

# UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

REPORT:

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA SENATE CONFERENCE

22-23 FEBRUARY 2021

*Re-imagining higher education:  
Frontlines, intersections and opportunities*



S 5101/21

## BACKGROUND

We are in the midst of demanding, disruptive, fraught and yet exciting times for higher education in which universities, like other institutions, are sites for change in an interconnected world. Many describe these times as a period of crisis, disruption, or uncertainty.

The change flows activated by the 'ruins' of COVID-19 provide a major impetus for forging new directions. Market orientation, economics, education, politics, health, social justice, rights, social responsibility, sustainability science, engineering and technology remain equally central.

Beyond the tangible experience of ambivalence, disturbance and instability, there is also the prospect of opportunities, in spite of the dangers. In times of transformative shifts and adaptation, academic and intellectual reorientation has an important role to play in reflections on our location, position and place as a university. In the words of Olonisakin (2020), re-imagining the university requires 'confronting our own place and contributions with integrity'. If reorientation is about repositioning and reacclimatizing in a troubled and messy world with 'wicked problems', then it is also about foresight and futuring to overcome persistent challenges. The latter demands bold, innovative and fresh ideas to re-imagine our direction and purpose as a university.

Barnett (2011: 62) reminds us that 'being a university is always a matter of becoming a university'. Thus, a university enters the world – and a university is *active* in the world'. More than this, 'the university has a dynamic and always unfolding being [...] its becoming places responsibilities on the university for imagining its future' (Barnett 2011: 154). In other words, a university is expected to confront its context, situation and circumstances. It actively responds to the current conditions of its being but, conversely, imagines the new for its future. A key question for the University of Pretoria is, What are feasible options for the university's 'becoming' in a context of considerable unpredictability?

As a response to disruptive forces, 'universities have to be innovative and proactive, they have to strengthen their capacity for sensing emerging developments and dealing with unknowns and, ultimately, orchestrating new directions and pathways towards the emerging futures' (Ouma & Kupe, 2020: 1-2; see also Bawa, 2018). Re-imagining the university involves deciding *how* we want to be in the world. While such re-imagining may be dismissed by some as utopian, Barnett (2012, 2013) and others urge us to discover the limits of the possible and to seek out 'feasible utopias' so that possibilities are transformed into actuality.

In all of this, the key questions remain 'What *is* a university?' and 'What is a university to *be*?' More specifically, what should a re-imagined University of Pretoria become in a re-imagined higher education context in the twenty-first century? There are no easy answers or solutions, but the

questions should stimulate us to generate ideas that offer conceptual and practical direction for shaping our future interventions as an institution committed to generative research and sound and authentic teaching and learning practices.

Our re-imagining of the university represents both a response to the malaise that undergirds current understandings of the university, and an alternative conceptual appeal to reconstitute the university as a place of engagement (encompassing criticality, care, trust and responsibility in and beyond the university). According to Barnett (2013), for a university to be imaginative, it should manifest 'actual innovative policies and strategies' (p. 155) as it sets out to 'be sensitive to the potential callings of the wider world' (p. 154). Such demonstration positions the imaginative university as a site of responsible actions 'in and towards the world in aiding the wellbeing [and flourishing] of the world' (p. 154). On the other hand, the imagining university is 'continually reflexive and gives itself to imagining its future [...] for it is always becoming, in attempting to realize the imagining of itself' (p. 155). A re-imagined university is therefore a proactive and provocative idea of a 'becoming-ecological-university' (p.144) that is connected to its aspirations to promote human flourishing and well-being, especially human understanding, transforming people's lives, forming self-sustaining communities, and developing a self-critical society.

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## THE AIMS OF SENATE CONFERENCE 2021

The virtual Senate Conference 2021 built on the 2020 Senate Conference: '*Breaking new ground*' to advance inter- and trans-disciplinarity. In 2020 three main strategic planning issues emerged: technologies needed to improve teaching and learning (especially those developed in-house); a review of the University's Academic Plan; and proposals for transdisciplinary research that engage platforms within the University (e.g., Engineering 4.0, Javett-UP, Future Africa, and Innovation Africa). Beyond these emerging platforms, UP anticipates direct involvement with current community platforms that respond to engagements and interventions beyond university spaces (e.g., platforms that address the rural/peri-urban and urban divide).

The Senate Conference 2021 considered current and envisaged future contexts. It aimed to identify options and to stimulate deep thinking for critically engaged work leading to the production of new knowledge, to finding new solutions to extant intractable problems, to moving towards new horizons, and developing new human capabilities. In this spirit, senators were encouraged to develop generative ideas reflecting future prospects that respond to the University's key navigational markers: teaching and learning (encompassing student access, inclusion, ability to learn, and well-being), research, postgraduate education, innovation, internationalisation, and social responsibility.

### **Institutional Navigational Markers**

The Vice-Chancellor and members of the Executive presented the core elements of the University's long-term strategic plan, UP 2025, highlighting areas of realignment that were necessary with respect to revisions to the Academic Plan, and identifying priorities for the next five years and beyond. The following guiding questions were addressed by keynote and invited speakers, and in responses from panel members and senators. These questions also became the focus of separate group discussions.

- *What* should the University of Pretoria become in a re-imagined higher education context in the next 10 to 20 years?
- *Where* are we now, *what* are the trends (or ingredients of change) and *how* does UP forecast where we hope to go as an institution?
- *What* are the possible futures for a re-imagined University of Pretoria?
- *What* research priorities should the re-imagined university focus on?
- *What* are the ideas, sources and templates of innovation?
- *What* is the role of the creative in a re-imagined UP?
- *What* kind of institutional ecosystem do we want to design for the UP community (staff, students, graduates, alumni) that also addresses systemic racism and other forms of discrimination in higher education and, by extension, society?
- *How* do we harness technology to improve the human condition?
- *How* do we find common ground between academic freedom and competing interests in re-imagining the university?
- *How* do we design and re-imagine an identity for the University in intellectual and practical ways?

- *How* does a re-imagined UP advance its ambition of becoming a site of transformative experience and action?
- *What* should the future of our teaching and learning look like if we wish to appropriately prepare UP students for a rapidly changing future (including the future of work)?
- *What* will be the composition or nature and needs of our future student communities?

## THE FORMAT OF THE CONFERENCE

For the first time since its initiation, the Senate Conference was held in virtual format. As indicated below, the format worked extremely well, and may perhaps have to be considered as a future option, even post-COVID-19.

## PARTICIPATION IN THE CONFERENCE

A total of 176 members of Senate attended the conference during the two days of proceedings. Participation rates were high and stable for the duration of the conference. The reasons for this arguably may be related (at least in part) to the information conveyed by the statistics presented in Table 1 below.

