



UNIVEN Drives Policy Reform and Academic Excellence at Transformative 2025 Registrar's Summit



Attendees of the Registrar's Summit

The University of Venda (UNIVEN), through the Office of the University Registrar, successfully hosted the 2025 Registrar's Summit from 5 to 6 August at the Protea Hotel Fire and Ice in Pretoria. The two-day summit served as a high-level strategic platform to evaluate progress in academic administration, address persistent operational challenges, and re-imagine institutional policies in line with UNIVEN's vision for academic excellence and student success. Drawing key insights from the 2024 Registrar's Lekgotla, the summit convened academic and administrative leaders as well as student leadership to align regulatory frameworks with evolving national and institutional imperatives, paving the way for a more student-centred, agile, and future-ready university.



Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni, officially opened the summit with a compelling address that underscored the centrality of sound academic

administration to effective governance and strategic planning. He reflected on the tangible progress made since the 2024 Lekgotla, particularly the development of a home-grown student administration system that has enhanced process efficiency and data integrity. Prof Nthambeleni addressed ongoing institutional challenges, including admissions, enrolment management, curriculum reviews, student accommodation, and internationalisation. He urged delegates to apply academic rules consistently, uphold rigorous standards, and ensure accountability, especially in light of recent structural and staffing investments. Commending achievements in postgraduate enrolments and systems development, he encouraged continued momentum, collaboration, and shared ownership of the university's mission to cultivate future leaders through inclusive, high-quality education.

Sound academic administration is the cornerstone of effective governance and student success



Delivering the purpose of the summit, University Registrar Dr Joel Baloyi emphasised the importance of governance rules in ensuring institutional efficiency, impartiality, and accountability. He framed the summit within the context of the rapidly evolving higher education landscape, shaped by digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Highlighting UNIVEN's strides, such as the transition to cloud-based systems, Dr Baloyi called for a definitive shift from outdated manual practices. He positioned the summit as a vital opportunity to reshape academic policies, particularly the General Rules and Regulations (G-Rules) and Promotional Criteria for students, to better reflect the university's strategic trajectory. Dr Baloyi urged inclusive participation throughout the summit's deliberations, reiterating that every voice matters in driving lasting institutional change.

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Prof Modimowabarwa Kanyane presented an overview of the 2024 Registrar's Lekgotla recommendations, which aimed to resolve key challenges across four priority areas: academic structures and student appeals; applications, admissions, and registration; financial aid and student accommodation; and the academic calendar, including teaching, examinations, and graduations. Among the key proposals was the need for Deputy Deans: Teaching and Learning to play a more active role in verifying academic structures for alignment with faculty calendars and the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS). There was also a call to improve the fairness and consistency of the academic exclusions and appeals process, enhance the accessibility of undergraduate and postgraduate application systems, and streamline registration processes to promote timely enrolment. Further recommendations emphasised the importance of improving coordination between financial aid and accommodation units to reduce administrative delays, refining timetabling to prevent scheduling conflicts, modernising graduation workflows, and strengthening assessment integrity across the board. Collectively, these proposals were designed to reinforce academic governance, elevate the student experience, and enhance institutional efficiency.



Prof Tharien van der Walt provided a detailed update on the implementation of these recommendations. She reported considerable progress in the ongoing revision of the General Academic Rules (G-Rules) and the Main Calendar. The revisions are intended to eliminate outdated provisions, resolve inconsistencies,

and align policies with current institutional structures and national regulations. Specific areas of improvement included the removal of obsolete calendar content, restructuring of the G-Rules into clearer thematic categories, refining admissions and assessment protocols, and clarifying policies on credit transfers, extraordinary examinations, and academic exclusions. Importantly, the review aims to phase out manual promotion practices and establish clearer faculty-based decision-making processes. These reforms are integral to strengthening academic integrity, operational efficiency, and student support.



