



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

UNIVEN Weekly e-Newsletter



ISSUE 33 | 25 June 2025

Leadership Team Reflects and Reviews Progress at Strategic Mid-Term Session



Group photo of the participants

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) convened a Strategic Mid-Term Review Workshop from 19 to 20 June 2025 at the Radisson Safari Hotel in Hoedspruit. The session brought together members of Executive and Senior Management and key institutional stakeholders to evaluate progress on the current Strategic Plan (2021–2025) and chart a path forward for the upcoming 2026–2030 strategic cycle. Serving as a structured midpoint reflection, the workshop aimed to assess institutional achievements, re-evaluate strategic priorities, and ensure alignment with the university's long-term goals.



In his opening address, Vice-Chancellor and Principal Prof. Bernard Nthambeleni stressed the importance of collaboration, introspection, and maintaining momentum.

He described the workshop as an invaluable platform to reflect on successes, acknowledge challenges, and recalibrate institutional strategies to remain on track. Core focus areas of the review included the assessment of progress using key performance indicators, identification of internal and external challenges hindering plan implementation, and fostering candid dialogue among senior leaders to explore innovation and performance improvement opportunities.

Key intended outcomes from the workshop included establishing baseline performance data to inform the 2026 strategy and APP metrics, identifying emerging strategic risks, particularly around data integrity and reporting, and drafting sub-strategies for the 2026–2030 Strategic Plan. Participants also reviewed institutional values, grant management systems, and areas requiring urgent attention, such as the implementation of reviewed Annual Performance Plan (APP) Technical Description Indicators (TIDs), improved performance record-keeping, and strengthened oversight mechanisms.



Dr Mutshinyalo Ratombo

Presentations by various university leaders and experts provided insights into specific strategic themes. Dr Mutshinyalo Ratombo, Director of Strategy and Risk, presented a four-year overview of strategic performance from 2021 to 2024.



Consultant Dr Glen Barnes (IDSC) proposed measures for enhancing data management and strategic alignment through tools such as PowerHEDA.



Prof Joseph Francis, Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies, highlighted key strategic interventions aligned with the current plan, focusing on building research capacity, postgraduate student support, and innovation. He also emphasised the university's rural development mandate and its vision to transform Thohoyandou into a dynamic University Town.



Prof Sebi Lekalakala-Mokgele, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, shared a reflective overview of the 2021–2025 strategy centred on student success, inclusive transformation, and innovation. Her presentation outlined a strengths-based,

student-centred approach supported by frameworks like Appreciative Inquiry, Design Thinking, and the Psycho-Social Model. She stressed the importance of digital tools and faculty leadership in academic success.



University Registrar, Dr Joel Baloyi provided a detailed account of the Registrar’s Division performance between 2021 and 2024. Notable achievements included surpassing key targets in student affairs interventions and committee administration, as well as the digitisation of over 56,000 institutional records. Looking ahead, the division’s 2026–2030 strategy, informed by the Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results (SOAR) framework, will focus on student-centred academic systems, digital advancement, compliance, and stronger stakeholder engagement.



In further sessions, Mrs Mavis Madzhie, Director of Financial Management and Reporting, presented the university’s financial sustainability strategy with an emphasis on third-stream income generation and governance.



Mrs Uanda Ndou

Mrs Uanda Ndou, Director of Human Resources, discussed strategies for talent acquisition and retention.



Dr Phillia Vukea, Director of Grants Management, delivered a comprehensive strategic review of DHET earmarked grants, infrastructure and efficiency grants (IEG), and the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP), identifying both progress and ongoing challenges in grant management.

On the second day, Prof Nthambeleni presented the draft Strategic Plan 2026–2030, aligned with Vision 2040. The proposed plan aspires to position UNIVEN as an entrepreneurial, research-driven, and community-engaged institution that serves as a catalyst for societal change. Rooted in the unique Vhembe Biosphere context, the strategy emphasises innovation, student-centeredness, environmental sustainability, and international partnerships. It is structured around four strategic thrusts: student success, entrepreneurship, people and environment, and internationalisation, with clearly defined, measurable outcomes.

Dr Baloyi also presented the Registrar’s governance strategy for 2026–2030, which will focus on strengthening ethical leadership, oversight, and institutional accountability. Drawing from global standards such as ISO 37000/37004 and the OCEG GRC model, the strategy prioritises improved governance capabilities, risk and compliance systems, data quality, cybersecurity, and legal compliance, all while reinforcing stakeholder engagement and long-term sustainability.