Fifty-one conference participants (i.e., approximately 33% of participants) completed a questionnaire aimed at obtaining feedback on participants' experiences of the conference. As reflected in the statistics contained in Table 1, the vast majority of senators indicated that they viewed the conference as having met its objectives and that the platform used for the conference allowed for optimal participation by senators. Interestingly, senators gave close to a maximum score for the questionnaire item, "The conference was professionally and efficiently organised".

**Table 1:** Conference survey results

This conference was good value for my time	4.44
I was able to participate fully in the conference	4.31
I was able to understand how we as an institution can concretely re-imagine UP	4.12
I have reflected on how to use the insights gained during the course of the conference at UP	4.42
I received all the necessary event information timeously	4.83
The pre-conference information was informative	4.6
I connected to the platform with ease	4.9
The conference was professionally and efficiently organised	4.94

Respondents (N) = 51

## DAY 1: SESSION 1

The first day of the conference was divided into two main sessions: Session 1 included an introduction, followed by three key note speakers: the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Pretoria; the Vice-Chancellor and President of Murdoch University, Perth; and the Vice-President and Vice-Principal of King's College, London. The main theme was the context and role of the research-intensive university in Africa and globally, as well as the current position and future aspirations of the University of Pretoria.

### Keynote presentations

*Chair: Professor Norman Duncan, Vice-Principal: Academic, University of Pretoria*

Professor Norman Duncan welcomed delegates and outlined the intention and drivers that gave rise to the conference as well as the purpose of the conference and questions to be addressed during the course of the conference. The deliberate intention was to foreground new frontiers of transdisciplinarity in research and in teaching platforms and practices already in place. The conference would also reflect on the existing and anticipated future strengths of the University.

### Where are we now, what are the trends and what future does UP envisage for itself?

*Professor Tawana Kupe, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Pretoria, South Africa*

In this first keynote address, Professor Kupe focussed on the challenges and opportunities that COVID-19 presents as one of a number of disruptions to higher education and also to society as we know it today. While COVID-19 is a clear and immediate disruptor, there are multiple other ongoing disruptors that can be traced back over decades. These include poverty and inequality. COVID-19 has exacerbated these challenges and brought these and various other invisible disruptors into sharper focus. Nothing will be 'normal' again.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also revealed opportunities for change. These include the need for a set of well-articulated transformations that re-imagine and reposition the university as an engaged actor, critical to the creation of new, re-imagined societies that are prosperous, inclusive and sustainable. Such new societies, and the world, should be characterised by harmony between humanity and the environment. Professor Kupe emphasised that real-life problems do not present in discrete disciplines; it is therefore clear that solutions often need to be found through transdisciplinary work. By way of illustrating the value of transdisciplinary work, Professor Kupe referred to the invaluable contributions to society of the approximately 30,000 UP students engaged in community projects each year.



Fortunately, UP has been engaged in hybrid teaching and learning since 2014 and had a relatively smooth transition to online learning during various phases of the national lockdown. Students have responded well and in some cases are doing better and engaging in more collaboration than was the case in face-to-face learning contexts. Professor Kupe pointed out that technology is not education, but rather that technology opens up opportunities for engagement. The key points raised by Professor Kupe were taken up in various conversations throughout the conference: UP needs to be a driver of change and a creator of the innovations that are needed to introduce and sustain such change. The University needs an internationalisation of knowledge and to ensure the valorisation of diverse knowledges. [Refer also to Ouma & Kupe, 2020<sup>1</sup>]

### **The research-intensive university in a global context: experiences and perspectives**

*Professor Eeva Leinonen, Vice-Chancellor and President, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia*

In the second keynote address, Professor Leinonen – referring to the extraordinary period we are living in, including the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and the need to work together – noted that in this extraordinary period universities need to find new ways of working if they are going to thrive. Research needs to focus on the world’s most intractable problems and universities need to provide strong support to leading researchers and research infrastructure.

For centuries, universities have connected with one another across geopolitics to exchange ideas and further knowledge. The ideas, innovations and inventions that have resulted have helped in some ways to transform societies. In the current era of unprecedented change, driven by the 4IR and now, a global pandemic, together with a growing rise in populism, protectionism and isolationism, how universities engage and conduct their research is being transformed.

In this shifting landscape, global collaborations among institutions, governments and industry are becoming even more important at a time in which, for many, research priorities are being driven by an overarching strategy that aims to direct an institution’s energies and finite resources into areas of greatest impact. Professor Leinonen cited several examples of such collaboration, including the transdisciplinary Africa Research Group, which is linked to government, industry, NGOs and society and committed to innovation and high-quality higher education that can offer models for ‘uptake’ on a global level. Murdoch University has many international partnerships and collaborates with over 2000 academic institutions worldwide. One question is, ‘Should we be rebooting the traditional ways in which universities have functioned after the pandemic or re-imagining universities?’ We need to focus on glaring problems such as climate change. Our research needs to be driven by a university strategy. We need a long-term vision. We also need to have an easily understood narrative to communicate research to a wide audience.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usaf.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Uncertain-Times-Paper.pdf>

Professor Leinonen also provided examples of the globally engaged research-intensive university with special reference to numerous Australia-Africa research collaborations.

### **The research-intensive university in an African context: experiences and perspectives**

*Professor Funmi Olonisakin, Vice-President and Vice-Principal, King's College London*

Professor Olonisakin's presentation provided insights into the profusion of challenges we face and the importance of designing solutions from and for Africa, while not excluding global connections and relevance. She reminded senators that like every generation of people, every university must confront the challenges of its times. In this twenty-first century moment, the challenges for the research-intensive university in an African context are simultaneously both intensely local and global. The disruptions of a pandemic offer an opportunity to universities to rethink their approaches to these challenges and to adapt to emerging contexts. Events during this 'pandemic moment' reinforce the vital importance of knowledge production and expertise coming out of the university. However, these events also challenge some established approaches to the production and transfer of knowledge. The development and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, for example, have laid bare the same kind of power dynamics that underpin research, development and knowledge transfer between actors and institutions in the Global North and South. We now know that some approaches are neither universal nor fit for purpose in diverse twenty-first century contexts. This moment also challenges the university to revisit its social contract with the society in which it is embedded.

