in the Alumni Association leadership. We can no longer accept the embarrassment of having an Executive Committee that is not constituted of a single female, although we have tried to invite names for cooption without success.

We need to align with the broader agenda of CUT without putting quotas in place. In the 2019/2020 financial year, the university approached the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) to conduct an independent study on transformation within the institution. The CGE recently released its report in this regard, which, amongst others, contained the following recommendations:

1. CUT must ensure that the Employment Equity Plan sets out clear targets to achieve gender transformation and to increase representation of women in executive and senior management, and academic positions.
2. CUT must allocate a gender-responsive budget in support of transformation. This will assist the institution in addressing the needs of all persons and in terms of the equitable

distribution of benefits and resources. In addition to that it must cover the needs of persons with disabilities.

3. CUT must develop the following policies to address issues of LGBTIQ+ staff and students, as well as gender-based violence and sexual harassment.
4. In executing their duties, CUT Council members must ensure compliance and adherence to the Guidelines for Good Governance Practice and Governance Indicators for Councils.

In July 2020 we undertook a campaign titled #CUTAlumniAgainstGBV, where our own alumni made a statement against gender-based violence through sharing of their photos with a clear message against gender-based violence. As part of the programme the Vice-Chancellor addressed alumni via a video clip, and he also encouraged alumni to join the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

The institution regards itself as a leading African university of technology, shaping the future through innovation. The alumni must contribute to these intellectual debates so that we can have a smart campus that also accommodates the alumni.

We are happy with the value proposition mooted by the CUT Digital Transformation and Roadmap. Among these are the following:

1. To create meaningful digital networks for staff and students at CUT, thus facilitating alumni and staff in staying connected and sharing their experience, whilst increasing the desire to raise funds and fulfilling a mentoring function at CUT.
2. Establish and strengthen partnerships and alliances with alumni, local businesses, and enterprises through business events and by building partnering into ways of working.
3. Use social media to target alumni who have a large workplace network of prospective students.
4. Link placement providers to students, and employers to alumni.

## **DATABASE MANAGEMENT**

The Alumni Association has led a process of strengthening the alumni database. A service provider was subsequently appointed to ensure a comprehensive and practical cloud-based solution as a tool to communicate effectively and efficiently with the alumni community.

Data scraping was also undertaken to improve the quality of data to stay in contact with alumni members. The current database is yet to be where we want it to be; however, huge strides were made in this regard.

It also remains the responsibility of alumni to update their details via the website so that they can receive continuous and updated information about the developments within the institution.

## **CUT ALUMNI ASSOCIATION ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT**

The Alumni Association has been operating with skeleton staff since its inception. We wish to report that we now have an Alumni Affairs Unit located in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor. The unit is led by the Deputy Director: Alumni Affairs, who report to the Director in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal.

The Executive Committee has advocated for a principle at CUT of growing and appreciating our own timber. Though there are some elements tossing a hint of reluctance, the institution

has an obligation to adhere to this principle, especially as it relates to alumni affairs. We must remain champions of these principles within the university.

## **ALUMNI CHAPTERS**

We are of a firm view that the chapters are recognised structures of the association as per our Terms of Reference, and they must be supported fully. We must also re-emphasise that the chapters may be based on the bases of geographic location, academic interest or any interest related to the institution without deviating from the primary requirements for one to be a member of the Alumni Association. We must henceforth encourage alumni members to organise themselves through these networks.

We have done work to outline responsibilities of the chapters so that there is no confusion. We need to also delegate the incoming leadership to strengthen the powers and functions of the chapters.

The Alumni Association remains at its formative stage, and therefore needs support to be able to execute its broader mandate. The following chapters were established:

1. Lejweleputswa Chapter
2. Motheo Chapter
3. North West Chapter
4. Gauteng Chapter

## **ALUMNI AWARDS**

The Alumni Executive Committee approved the concept document to guide recognition of alumni. Our members are contributing positively to the society. However, unlike other institutions, we are not given them the deserved recognition.

As a way to close this gap, we have launched a social media campaign titled #ProudlyCUTAlumni. The campaign received huge positive feedback.

