

NEWS RELEASE

UP appoints Dr Naledi Pandor as honorary professor in education



Prof Naledi Pandor delivers a heartfelt address at her welcome ceremony, inspiring attendees with her vision and leadership

Pretoria - In an appointment described as “strategic and important”, the University of Pretoria (UP) has welcomed former cabinet minister Naledi Pandor to its [Faculty of Education](#) as an honorary professor.

A PhD graduate of the faculty, she joins UP’s Centre for the Advancement of Sustainable Higher Education Futures, where she will contribute – without remuneration – to research, and student and staff development.

“Professor Pandor is a leader whose impact on education, policy and innovation, and whose unwavering commitment to advancing higher education and sustainable development, aligns perfectly with the mission of the centre,” said UP Vice-Chancellor and Principal Prof Francis Petersen. “It is truly a privilege to have someone of her calibre joining our academic network in this esteemed role.”

He was speaking at a small gathering held on UP’s Hatfield campus on Friday, 28 February 2025 to welcome Prof Pandor, whose appointment followed an external peer-review process and was vetted by the Senior

Appointments Committee of the UP Senate. The University's Registrar has issued a formal note confirming that Prof Pandor is permitted to use the title of "Professor".

Prof Pandor received a PhD in Education from UP in 2019 after completing her doctoral thesis, titled 'The contested meaning of transformation in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa'.

"Her passion for education stems from her background as a teacher and a lifelong curiosity about the field," Prof Petersen said. "Through her research, Prof Pandor explored the vast and rewarding landscape in education, while acquiring academic and research skills."

He added that the honorary professorship was a testament not only to Prof Pandor's academic abilities and remarkable contributions to transformation, but also to her excellence as a leader with strong ethical values.

"Balancing the responsibilities of a cabinet minister and PhD student was no easy task," Prof Petersen said. "She meticulously planned her schedule and dedicated every available moment outside work and politics to her studies, even reducing her public engagements. Despite the challenges, she remained committed to her academic goals

Congratulating Prof Pandor on her appointment as honorary professor, Prof Petersen said UP looked forward to "learning from your vast experience and engaging in meaningful collaborations that will shape the future of higher education".

Prof Pandor, who served as a cabinet minister from 2004 until July 2024 in various portfolios – including higher education, science and technology, and international relations and cooperation – described her new appointment as "an incredible honour" and said she was thrilled to return to UP.

"My experience as a student for four years matured me in significant ways and prepared me for international relations," she said, recalling how defending her PhD thesis, for example, was part of a learning experience in standing her ground.

Prof Pandor also offered insight into her decision to enter academia after retiring from government.

"When you retire, it is a very peculiar experience when you've worked most of your life. I've worked for more than 40 years and have always been very busy. So in July last year, when I realised this was it and I should let others take over, I sat at home for a bit and thought about what I would do."

She received several offers, including from other universities in South Africa, but did not seriously consider any of them until her former PhD supervisor, Prof Chika Sehoole, then Dean of the Faculty of Education at UP, expressed interest in nominating her as a professor with the faculty.

Prof Sehoole noted that his former student did not use academic titles lightly.

"Prof Pandor has four honorary doctorates, but she never used the titles," he said. "After she formally obtained her doctorate from UP, which she studied for, she agreed to be called 'Dr'. She chose not to until she'd earned it," he said. "Your four years' experience as a student in the Faculty of Education will be an asset to and enhance the status of UP," he said, addressing Prof Pandor.

Prof Sehoole added that she had been an exemplary PhD student who adhered to all doctoral requirements, including attending classes and compulsory support sessions.

"She was a role model. She did not send her office staff to register; she came herself."

The new Dean of the Faculty of Education, Prof, welcomed Prof Pandor, saying that the faculty and the entire University would benefit from the strategic and important decision to recruit a leader of her stature.

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2025 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of [Accounting and Finance](#); [Architecture](#); [Electrical and Electronic Engineering](#); Law; Sport Science; and Veterinary Science. UP's Faculty of Law has been ranked as the top law school in Africa for a remarkable eighth consecutive year.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za