The challenge for the African university is to find its place in engaging global problem-solving from a place of equity, while at the same time revisiting its engagement with society. Arguably, the leading and most forward-looking universities on the African continent must respond to three inter-related questions at this moment. First, 'How will the knowledge produced in the university be deployed to make the society that supports it stronger and more successful?', second, 'On what terms should the African university engage and participate in global processes of change?', and third, 'Should African universities that have a deep consciousness and commitment to the pursuit of knowledge for the service of local and global society provide leadership to other universities that are just beginning to develop this consciousness, and what will it mean to provide such leadership?' Research produced in the university cannot be disconnected from extant cultural, social and economic contexts. This is all the more important for the African university.

Professor Olonisakin stressed the importance of experts from African universities who have been propelled to centre stage due to the pandemic as well as the opening up of opportunities for collaboration on a new scale. The inequalities between North and South and notions of the superiority of Western ideas have also become increasingly apparent. Forward-looking universities need to respond by changing the global consciousness of Africa. The post-pandemic period is an opportunity to re-centre the role of African research-intensive universities. These universities need to engage with partners in the North. African knowledges have much to contribute and should expect fair financial rewards.

Africa has a young population with an average age of 19.4 years. This has significance for future visioning. We need to transcend national and disciplinary borders and pay attention to the decolonisation of knowledge and to adopting a continental lens. Translating these intentions is an enormous task. Africa 'hardly has a seat at the table' in terms of global rankings. Professor Olonisakin raised the question of whether African universities should focus on 'playing the game' to join UCT in the top 100 or whether the rules of the game (none of which was made by an African university) need revisiting; African universities need to challenge structural biases.

### **Concluding comments**

Synchronicity was evident across the messages of all three speakers: African solutions for African problems, but also higher education institutions becoming global players on their own terms. Collaboration, expert knowledge, transdisciplinary approaches and society-focused research will need to inform re-imagining the university in Africa, especially for a young population heading into an unknown future shaped by inequality of resources and a global climate crisis. Postgraduate students need to be included in international collaborations. Research intensive universities need to be at the forefront of creating relevant technological solutions for teaching, and for addressing health, environmental, humanitarian, and global power issues. The recognition of opportunities, the acknowledgement of excellent work already under way, and visionary thinking and inclusiveness across borders create an inspiring and high-energy basis for further discussions.

### **Responses of members of Senate to the keynote presentations**

*Chair: Professor Tawana Kupe, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Pretoria*

*Panel: Professor Barend Erasmus (Dean: Natural and Agricultural Sciences); Professor Margaret Chitiga-Mabugu (Economic and Management Sciences); Professor Vasu Reddy (Dean: Humanities)*

In his response to the keynote presentation, Professor Erasmus argued that what we need to change is the global consciousness of what Africa has to offer. Many of the solutions to the world's wicked problems lie in Africa. For example, Africa has large tracts of natural environments and abundant natural resources. Researchers in Africa could explore different models for sustainable development pathways. He commented that we need to remember that universities are not the sole producers and keepers of knowledge. Reprising a comment made by Professor Kupe, Professor Erasmus emphasised that COVID-19 is obviously not the only disruptor confronting us. There have been (and are) many others such as environmental disasters. In the case of COVID-19, one enabling factor in responding to the effects of the pandemic on teaching, learning and research, has been UP's online infrastructure. In promoting transdisciplinary research and teaching, there need to be new practical innovations in regard to how this is done without relying exclusively on face-to-face interactions.

Professor Chitiga-Mabugu drew attention to the need to understand how inequalities are shaping the higher education landscape. We need to find new ways of tackling old problems. The Sustainable

Development Goals<sup>2</sup> provide opportunities to address inequalities (see Section 38 of the Higher Education Act.<sup>3</sup>). There is a need to deliberately encourage partnerships, especially in Africa, rather than assuming 'business as usual'. We need to pay attention to *how* we collaborate and *how* to incentivise and nurture researchers. This means re-examining funding models and policies of teaching and research.

Professor Reddy noted that the three keynote addresses provided a starting point for conversations across regions, identities and nations; where we are and our sense of the world, and conversations about the uneven, changed and complex terrain of higher education institutions. In the context of the tensions between local and global, North-South power dynamics, and intra-Africa collaborations, he proposed the development of a global compact and a global consciousness while staying relevant to African contexts. He pointed out the tension between the aspirational and sustainable vision of African universities and also noted that people constitute universities' greatest resource.

Professor Reddy raised the following fundamental questions: 'How will we give meaning to change?' 'What have we little control over?' 'What impacts on efficiencies?' He concluded by returning to the overarching theme of a collaborative agenda and of the need to push boundaries. With determination and resolve the University should build on what is emerging.

#### **Professor Tawana Kupe**

Professor Kupe provided some reflections on the keynote addresses and the panel responses. He acknowledged the difficult challenges accompanying and resulting from disruptions, including, of course, from COVID-19, but pointed out that not all disruptions are negative. They can be positive and the current situation is not one of 'stalemate'.

He made a number of suggestions for action: even though there is insufficient government funding for universities, there are a number of regional, sub-regional and continental bodies that are meant to and can support collaboration. Why are these not impacting research output? The gateway model is an excellent way forward to get tripartite collaboration. A more robust internationalisation approach focusing on sub-Saharan African countries, for a start, needs to be embarked on. The African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) is a good start, though it is in danger of being perceived as an African Ivy League. Future Africa is a valuable avenue for collaboration. However, we must be very careful not to be seen as promoting another 'Cape to Cairo' presence on the continent. As a final point, Professor Kupe indicated that a key challenge is to establish a continental footprint (in qualitative terms) that will allow for UP to be measured in ways different from the current approaches to rankings, which are largely a numbers game.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>3</sup> 38. (1) Public higher education institutions may co-operate with each other in any manner to achieve the optimal utilisation of resources and the performance of their functions.

## DAY 1: SESSION 2

### Group discussions

*Chair: Professor Caroline Nicholson, Registrar, University of Pretoria*

Conference participants were randomly assigned to four groups, each focussing on a specific question or set of related questions following on from discussions in Session 1 and guided by facilitators. Questions were broadly formulated around research priorities, new roles and identities, resolving tensions around transformation and future innovations.

#### GROUP 1

Topic: *What research priorities should the re-imagined university focus on?*

Facilitator: Professor Tiaan de Jager, Dean: Health Sciences

The discussion began with an acknowledgement of the guiding documents, *Sustainable Development Goals*<sup>4</sup>, and *UP 2025*, which identify various research priorities. These include, among others, agriculture, One Health in broad context, water, energy, inequalities, social justice and human rights, economic development, smart infrastructure, climate change, and environment. The need to prioritise job creation and understanding the needs of youth was emphasised. Generation Z focuses on technology but also on social justice issues. Transdisciplinarity was a recurring theme, as was optimising resources.