The excellence awards will be another mechanism used to appreciate the contributions made by our members. The incoming Executive Committee must launch these awards as their first programme after the strategic planning session. We should formally recognise these ambassadors through these excellence awards. The following are categories of these awards:

1. Social Impact (the award recognises contributions alumni made to enrich the society through the service to humanity.)
2. Academic Star (the award recognises outstanding performance in academia.)
3. Innovation and Entrepreneurship (the award recognises outstanding achievement in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship.)
4. Sports, Arts and Media (the award recognises outstanding achievement in sports, arts, and media.)

## **NATIONAL ALUMNI FORUM**

The Alumni Executive Committee has led a move to establish the National Alumni Forum with an intention to collaborate through seamless fundraising measures, and to cooperate in national efforts to shape the discourse in the Higher Education sector.

The forum will be constituted by alumni structures of universities of technology, with the hope to expand this to traditional universities. The first responsibility of this forum will be to engage the corporate world to increase donor funding dedicated to universities of technology, as they are the least beneficiaries of donor funds.

CUT must be encouraged to administratively support this forum and host its national office. The incoming leadership should spearhead the completion of the Terms of Reference for this national structure.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The members of the Alumni Association participated in an inclusive consultative process to amend the constitution of the Alumni Association in line with the directive of the 2018 elective AGM. The broader internal stakeholders were invited to make substantive inputs on the draft Terms of Reference, and to further participate during the constitutional review. This was a broad consultative mechanism to ensure transparency, and to obtain outsider input.

We wish to report that the Terms of Reference were approved by Council in 2020, and Council Resolution CM E 1/20/01 bears reference. We have directed that the Terms of Reference be distributed and uploaded onto our website page.

## **GRADUATION CEREMONIES AND ROADSHOWS**

While we are aware that virtual graduation ceremonies are not ideal for the first generation of graduates in our respective families, we have no choice but to avoid in-person graduation ceremonies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We continue to be optimistic that the world will finally conquer the pandemic.

The Alumni Association must be a mainstay stakeholder during the graduation ceremonies. We should cling on to bragging rights during these events. We should be permitted to welcome new members in our ranks. We are happy to report that Management has shown a gesture of goodwill, and we are now part of the graduation ceremonies. We also mounted a photobooth and created hype towards the 2019 graduation ceremonies to encourage alumni to participate in these activities, and to update their contact details on our database system.

Due to the postponement of graduation ceremonies in 2020 and virtual graduations hosted in 2021, we had to backpaddle as a result of the novel coronavirus pandemic. However, the incoming leadership must devise creative means to increase the presence of the Alumni Association and its leadership during these virtual ceremonies.

The roadshows remain deferred as a response to COVID-19. However, once the country gets back to normalcy, we should embark on roadshows to encourage participation of the alumni. Furthermore, we should be present in events where many of our members are active, and we should enhance the CUT brand mileage. The approach we should adopt is that every alumnus or alumna is a potential donor to our crowd funding initiative; hence the events are of importance.

## **MEDIA PLATFORM**

We currently have active social media platforms, although there is a need to financially boost our media platforms. We also need to help with feeding the content through the Alumni Office and the Executive Committee. The alumni media spaces should remain platforms to celebrate

the alumni community. For this reason the Triumph magazine has to be resuscitated. We also wish to appreciate the work done to launch the alumni newsletter. We hope the letter will continue to carry the content biased to the Alumni Association, and the input of the Executive Committee should always be accommodated.

The Executive Committee needs to continue to communicate with the alumni and the broader community on a regular basis through the President's letters. The President must consistently influence the discourse and provoke debates on societal challenges as a thought leader of the association.

## **GRADUATES' CERTIFICATES**

Statistics South Africa has recently confirmed that the unemployment rate reached 32.6% in the first three months of 2021, whilst the youth unemployment rate stood at 46.3%. This calls for a radical shift from the conventional approach to challenges faced by graduates. It cannot be justified to withhold graduates' certificates purely because students do not have a means to settle their debt. The certificates are gathering dust on the shelves of the universities, when they can be used as tools to fight unemployment and strengthen the case for funding for entrepreneurial graduates.

In response to frustrations faced by unemployed graduates and those faced with dire financial circumstances, the Alumni Association initiated a national campaign to get universities to release graduates' certificates to address the socio-economic challenges faced by the unemployed graduates, and to eradicate unjustness in the policy.