He commended Executive Management for aligning operational activities with strategic goals and encouraged the submission of outstanding inputs to the Director of Strategy and Risk. He also reinforced alignment with Limpopo Provincial Government priorities, especially in mining, agriculture, and the hydrogen economy, and emphasised the importance of evidence-based performance, robust data governance, and a culture of appreciative enquiry. He called for improved internal grant management capacity, reduced reliance on consultants, and greater accountability, including mandatory executive sign-off on grant reports.



Executive Dean of the Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law, Prof Barwa Kanyane, provided a comprehensive recap of the workshop.

In his closing remarks, Prof Nthambeleni praised the depth of engagement and consensus achieved on the institution’s strategic thrusts, outcome indicators, and refined core values. He called for continued momentum in achieving 2025 performance targets and finalising divisional contributions to the 2026 APP. The next steps include a consolidation workshop in July and Council submission of the finalised 2026–2030 Strategic Plan by September 2025.

Green Technology Confucius Institute (GTCI) Student Makes Historic Debut at South Africa’s “Chinese Bridge” Competition



The “Chinese Bridge” Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students South Africa Finals, recently hosted by the Chinese Embassy in South Africa and organised by the “Chinese Bridge Club (Cape Town),” was successfully held in Cape Town. Fifteen Chinese language students from Confucius Institutes at universities such as the University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, Rhodes University, and the University of Venda took the stage, delivering a feast of language and culture. Through three segments, a written test on China’s history and culture, a themed speech, and a Chinese culture-related talent showcase, they demonstrated their achievements in learning Chinese. Among them, Kaevin Mapila from GTCI UNIVEN made a remarkable appearance. As the first Chinese language student from the University of Venda and Limpopo Province to participate in the “Chinese Bridge” competition, he made history with his voice on this prestigious platform.

The first segment of the competition was a written test on China’s history and culture, featuring multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions designed to assess the contestants’ reading comprehension and knowledge of Chinese society and culture. Questions such as “What food is commonly eaten during Chinese New Year?” and “Who joined LIU Bei and GUAN Yu in the Oath of the Peach Garden?” flashed on the screen as the contestants answered under pressure, with the audience silently cheering them on.



Contestants taking the written test

The themed speech segment was the most critical part of the competition. This year’s theme was “One World, One Family.” As the third contestant, Kaevin Mapila took the stage early in the competition.



In his speech, he shared the education story of a young man from a small town in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Born and grew up in a remote area where life was simple with limited knowledge about the outside world. The young man seized the opportunity to enroll in the Chinese language courses when the Green Technology Confucius Institute at the University of Venda started the Chinese language programme in March 2024. There, he not only learned Chinese but also discovered the beauty of Chinese culture and became deeply fascinated by Chinese society. The GTCI opened a window to the world for him and helped him truly understand the meaning of “One World, One Family.”



Kaevin Mapila delivering his speech

He said in his speech: “China and South Africa are working together to practice new development concepts, adopt new technological achievements, and forge new paths forward. I believe we will surely march toward a brighter future together. Communication fosters understanding, and cooperation leads to mutual success. Different languages and cultures will not stop us from joining hands.” His sincere delivery, profound insights, and fluent Chinese

moved the audience and judges alike. Ultimately, Kaevin won second place in the speech segment.

In the talent showcase segment, Kaevin recited the Chinese poem “By Chance”. His accurate pronunciation, elegant delivery, and emotional depth immersed the audience in a moment of beauty. To everyone’s surprise, after the recitation, he also performed a rapid series of Chinese tongue twisters, flawlessly completing five pieces of tongue twister within a minute. His outstanding performance earned him prolonged applause from the audience.



Kaevin Mapila showcasing his Chinese talent

Although Kaevin did not win the championship which will enable him to participate in the global “Chinese Bridge” competition in China later this year, his passion for Chinese and dedication to learning the language shone through. His performance is outstanding and impressive, especially given the fact that he had only studied the language for a year in an “interest class.” His confidence and composure won the admiration of the audience, with many praising his performance and expressing hopes for even greater achievements next year.



Award ceremony of the competition



In March 2024, when GTCI first opened its doors to local students, Kaevin declared: “In six months, my Chinese will be fluent, and then I’ll be like a Chinese person.” A year later, he fulfilled his promise, using fluent Chinese to share the story of himself, the story of Venda, and the story of Limpopo on a national stage in South Africa. We look forward to more students from GTCI following in his footsteps, showcasing their talents and amplifying the voice of Venda’s Chinese learners on even grander platforms.