#### ***How do we engage the wicked problems of society through research?***

One suggestion was to consider a focus on one specific theme, one SDG (e.g., food security), which would have an impact on all other themes or SDGs. This would make interdisciplinary research more attractive. Engagement should include networking across Africa and the globe. Many of the suggestions focussed on finding cutting-edge, cross-disciplinary solutions for basic needs: health, well-being, technology.

#### ***What possible topics/ gains become possible for transdisciplinary collaboration?***

Specific key areas proposed were: zoonosis, malaria and vaccine research that would prepare for future disease outbreaks through prevention, diagnosis and treatment. Elements of the 4IR, including artificial intelligence, could be used in agricultural development. The African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR)<sup>5</sup>, to a large extent, was tasked to drive this process; however, the knowledge and skills reside in universities. Another proposal was for cancer research with personalised medicine as part of One Health<sup>6</sup>. Numerous issues can be included under the One Health umbrella.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.who.int/trypanosomiasis\\_african/partners](https://www.who.int/trypanosomiasis_african/partners)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/one-health>

There are various technological, social, moral, legal, and economic challenges at the human-technology interface that need to be addressed. The area of technology and security may offer a unique area of research for African universities, as may the ethics of the use of artificial intelligence (AI). These are transdisciplinary opportunities that will also have social impact and contribute to our internationalisation and Africa networks.

Another topic could be the digitalisation of diagnostic and treatment platforms with harnessing of AI to improve management and outcomes of disease. Bioinformatics would play a central role.

An area of concern that needs attention is the heightened level of stress and anxiety for students or youth created by inequality of connectivity during this time of online teaching. Another is how mental health can be promoted through the use of technologies. An additional inter-disciplinary link that was suggested was between law and health.

From an educational perspective, online teaching (in COVID-19 times) in the various disciplines of the University (but also across higher education institutions nationally and internationally) may be a timely focus for collaboration.

### **Summary**

The discussions focussed on addressing immediate human needs through technology, transdisciplinary approaches and wider networks, building on what UP already does well and keeping in mind the voice and needs of the younger generation.

Some of the key questions that emerged from this group discussion include:

1. In our research, what and who will be impacted?
2. What will make us prosperous? What is relevant?
3. How does research impact policy?
4. How do we go about community engagement? How do we engage youth in setting research agendas?
5. How do we move away from competition towards collaboration?
6. Does UP have the capacity to produce and manufacture (with partners) a vaccine?
7. How can we promote mental health through the use of technologies?

### **GROUP 2**

Topic: *How does a re-imagined UP advance its ambition of becoming a site of transformative experience and action?*

Facilitator: Professor Chika Sehoole, Dean: Education

Contributions from senators focussed on the need for the university to confront its context and to choose its options for creating a more transformed and culturally diverse University. It was argued that a transformation path has many dimensions which include creating a genuinely inclusive university, with diversity of both staff and students prioritised. All forms of discrimination need to be eliminated, including, for example, xenophobia, gender-based violence, and disability.

There was a clear intention for UP to have an enabling and inclusive culture so as to be the institution of choice in Africa. More than 60% of UP students are Black but many may not feel at home at UP. UP needs to check on the quotas and goals of transformation to monitor progress. A limiting factor

to diversifying the student body will always be the finances involved. This limitation has been rendered more complex by COVID-19. However, increasing the percentage of Black students is only one aspect of transformation.

Systems dynamics have shown that numbers are the least effective driver to effect transformation. Some senators asserted that the most effective place to start is with values and worldviews. Mind-sets need to change; transformation is also an internal process. Direct yet safe conversation platforms need to be established to improve awareness and to ultimately facilitate true transformation.

Structures, such as the Institutional Forum (IF), need to be recognised as important in addressing some of the transformation issues. The IF should not operate in a silo but should work more closely with the Transformation Committees and with the Transformation Office. The IF could also assist with questions for the forthcoming Institutional Culture Survey.

Policies and fora are key in driving transformation: The Language Policy needs to be revived and reviewed; the Anti-discrimination Policy should be more nuanced; and the Transgender Policy and EE Policy should be formalized and integrated into the University culture.

Curricula need renewal: Does what is taught speak to the envisioned future? The medical curriculum was being revisited for relevance and it was suggested that all medical students learn an African language. Furthermore, African languages need to be researched and promoted. The opportunities afforded by the 4IR should be investigated. To assist with access and also retention of staff and students, mentors and role models could play a role. A further suggestion was made that structures and funding be in place to ensure that the playing field is levelled as much as possible.

As in other fora, the issue of communication was raised. The whole UP community needs to know what is happening and needs to be included. The last Institutional Cultural Survey was conducted about ten years ago and such a survey needs to be repeated. Students/Generation Z need to be included in fora similar to the Senate Conference. As was pointed out, the future cannot be re-imagined without input from the generation who will create and inhabit it. On an operational level, documents need to be dealt with digitally for improved efficiency and security. It was noted that some staff need training in the digitalisation of information.

### **Summary**

In addition to further diversifying the staff and student body, UP can advance its transformation agenda through reviewing structures, policies, curricula, communication platforms, and funding models. Individuals need to reflect on their own assumptions and worldviews so that an inclusive UP culture can flourish.

The key questions that emerged from this group discussion include:

1. What is the university good at and what are universities good for?
2. Do Black students feel at home in the University?
3. How do we create enabling environments for students and staff?
4. What are we doing about language transformation?
5. How do we ensure throughputs for students who have financial challenges?
6. How do we address reflection on, and inclusion of a wide range of values and worldviews?

### **GROUP 3**

Topic: *How do we find common ground between academic freedom and competing interests in re-imagining the University?*

Facilitator: Professor Nthabiseng Ogude, Dean: Mamelodi Campus

An initial comment on the notion of academic freedom problematised the question under consideration: the traditional definition (free enquiry, advancement of knowledge and search for truth) it was argued, is no longer possible. There is now rather the notion that universities are products of society and for society. Another observation was that there are binaries when we talk of common ground. This gives rise to tension points which need to be identified and then a common vision for a re-imagined university articulated.

Some tension points include the focus on transdisciplinary research versus disciplinary research, internal and external bureaucracy, and quantity versus quality of research.

However, there were numerous suggestions of immediate issues requiring negotiation for common ground between academic freedom and competing interests, such as the influence or effect of the University's relationship with industry, as well as funding limitations. Accountability to society must be balanced with accountability to academic peers. National security imposes constraints and government needs to understand the role of academic research, for example, in relation to the Protection of Personal Information Act. Funding for research has decreased which will affect the type of research done as well as the quantity and quality of outputs. The issue of restrictions on foreigners applying to come into the country was mentioned, as was the need to take into account any re-imagining that may impact on students.