In a related presentation, Prof Lutendo Murulana highlighted progress made in integrating financial aid and student accommodation processes. Building on resolutions from the 2024 Lekgotla, he noted successful initiatives such as early NSFAS funding confirmations for SASSA beneficiaries, improved communication via institutional emails, and the unblocking of students based on verified funding status. Looking ahead to 2026, proposed enhancements include the automation of funding and residence processes, the integration of residence applications with academic admissions, and the enhancement of Fundi's platform to provide greater transparency in off-campus housing. The presentation also underscored the importance of setting enrolment quotas for bursary-linked programmes and promoting the timely registration of returning students to ensure readiness for the new academic cycle.



Mahlatse Shokane's presentation focused on the current challenges and proposed improvements in the application, admission,

and registration processes for international students. Key concerns included the absence of document upload functionality in the online application system, delayed and inconsistent communication with applicants, and the lack of system-generated admission and rejection letters. Furthermore, registration processes do not yet account for international student quotas as required by the Department of Higher Education and Training. Proposed solutions included enabling document uploads, embedding quota requirements into system workflows, implementing automated email and pop-up notifications, introducing a chatbot for applicant support, and ensuring alignment with governance timelines for both undergraduate and postgraduate admissions. These efforts aim to strengthen internationalisation and enhance UNIVEN's appeal to global applicants.

Streamlined admissions are key to building a truly international, future-ready campus



Adv Thanyani Mphephu



Mr Azwindini Mulaudzi

Other presentations included Timetabling, lecturing, examinations, and graduations, which was presented by Mr Azwindini Mulaudzi. The Rules for Postgraduate degrees and Regulations in respect of student disciplinary actions were presented by Prof Takalani Mashau and Adv Thanyani Mphephu, respectively.



Prof Takalani Mashau



Dr Sannah Mativandelela

The second day of the summit focused on the review of regulations through breakaway sessions chaired by Dr Sannah Mativandelela and Prof Takalani Mashau. Facilitated discussions on the General Rules and Promotional Criteria allowed participants to engage deeply with proposed revisions.

Due to time constraints and other logistical considerations, the outcomes from the breakaway sessions were partially presented during the summit. As a result, it was agreed that the Office of the University Registrar will convene a follow-up session on a later date, during which the outstanding areas would be adequately considered.

Attendees included Directors and Heads within the Registrar's Division, Executive Deans, Deputy Deans, Faculty Managers and Administrators, the Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) team, Internal Audit, Financial Aid, ICT, Marketing, Branding and Communication, Legal Services, and other critical academic and administrative units. Their collaborative contributions reflected a unified commitment to institutional renewal and academic transformation. Through this inclusive and strategic engagement, the 2025 Registrar's Summit reaffirmed UNIVEN's dedication to fostering an enabling academic environment, responsive governance, and a student-focused approach to higher education. The summit concluded with a renewed collective determination to advance the university's mission and embrace innovation as a vehicle for meaningful, long-term change.



Attendees on the first day of the Registrar's Summit

A Voice for Trauma-Informed Education



At just 29 years old, Dr Muimeleli Munyadziwa is blazing a trail as one of South Africa's most promising young scholars in the field of public health research. With a compelling vision, unwavering determination, and a passion for community impact, she has rapidly risen to national and international recognition.

As South Africa commemorates Women's Month, Dr Muimeleli Munyadziwa's story resonates deeply with this year's spirit of empowerment and resilience. She exemplifies the strength, intellect, and transformative potential of young women who rise above systemic barriers to create meaningful change. Her journey not only honours the legacy of women who fought for equality but also inspires a new generation to lead with purpose, compassion, and academic excellence.

Dr Muimeleli Munyadziwa was awarded her Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health recently by the University of Venda (UNIVEN), a milestone she reached in just two years. Her doctoral research developed a trauma-informed curriculum for primary school teachers, addressing the critical need for mental health support in classrooms, particularly for learners affected by childhood trauma.

Her academic journey is defined by consistent excellence and recognition. Most recently, she clinched first place for Best Poster Presentation in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the UNIVEN 2025 Research Open Day. This marked her fourth top award in competitive research forums. Reflecting on her achievement, she noted, **"This was not just another win; it was a reminder that**

young researchers have a place at the table. Our work is valid, and our voices matter."