Delegation from the Green Technology Confucius Institute at the University of Venda





UNIVERSITY OF VENDA'S DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SCIENCE IN THE FACULTY OF SCIENCE, ENGINEERING & AGRICULTURE IS PROUD TO CO-HOST THE 55TH ANNUAL SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR ANIMAL SCIENCE (SASAS) CONGRESS!

The University of Venda, in collaboration with the University of Limpopo (UL) and the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (LDARD), will co-host the **55th Annual Congress of the South African Society for Animal Science (SASAS) from 8-10 July 2025 at Protea Hotel, The Ranch Resort, Polokwane.**

This year's congress will be under the theme **"Thriving in diverse environments: optimised innovations and resilience in livestock-wildlife interactions"**

The congress expects to convene over 300 delegates, including leading livestock researchers, policymakers, industry executives, and students, who will engage in high-end discussions on scientific innovation and sustainable livestock production.

The UNIVEN is proud to be involved in an event which is of such strategic significance, as the congress will deliver the following:

Strengthen the University' scientific leadership in the province

Co-hosting the SASAS congress is in line with the UNIVEN's vision of engaged scholarship in delivering its mandate.

Promote livestock industry collaborations

The congress provides a platform to strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders, including the agricultural research council (ARC), the department of agriculture, land reform and rural development (DALRRD), and major agribusinesses.

Promote post graduate student development

Through participation in academic presentations, networking sessions, and the SASAS Student Quiz and Debates, students will gain valuable exposure to cutting-edge research, industry trends, and career-building opportunities, to become locally relevant and globally competitive.

Stimulate development economic transformation

With a focus on building resilient livestock systems, productivity, and sustainability, the congress aligns with UNIVEN's mission to contribute to local and regional agricultural development and economic empowerment.

Congress Highlights

Plenary sessions and scientific panels

Will feature leading global experts on sustainable, climate resilient, and precision livestock production.

Industry showcases and innovation exhibitions

Spotlights of groundbreaking advancements in livestock production and agribusiness solutions.

Technical field excursions

Field excursions to outstanding local livestock enterprises, to showcase local innovative and sustainable livestock production practices.

Participation and Engagement

UNIVEN researchers and Post Graduate students will actively participate through:

- Presenting research papers and posters
- Attending plenary discussions and technical sessions
- Engaging with industry leaders and potential research funding agencies
- Chairing sessions

For further information, please contact:

- **Prof. F Fushai** (HoD, Department of Animal Science, felix.fushai@univen.ac.za)
- **Dr. T Chitura** (Vice-Chairperson, Local Organising Committee, Department of Animal Science, Teedzai.Chitura@univen.ac.za)
- **Prof M Manjoro** (Local Organising Committee Member, Institute for Rural Development, Marizvikuru.Manjoro@univen.ac.za)
- **Prof J Baloji** (Local Organising Committee Member, Department of Animal Science, Joseph.Baloji@univen.ac.za)
- **Dr A Raseona** (Local Organising Committee Member, Department of Animal Science, andrea.raseona@univen.ac.za)

If you spot anything out of the ordinary on campus - contact the University Hotline by calling toll free number 0800 212 755 or email: univenhotline@tip-offs.com

Improper conduct includes the following...

1. Financial misconduct,
2. Misuse or misappropriation of University assets,
3. Health and safety risks,
4. Plagiarism,
5. Fraud and corruption.

UNIVEN VICE-CHANCELLOR'S WINTER GOLF TOURNAMENT 2025

KILLARNEY COUNTRY CLUB, JOHHANESBURG
04 JULY 2025

Format: 4 Ball Alliance

Entry Fee: R8000
-Inclusive of Green Fee
-Golf Cart, Golf Shirt & Cap
-Halfway Light Meal
-Prize Giving Dinner

Payment: 30 June 2025

Golf Registration: 08H00 - 09H30
Tee-off: 10H00

The funds can be deposited into the University of Venda ABSA Account
Acc. Name: University of Venda
Acc. Number: 1000 000 538
Branch Name: Thohoyandou
Branch Code: 33419
Ref. Number: GOLF DAY 2025

RSVP: Mrs TR Muthadzwi
015 962 8823 | 072 168 7368 | tshililo.muthadzwi@univen.ac.za

saair University of Venda

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS
Venue: University of Venda
Deadline: 30 June 2025

32nd SAAIR Annual Conference
27 - 31 October 2025

Towards Excellence: Enhancing Funding Pathways and Student Outcomes through Human-Centric AI, Impactful Research, and Operational Intelligence

Subthemes

- Funding the Future
- From Insight to Impact
- Bridging the Skills Gap
- Ensuring Excellence
- Global and Continental Commitments

admin@saair.net

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