The group offered the following suggestions: check how research aligns with funders' interests in order to ensure that they buy in; build networks of international partners or funders; and encourage researchers to generate their own funding.

### **Summary**

UP could envision increased academic freedom as a focused interest in itself, achieved through a track record of high-impact research. There would then be an emphasis on the integrity of the research, ethical behaviour, an ethos of critical thinking, transparency and building of trust. To achieve quality and impactful research, indicators need to be re-imagined and impediments to academic freedom (however it is defined) need to be identified.

Key questions that emerged from this group are:

1. What systems need to be created or revised to improve the efficiency of bureaucracy?
2. How can students be included in re-imagining the University?

### **GROUP 4**

Topics: *What is the role of the creative in a re-imagined UP? How do we design and re-imagine an identity for the University in intellectual, creative and practical ways?*

Facilitator: Professor Alexander Johnson, Head: School of the Arts, Humanities



Professor Johnson framed the discussion by stressing the importance of an education system valuing creative and critical thinking, two attributes that are essential for the twenty-first century. The word, 'creative', has great potency as well as 'marketability'. Curiosity is the key driver of creativity and therefore extends across all disciplines. Creativity includes risk, potential failure and ambiguity. Creativity is a mode of being that requires thoughtful reflection and intervention. A few senators raised the point that authority often finds itself challenged by creativity, and yet to accomplish radical rethinking, creativity and problem solving are needed. 'Creatives' are often viewed as disruptive. It was pointed out that creativity leads to asking different and oppositional questions, rather than focusing on the status quo. As in other groups, the point was raised that competition needs to be replaced by collaboration. Currently, collaboration tends to be individual-to-individual; this needs to be broadened to include creative team collaborations in both research and in teaching and learning. Staff should be given the option to choose the degree of face-to-face teaching versus online teaching in the hybrid model.

As for interdisciplinary teaching collaboration, the successful cross-faculty model of post-doctorates in science and African language could be replicated in other postgraduate contexts. Inhibitors of creativity include the rigid requirements of postgraduate mini-dissertations. Similar challenges also remain at undergraduate level, making it difficult to forge links across faculties. (There are however some success stories.) Furthermore, there are basic issues precluding further innovations such as student funding – many students, especially in education, are finding it difficult to gain access to the University due to lack of funding.

### **Summary**

Senators identified numerous present barriers to creativity such as an established status quo in funding, protocols, curricula and competitiveness. Academics need to be rewarded for taking risks. Creativity is seen as a key driving force for re-imagining UP in relation to its research, teaching, learning and assessment.

Some of the key questions that emerged from this group discussion include:

1. What criteria would one use to determine potential partners?
2. Who could compile such a list of appropriate institutional partners?
3. How do we recognise collaboration?
4. Would combining majors and team-teaching online courses be part of these criteria?
5. What are the benefits and limitations of offering dual degrees?
6. How can education be transformed?
7. How do we change the status quo?

## DAY 2: SESSION 1

The second day was divided into two main sessions: Session 1 included an introduction by the chair, followed by three key invited speakers: Professor Calie Pistorius on 'The future of work'; Dr Lisa Coleman on 'Engaging wicked problems to ensure diversity in a re-imagined higher education system'; and Professor Marguerite Dennis on 'Engaging wicked problems in a re-imagined higher education system'.

### Keynote presentations

*Chair: Professor Themba Mosia, Vice-Principal: Student Life, University of Pretoria*

Professor Mosia welcomed delegates and indicated the purpose, focus, rationale and structure of the virtual Senate Conference for Day 2, before introducing the speakers.

### The future of work

*Dr Calie Pistorius, former Vice-Chancellor, University of Hull; Director, Delta-Hedron*

Dr Pistorius began from the premise that the future nature of work and the workplace of the future will both be very different from how we know them today. More people will work from home and a number of jobs will become obsolete. Using as an example the statistic that 85% of MBA graduates in the USA work for themselves, he argued that the education students receive needs to prepare them not only to survive in an unknown future but to be equipped to shape that future, and create new knowledge. As a second example, Dr Pistorius noted that engineering students who enrol in university programmes in 2021 will only complete their degrees and internships in 2029 and asked whether we can predict the world they will inhabit. He pointed out the stark reality of the half-life of knowledge. As it is likely that after two years, half of the knowledge students have learnt will be obsolete, the question to be asked is 'What knowledge is important?'

It is higher education's responsibility, he argued, to educate today's students to participate productively in tomorrow's world and beyond. As trustees of the future, universities need to contemplate, anticipate and understand the future world of work to which our current and prospective students will contribute, that they will shape and in which they will work and live.

Even in the pre-COVID-19 world, a number of technologies such as automation and robotics, artificial intelligence and big data, 3D printing, quantum computing, nanomaterials, renewable energy and a wide spectrum of others ('smart everything') were already transforming the world of work and the way we live (in smart cities perhaps). Dr Pistorius raised the challenging question: 'What is a *smart* university?'

As technology does not exist in a vacuum, it is equally important to contemplate the societies, economies and political dispensations of the future, in addition to considering the impact of climate change and what can be done about it, for example. The upheaval created by the COVID-19 pandemic has foregrounded the importance of a sharp focus on technological, environmental and social change and the implications of each for universities' teaching, curricula and research agendas as higher education institutions prepare today's students for the future.

Universities need to be proactive. Complacency will only lead to a 'fumbling of the future' – and this cannot be an option.

### **Engaging wicked problems to ensure diversity in a re-imagined higher education system**

*Dr Lisa Coleman, Senior Vice-President for Strategic Innovation, Diversity and Inclusion, NYU*

Dr Coleman introduced her presentation with the observation that wicked problems are not new and neither is the way they manifest globally in higher education. However, if we are to learn from disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has exacerbated inequities at the intersections of multiple oppressions, and if we are to learn from global intersectional social movements for indigenous and Black lives, what can be new – perhaps a new different – is how we actively and continually engage these wicked problems with courage in order to advance global diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education and to re-imagine how we partner and innovate. Dr Coleman succinctly set out some of the effects of disruptions, including VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity). In doing so, she focussed on both the destructive results of disruptions and the opportunities they offer. Dr Coleman also articulated a number of arguments and strategies for engaging with wicked problems: universities need to move from 'professing' to 'learning organisations'; connect with our global interdependence; institute *solve-athons* on topics such as environmental justice; harness the range of generations at universities; recognise the power in contestation; leverage markets across the world, and consider preparing students for a future where there will be job sharing and the emergence of new identities.