The campaign was themed **#ReleaseGraduatesCertificates** and it received massive media coverage and popular support from the society. Amongst others, media houses that covered the campaign included Metro FM, Lesedi FM, Mhlobo We Nene, Civic FM and News Africa - Channel 405.

We have formally introduced a motion in the Council of the institution as the highest decision-making body. The Council is yet to substantively consider the matter. We are concerned that there seems to be reluctance to consider the matter. The responsibility remains with the incoming leadership to see the implementation of the motion through.

As far as the results of the 2019 annual graduate survey of the institution is concerned, the unemployment rate among CUT graduates hovers around 47%, and this is way above the national unemployment rate. Thus, we should assist in facilitating the entrance of CUT alumni in the labour market through the release of certificates.

The policy of withholding graduates' certificates to leverage payment of their outstanding debt is ineffective and inefficient. The debt recovery rate demonstrates this reality.

On 28 February 2020, the Vice-Chancellor's communiqué recorded student debt to be R1,138 billion. The institution had more than 9 576 graduates' certificates in its possession due to outstanding debt between 2007 and 2012. Whilst we need to encourage alumni with outstanding debt to settle their debt, it cannot be business as usual for all of us.

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

The Alumni Association continued to participate in stakeholder engagements with the institution. We started our term of office by meeting with different internal and external stakeholders to re-introduce the alumni as a structure, and to share our plans.

We were not able to engage the public through hosting lectures and public debates through webinars. We are positive that the new leadership will accept the responsibility to complete these tasks.

The institution cannot be an ivory tower; hence a need for the university to work with the communities and build capacity within civil society movements through workshops, training and dialogue. The Alumni Association must consider a proposal for the university to have a centre for community engagement. The university must tap into its technological capacities to empower our communities. This centre can also be a platform through which the alumni can volunteer.

## **VISION 2030**

The institution undertook a process to define its vision for the next ten years. Stakeholders were invited to make inputs. The Alumni Association was represented in the Vision 2030 Task Team. It is important for all of us to internalise the vision and hold each other accountable for its implementation. The success of the vision remains our collective responsibility.

## **ALUMNI SURVEY**

The Alumni Association proposed a comprehensive graduate survey to have a full understanding of the location of our alumni in the corporate world. This survey will go a long way to coin a focused programme to respond to alumni interest. The survey will be led by the Institutional Planning and Quality Enhancement Unit of the institution, as per Council's resolution. The incoming leadership must ensure that this resolution is implemented.

## **ALUMNI ELECTIONS**

In 2018, the AGM raised serious reservations about fairness of the elections, given weaknesses in the electronic system used. The Executive Committee was mandated to procure a new database system and a credible voting system to bring fairness in the elections of the Alumni Association. Though we have experienced technical glitches with the current system, there is improvement. The election application used remain a work in progress.

## **FOCUS AREAS FOR THE INCOMING EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

1. Mentorship
2. Student leadership mentorship
3. Community engagement
4. Fundraising
5. Communication
6. Participation in structures
7. Mediation and dispute resolution
8. Academic networks
9. Chapter launches
10. Curriculum development
11. National Alumni Forum

## **CONCLUSION**

I am happy that we are handing over the baton to the new collective who are eager to inject new ideas and make their mark in enhancing the CUT brand. The incoming leadership must know that they are not joining a dinner party, but an organisation with a punishing schedule. Your family will suffer as you will need to not only excel in your respective workplaces, but you



also must burn midnight oil and read through mountains of documents and respond to many e-mails. As fatigue sets in, remember you are representing many professionals who expect nothing less from you, and you dare not fail them.

To the outgoing Executive Committee, you were a team and always willing to go an extra mile. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to CUT. The work you have done albeit the pandemic far exceeded expectations. Today there is hype around the Alumni Association because of your massive presence. The fact that you are in this meeting to account on your responsibilities is indicative of your work ethics. Thank you.

We are grateful to have the support of the Executive Management led by the Vice-Chancellor, the Alumni Unit and the entire alumni community, stakeholders and most importantly, the Registrar.

Thank you!

**Mr Chabana Chabana**  
**Outgoing Alumni Association President**