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## GENERAL NOTICE

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### NOTICE 136 OF 2009

#### REPORT OF THE MINISTERIAL TASK TEAM,

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TO THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF EDUCATION  
GNM PANDOR, M.P.

INVESTIGATION BY THE MINISTERIAL TASK TEAM INTO THE NORTH-  
WEST UNIVERSITY

DECEMBER 2008

**REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION  
BY THE MINISTERIAL TASK TEAM  
INTO THE NORTH-WEST  
UNIVERSITY**

## PART ONE

### INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

#### 1. Introduction

The North-West University came into being as a single university in 2004 through the merger between the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PUCHE) and the University of the North-West (UniWest), and the incorporation of staff and students of the Sebokeng campus of Vista University with the Vaal Triangle campus of the former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (Institutional Plan 2008–2010, p.1).

The University consists of three campuses, namely, Potchefstroom, Mafikeng and the Vaal Triangle, spread over a geographic distance of over 330 km. The three campuses differ not only in terms of their history, but also in other important dimensions such as the numbers of enrolled students, the diversity of academic programmes, their language policies, their institutional practices, and so on. The Potchefstroom campus is the largest of the three, followed by Mafikeng. Each campus is headed by a rector who is accountable to the Vice-Chancellor for the management of his or her site.

The merger that gave rise to the North-West University was part of a broader government initiative to restructure the higher education system in South Africa. This merger was aimed at achieving the following strategic goals as per Government Gazette No. 1689, 14 November 2003:

- Overcoming the apartheid-induced divide between historically white and historically black institutions;
- Promoting a more equitable staff and student body;
- Enabling the development and provision of a wider and more comprehensive range of vocational, in particular technikon-type, professional and general programmes, in line with regional and national needs;
- Building administrative, management, governance and academic capacity;
- Consolidating the deployment and use of academic personnel;
- Building research capacity; and
- Enhancing sustainability through increased size.

The merger came into effect on 1 January 2004, establishing the North-West University, with the seat of the institution being in Potchefstroom.

## **2. Background to the Ministerial Task Team investigation**

The Minister of Education observed that the North-West University (NWU) has been experiencing a number of problems as it continues to grow and become consolidated as a merged institution. These problems have surfaced and are most prominently illustrated by several disruptions of academic activities that have occurred at the Mafikeng campus over since merger. This resulted in the closure of the Mafikeng campus on at least three occasions in 2008 alone. The Minister further noted that there has been an **apparent** lack of academic integration within the University, as well as some staff discontent on the Vaal Triangle campus.

Against this background, the Minister appointed a Task Team of Dr J. Phaahla (Chairperson), Dr M. Kgaphola, Dr N. Cloete, Dr J. Lewis, Dr E Dladla and Ms L. Vilakazi-Tselane on 10 October 2008 to carry out an investigation with a view to finding a sustainable solution to the problems that have plagued the Mafikeng campus in particular, but critically with a view to locating these problems within a holistic institutional context. The broad brief of the Task Team was to identify the cause of the ongoing problems in the University and to propose solutions thereto, and to evaluate the extent to which the NWU has achieved the intended objectives of the merger and the processes it has followed towards this end.

## **3. Terms of reference for the Task Team**

The specific terms of reference for the Task Team were to report on the following:

(i) The causes of disruptions, instability and discontent at all the NWU campuses, especially the Mafikeng campus, in the context of the goals and objectives of the merger and the National Plan for Higher Education, with a view to enhancing the efficacy of the merger and identifying and proposing a resolution to the ongoing problems at the University.

(ii) The extent, manner, success and efficacy of integrating institutional policies and practices, across all campuses, in such matters as academic structures, governance and management, including financial management, resource allocation and human resources in the context of the objectives of the merger.

(iii) The extent, manner and success of enhancing social cohesion and a new institutional culture across all campuses that overcomes the apartheid-induced divide between historically white and historically black institutions.

(iv) The measures and actions necessary to enhance the efficacy of the merger.

#### 4. Process

The Task Team was initially provided with background documentation on the NWU, specifically documentation that was germane to the disruptions that had besieged the Mafikeng campus. Further documentation was subsequently provided that covered a wider spectrum of aspects of the University, dealing with management and processes at the institutional level, including annual reports, strategic plans, and communiqués and memoranda relating to the immediate and past events at the Mafikeng campus. Documents that captured the activities of and relevant developments on individual campuses were submitted to the Task Team during its various site visits.

For the purpose of gathering oral submissions and any appropriate supporting documents, the Task Team met with various stakeholders at the three NWU campuses. At the institutional level, separate meetings were held with the institutional management, the university Council and the institutional forum. Separate meetings were held at each campus with the following categories of internal stakeholders:

- Campus management
- Staff unions operating on the campus
- Academic and support staff in their professional context outside of union representation
- The Student Representative Council (SRC)
- Organised student formations
- Other persons or groups on campus who felt a need to make separate submissions
- Meetings were held at the Mafikeng campus on 15 and 16 October, at the Vaal Triangle campus on 20 and 21 October, and at the Potchefstroom campus on 22 and 23 October 2008. The Task Team collected from a number of stakeholders a range of documents as part of or in support of their respective submissions, in addition to listening to oral arguments by the parties. In some instances, these supporting documents were submitted in the period following the formal sittings of the Task Team, by mutual agreement between the Task Team and the parties concerned.

In undertaking the investigation the Task Team set out to listen and observe and to peruse various documents and then compile a report to the Minister. This report uses the terms of reference as a starting point and additionally provides insight into some of the complexities of the debates and the submissions made to the Task Team by the various parties.