Dr Coleman argued that universities are becoming more adaptable, entrepreneurial and innovative. Furthermore, she argued that research-based leadership practices are necessary to promote diversity within and across higher education institutions, so that university communities can innovate, act, and transform together.

### **Engaging wicked problems in a re-imagined higher education**

*Marguerite Dennis, Higher Education Consultant, MJ Dennis Consultancy, Florida, USA*

Marguerite Dennis's presentation offered numerous practical steps towards achieving partnerships, programme re-planning, and implementation of structural changes to ensure the viability of universities in the face of unsettled futures. Higher education, as well as all aspects of life, are going to experience disruption long after the immediate effects of the current pandemic have been felt.

An important focus of the address was on disruptions in higher education that have possibly received less attention than some of those mentioned thus far, including how students are recruited, admitted, and enrolled, where and how students are taught, and how buildings and classrooms can be re-configured to optimise their safety and usability for students, lecturers, and administrators.

Ms Dennis outlined the problems caused by the pandemic and also the many opportunities COVID-19 has created, including the introduction of vision planning to supplement strategic plans; potentially increased accessibility to higher education as a result of increased online learning; the utilisation of vacation periods; the opportunity to create differential pricing strategies; the possible establishment of year-long semesters; partnerships with other education providers (such as Coursera, IBM, and Google), as well as international partnerships for courses, new strategies for lifelong learning and career counselling, and 'moon-shot thinking' about how to re-imagine higher education in order for students to have a meaningful experience and feel cared for.

Marguerite Dennis's optimistic tone energised her audience with insights such as, 'Dates with destiny are always on time. COVID-19 has forced the entire world to press the pause button.' and encouraged us to recognise that many facets of life, including higher education, will never return to their pre-COVID-19 state.

### **Summary**

All three speakers provided thought-provoking, powerful and inspiring perspectives on complex topics, drawing from their diverse experiences and creating an almost alarming sense of urgency in respect of the need to develop re-imagined universities able to deal with the future world of work as well as the wicked problems faced by the world. The broad and rich international perspectives disrupted some commonly held notions – for example, that we are faced with a 'new different not a new normal'. Furthermore, the notion that the 'rest of our lives is lived in the future' impressed upon the conference participants the urgency of getting on with the project of re-imagining and recalibrating institutions of higher learning. Important questions were raised, including, 'Will universities continue to engender complacency and acceptance of an obsolete system?' 'Work-life balance: why are they separated out?' The speakers all called for innovative visions and actions and for drawing on partnerships in order to promote the well-being not only of students and universities but also of society worldwide.

## **Responses of members of Senate to the keynote presentations**

*Chair: Professor Elsabé Schoeman, Dean of Law*

Panel: Professor Joel Modiri (Law); Professor Nelishia Pillay (Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology); Professor Alex Antonites (Economic and Management Sciences)

Some of the responses centred on the need to use research as a predictor of what may be required in a fast-changing dynamic future and on the need to support lifelong learning, as well as progression

of staff. The disruptions caused by COVID-19 have amplified the urgency of designing for change but there are numerous other crises that persist in other contexts such as social, economic, health, ecological, as well as human wounding and gender-based violence. Not only are practical responses needed but there should be space for critique, theorising and philosophising.

In South Africa, the rate of unemployment currently stands at 32.5%, which creates significant uncertainty. However, a high unemployment rate can be an impetus for innovation. UP is one of the most entrepreneurial universities in the country with 5000 students enrolled in entrepreneurship courses. There is also extensive community work and the support portal assists 18 thousand businesses pro bono. There is a new drive to create a Centre for the Future of Work. We can think of the collaborative revolution as following on from the industrial and then the technological revolutions. Graduates need more than just employment; the human element needs to be included together with recognition of vocation as involving a calling.

The University is enriched by being an inter-generational space. UP must be open to democratising processes and critique.

### **Comments**

The following points were made in relation to the preceding discussions.

The University seems to underestimate the level of innovative and creative thinking needed to imagine the shifts proposed. However, we should not underestimate the levels of innovation and creativity that are present in the system.

UP has specific organisational and leadership assessment data and analytics that it could use at the macro and micro levels to gain better understanding of opportunities and areas for improvement and specific areas for shift and transformation.

The University's rigidities are deeply embedded. Beating down these walls will involve some tough decisions and not just creativity.

In addition to flexible choice, what about interdisciplinary degree programmes to address skills shortages e.g., Forensic Science, a potential interdisciplinary project involving Health Sciences and Natural and Agricultural Sciences?

This very rich session set the scene for the group discussions that followed. These aimed to answer specific questions set for each group.

The key questions that emerged from this group discussion include:

1. Is depersonalisation the new normal and is it transient?
2. How do we bring on board regulatory bodies of various professions to easily adopt change and not to suppress innovative approaches?
3. How would you effectively apply or explain the role of inclusivity where students encounter the effects of COVID-19 differently due to their experienced realities? How can inclusivity play a role in alleviating the devastating effects of the virus on our students (in particular)?
4. When we speak about the opportunities for change, we assume that we know how and why the current systems (administration, curricula, governance, etc.) have come to be. In many cases, our current situation is a combination of deliberate choices and incremental creep through

complexity, and we do not understand the mix very well. Does this mean we underestimate what is needed for a deliberate shift?

5. How does one take advantage of the unforeseen?

## DAY 2: SESSION 2

### Group discussions

*Chair: Professor Anton Ströh, Vice-Principal: Institutional Planning & Monitoring and Evaluation; Acting Vice-Principal Research & Postgraduate Education*

#### GROUP 1

*Topic: What will be the composition or nature and needs of our future student communities? How will the University respond to these?*

*Facilitator: Professor Jerry Pillay, Dean: Theology and Religion*

The starting point of discussions was the acknowledgement that students are the centre and essence of the University and every effort should be made to ensure their success. As the world of work is changing constantly, the needs of students will obviously change. It was acknowledged that the students themselves are going to be global citizens and agents of change. It was noted that the community of the future will be more diverse, and that creating partnerships with other institutions across the country would assist students to find the resources they need for success at and beyond the university.

Various characteristics of Generation Z were outlined, and these led to suggestions for changes needed in teaching. As the current generation are technologically savvy and immersed in online social environments, they may be more aware of the problems of the environment, poverty, diversity, energy, etc. than were their predecessors. They expect to be connected online, have the necessary resources and have access to courses that are relevant to their futures.

They will not be on board if they do not feel heard, respected or cared for. Nor will they feel comfortable with university policies to which they have not had opportunities to contribute. They need more flexibility than is currently available. Systems need to be able to adapt faster than in the past (e.g., in administration, enrolments, academic offerings, etc.). It was stressed that critical factors for student well-being include mental wellness.

As in other sessions, it was proposed that teaching moves out of silos, as has already been started in a number of successful projects including community engagement activities, and that global challenges could be included as themes in interdisciplinary curricula.

To this end, a number of learning outcomes for students were identified. These included having the self-confidence to be able to adapt, being able to deal with complex challenges, and developing knowledge and skills (not calling them 'soft' skills) in areas such as communication, problem solving, relating to peers, and developing empathy.

Assessment was a key focus of discussions. It was proposed that there be more competency-based than knowledge-based assessment, together with integration of the formal curriculum and more informal curriculum or activities. There is a need for students to be registered online before the start of the academic programmes.

A final point raised was the need for staff development to enable redesigning for the proposed changes in teaching and assessment.

### **Summary**

Likely future scenarios were discussed in conjunction with typical characteristics of current and future students. This discussion provided a context for identifying the needs of students and possible changes needed in designing curricula. Inclusion and care, technology, 21<sup>st</sup>-century core knowledge and skills, flexibility, transdisciplinarity and efficient systems need to be prioritised in such redesigning.

The key questions that emerged from this group discussion included:

1. In what ways does the disruption by the pandemic affect students and the kind of attributes that they need to cultivate?
2. In what ways do the environment and facilities cater for students' needs?
3. How will students study in future?
4. How flexible are UP's academic programmes?
5. How could assessment be more holistic, integrating formal and informal curricular activities?

### **GROUP 2**

Topic: *How do we develop and harness technology to improve the human condition?*

Facilitator: Professor Sunil Maharaj, Dean: Engineering, Built Environment & Information Technology

It was acknowledged that COVID-19 had forced changes in teaching modes which are likely to continue so that as technology use (and development) increases and includes collaboration across departments and faculties, there may be a need for professional development in terms of teaching and research methods. Human Sciences could assist in regard to perceptions around technology. However, it was noted that physical (one-on-one) interaction is also needed. Technology is a tool not a complete solution to problems. One challenge after COVID-19 will be that students have been exposed to technology-enabled teaching and learning and lecturers will need to consider how to make best use of a hybrid system.

The possible developments in technology that were mentioned include the design of an app or chatbot for students to access counselling and a mental health services. Other suggestions included having online therapy; the need to focus on green issues and conservation needs; the use of artificial intelligence to create personalised learning paths, and ensuring that no student is left behind.



Another aspect brought forward was that of social responsibility and the need to develop technology for the benefit of broader external communities (for example, educational opportunities, such as a pre-university academy).

Suggestions for how all of these ideas could be implemented included bringing alumni into faculty-level planning and seeking buy-in from advisory boards and research and teaching and learning committees. The committees would be especially able to assist in closing the feedback and response loop. It was proposed that a university policy for the responsible use of technology, including a data policy be drawn up. Such a policy would address issues of transparency (how and when is technology used to generate decisions impacting on students), and safety issues, among others.

### **Summary**

Key aspects that were raised included the following: UP's approach to technology should be human-centred. We should be producers and developers (and not merely consumers) of technology, which could be harnessed for a wide range of purposes, including cross-faculty collaborations in teaching, wellness, community engagement, the environment, and research. Stakeholders who need to be involved include advisory boards, teaching and learning committees, alumni, funders and students.

Key questions that emerged from this group discussion included:

1. How can UP develop technology that will benefit communities?
2. What changes are needed for harnessing technology in research to a greater extent?
3. What research is likely to be most relevant in the re-imagined future?
4. How will UP deal with the challenges of inadequate external infrastructure, the limited availability of technological resources and network coverage in certain communities, and unstable electricity supply?
5. How can technology or other means be used to control the use (or over-use) of technology?

### **GROUP 3**

Topic: *What are the things that we should definitely change and do differently as a re-imagined university in respect to our students, staff, alumni and society more broadly? In responding, consider the future of our teaching and learning for a rapidly changing future (including the world of work).* Facilitator: Professor Karin Barac, Deputy Dean: Economic and Management Sciences

In considering the two questions listed above, a key principle was proposed: place the student at the centre of what UP does. Other proposals for facilitating change included having faculty boards speed up the processes around the introduction of new or redesigned academic programmes and retaining an interest in the careers of alumni and providing opportunities for alumni to attend courses, to participate and to remain at the cutting edge of knowledge. Policy changes could be driven from the bottom up, and think tanks could be organised where society is invited to present problems and the University community comes up with proposed solutions.

With regard to students, there was an appeal to improve access and to allow students to come and leave and come back at a later stage to conclude their studies, as many students do not complete in the prescribed time. UP should consider the option of students not being attached to a specific faculty but being able to take various modules from a range of faculties – i.e., a more flexible degree structure. In relation to teaching and learning, it was argued that a hybrid model would provide greater opportunities for cross-faculty teaching and collaboration as well as opportunities to create more innovative curricula. These changes would necessitate conversations with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

It was also suggested that students should be more involved in community programmes by expanding on the current initiatives. Research could make a contribution to the world of work by exploring how to resolve intergenerational conflict that may arise due to a number of different generations interacting with one another. Further suggestions around flexibility related to those students who do not want to proceed to postgraduate research but who want further training in certain current fields. If this were offered in a flexible, block-building approach, it could tap into a huge market.

A number of points were made around operations, such as ensuring that the University's business model becomes more flexible. The University itself is not agile, for example in decision-making. Further points included the need to improve access to e-resources along with a re-imagining of the library space.

### **Summary**

The responses to the two questions posed to this group foregrounded revisiting University structures and policies, as well as negotiating with the DHET around more flexibility in programmes. Teaching and learning require collaboration, transdisciplinary projects, community engagement and placing students' interest at the centre.

Key questions that emerged from this group included:

1. How could alumni be included in contributing their knowledge and skills to UP?
2. What opportunities could be provided to alumni to continue their learning?
3. What does a re-imagined library space look like?
4. What platform could be created for society to present problems that UP could then consider for research or intervention-based solutions?

### **GROUP 4**

Topic: *What kind of institutional ecosystem do we want to design for the UP community (students, staff, graduates, and alumni) that also addresses systemic racism and other forms of institutionalized or systematic discrimination in higher education, and by extension society? How would we want our staff/students/graduates/alumni to experience UP?*

Facilitator: Professor Salome Human-Vogel, Deputy Dean: Education

A key argument made was that racism has three dimensions. On the one dimension it is structural – part of political and social history. On the second dimension, it is explicit, as seen in discrimination and various forms of expression and exclusion. On the third dimension, it is implicit and is deep-rooted in that people are not aware of internal biases or subtle exclusions.

Group members pointed out that aspects of the questions posed above have been addressed by legislation and policies, e.g., the Employment Equity Act and the University's Anti-discrimination Policy, but not everyone has bought into these policies. Care needs to be taken to avoid reducing the issue of structural or systemic racism to that of explicit belief systems – that is, belief systems anchored in the assumption that there are racially superior/inferior groups. This is a clear and present danger. Part of the debate centred around approaches such as that of Robin DiAngelo<sup>7</sup> and others, which have a great deal of current purchase. It was argued that the issue of 'racism without racists' needs to be tackled head-on. In a context where both people and institutions might disavow racist beliefs and practices, structural patterns of racial advantage and disadvantage, nevertheless, are reproduced over time. It was suggested that the human element (of implicit racism) can only be addressed through robust conversations.

The role of leaders is critical. They need to exemplify transformational leadership and this needs to extend to collective leadership, as people historically expected leadership to come from the top, forgetting that leadership is a shared responsibility. Furthermore, academics need to consult published research on racism.

Three main points were made in response to the question, 'How would we want our staff/students/graduates/alumni to experience UP?' These were: (a) to maintain space for critical thinking; (b) that racism needs always to be addressed, and (c) that UP should strive to become a more integrated community.

### **Summary**

A number of diverse aspects were discussed, including the role of policy, leadership, culture, and research, and the effect of these on the institution, staff, students and society. The consensus was that racism remains a problem that has to be dealt with.

Key questions that emerged from this group included:

1. What has been achieved since the last institutional cultural survey?
2. What should we focus on in the next survey?
3. Who should be involved in compiling the survey and in analysing the data obtained?
4. What opportunities does the pandemic provide to envision a changed institutional ecosystem?

## **CLOSING REFLECTIONS**

Professor Kupe expressed gratitude for and appreciation of the depth and breadth of engagement from everyone including the considered and captivating keynote addresses.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2020-08-06-robin-diangelo-on-white-privilege-supremacy-and-fragility>

He continued with the following points. From all the positive engagement and insights, it appears logical that UP should re-imagine its future in particular, and higher education in general, in national, continental and global contexts. UP needs to take care that this intention should not become lost, vague and meaningless. There are questions to be deliberated on: 'How does the individual and the institution participate in this re-imagining?' We need to take care not to evade critical introspection with reference to how we think about change. Furthermore, we should be aware that our own ideas are not necessarily going to be accepted automatically. Re-imagining the University will not be a linear process and will encounter challenges that need to be seen as collective, without blaming any one sector. We need robust engagement at all levels.

It is clear that UP's intention is to be future-focussed. This will include a strong emphasis on transdisciplinarity; silos need to be broken down at all levels, so as to enable collaboration and partnerships.

Change is not being made in circumstances of our making. There will be resistance – even self-doubt. Professor Kupe reminded the delegates that there have been concerns about the lack of circulation of information (or engagement with information) and that lack of communication will slow down change. The University needs to understand impending change and what may speed it up. UP needs to think about the sequencing of change. It is essential to have individual ownership and agency. However, change cannot trump all policies and regulations. There cannot be a winner in a failing team.

UP needs to look at what is possible. Agility, flexibility, adaptability, and resilience will be important. The conference was reminded that transformation is a journey not an event. The following process of three inter-related steps was proposed:

1. Sustain: ensure that what is in line with the current vision and is working is kept with minor changes to ensure relevant and productive growth.
2. Innovate: this is the sharp edge. Senators have suggested many possibilities in the discussions. Innovation also involves bold disruption of ourselves.
3. Perform: implementation matters along with continual critical thinking.

Professor Kupe also cautioned against ignoring the elephants in the room! Is everyone emotionally up for change? There is uncertainty, discomfort, threat, and conundrums of time and resources. What about the threat to positions of power? What about diversity and inclusion?

Student and staff lives matter: there needs to be assurance of continued stability and quality.

Re-imagining the future university for the good of society – with a particular focus on and from the African context – is this possible? Yes, it is.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

*We all have a stake in making higher education accessible, affordable, relevant, sustainable and enjoyable (Vasu Reddy)*

The thoughtful, informed, generous sharing, positive engagement and optimism for the future, stood out as features of the conference. Professor Kupe set the scene: while COVID-19 dominates the current context in all spheres of our lives, it is not all 'doom and gloom'. Disruptions provide opportunities.

*What would be an effective way to re-imagine the concept of learning, of consciously generating an environment that is conducive to learning, to growing in wisdom, compassion, and all the noble human qualities that bless the world? Universities have contributed significantly to the improvement of many lives; but not all lives.*

Senators provided numerous diverse and creative answers to the key questions:

1. What are the feasible options for the University of Pretoria in the midst of considerable unpredictability?
2. 'What is a university?' and 'What is a university to be?'
3. More specifically, what should the University of Pretoria become in a re-imagined higher education context?

Some key themes that emerged included the need for knowledge that is transformative and the need for transdisciplinary responses to global problems that create sustainability in research, teaching and society. Addressing these needs requires the crossing of borders, physically and metaphorically. Even though there is not enough funding for universities from government, there are a number of regional, sub-regional and continental bodies that support collaboration.

Universities need an expansive notion of the future rather than a notion of something they need to get ready for. Universities are locales where the future can be created (and recreated).

## WAY FORWARD

A number of suggestions for sustaining and innovating in higher education were made.

A key first step is designing a strategy that focusses on how the University will move forward to find its African voice and to take a seat at the world table in order to deliver African solutions to global problems. This strategy will include determining practical steps that each faculty can implement,

starting with how UP engages with undergraduates. The student needs to be placed at the centre (as has been said repeatedly): paying attention to access, success and well-being.

A more robust internationalisation approach – focussing on sub-Saharan African countries for a start – needs to be embarked on. Drawing on the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), a network of 16 research universities is a good start. Future Africa is also an important avenue for this initiative that needs to be inclusive and to promote equity. The following questions should be probed at the beginning of each research project: 'What will be impacted?' and 'Who will be impacted?'

Africa (including UP) needs to be an exporter (rather than simply being a consumer) of technology and also has the potential to make significant contributions through technology and continent-wide development. This requires a long-term vision.

The University needs to set up active conversations about structural racism which enable both education and the challenging of entrenched belief systems and cultural practices. It needs to organise think tanks to which society is invited.

In a student-centred re-visioning of the University, structures and programmes need to be more flexible.

There was wide agreement that, after the pandemic, the University's impulse should not be to automatically revert to pre-pandemic practices and systems but that it should continue to re-imagine a radically different future for itself.

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