Dr Munyadziwa's reach extends beyond South African borders. In 2024, she became one of the first female recipients of the South Africa Sustainable Academic Capacity Building for Excellence in Research Training (SACERT) scholarship from UNIVEN, which enabled her to complete a three-month academic exchange at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). During her time at UCLA, she received advanced training in biostatistics, expanded her research capabilities, and established lasting international collaborations.

Her success at UCLA opened new doors, earning her a role as a facilitator under Cookies and Relationships (CAR), a newly established collaborative research and capacity-building initiative between UCLA and UNIVEN. She was introduced to the programme by Dr Thendo Makhado and now works under the guidance of Prof Lufuno Makhado, whom she credits as a key mentor in her journey.

"Dr Makhado, Prof. Makhado, and Prof. Maphula believed in me long before I believed in myself. They nurtured my ideas, mentored me, and helped me rise. I owe so much to their guidance."

Currently serving as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at UNIVEN, Dr Munyadziwa continues her impactful work at the intersection of trauma, education, and public health. Her achievements stand as a powerful testament that young, Black, rural-born women can lead in academic and research spaces that have historically been difficult to access.

A Timely Public Lecture on Monitoring and Evaluation in the Public Sector

The Department of Public and Development Administration, under the Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law (FMCL) at UNIVEN, in collaboration with the South African Association of Public Administration and Management (SAAPAM) Limpopo Chapter, hosted an insightful Public Lecture on 04 August 2025 under the topic: "The Efficacy of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in the South African Public Sector."

The public lecture took place at UNIVEN Research Conference Centre, and it was physically attended by 133 participants and an additional 131 attended online. Those who attended included academics, practitioners, and students, showing interest in enhancing public sector performance and accountability through robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Opening and welcome remarks were rendered by Prof Lonias Ndlovu, Director of the School of Law, representing the Executive Dean of FCML, who indicated that the FMCL is happy to have a public lecture graced by such a high-profile person like a Director-General. The Director expressed that events of this nature must happen more often so that students, as the central stakeholders, may benefit.



A collaborative forum at UNIVEN's Public Lecture highlighting the intersection of theory and practice in public administration

A Timely Public Lecture on Monitoring and Evaluation in the Public Sector *continued...*

Prof Harry Munzhedzi, the Head of the Department of Public and Development Administration, provided a purpose of the lecture, reminding those in attendance that there must always be an interface between the theory and practice of public administration and management. He was even more elated to have an accounting officer of the national department in the form of a Director-General because he oversees public policy implementation. This greatly benefits our students who appreciate the practice of the discipline, particularly due to the chosen topic of the day.

A word by Dr Madikana Mokgopong, SAAPAM Limpopo Chapter Deputy Chairperson, spoke on the importance of collaborative dialogue between academics and practitioners to influence policy and improve the lives of our communities. She noted that working in silos and repeating the same methods hinders progress. Public engagements like this forum, she said, are vital for fostering new approaches and mutual learning. She encouraged active participation, sharing of experiences, and open exchange of ideas. Dr Mokgopong concluded by wishing attendees a fruitful and enriching engagement.



Dr Robert Nkuna, Director-General of the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation

The keynote speaker was Dr Robert Nkuna, Director-General of the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME). Dr Nkuna delivered a compelling, thought-provoking address that focused on the systemic challenges undermining the efficacy of monitoring and evaluation systems in the South African public sector. He argued that the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation cannot be isolated from the institutional structures and ideologies shaping public governance. Dr Nkuna highlighted issues such as institutional inertia, ideological rigidity, personal and group interests, informal power structures, and social norms as key obstacles to reform. Unlike the private sector, where change can be rapidly implemented, public institutions often remain stuck in unproductive paths due to historical, ideological, and bureaucratic constraints.

He also addressed that to overcome these challenges, there must be advocacy for the application of the Theory of Change (ToC), which is a results-based framework that links inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes with evidence-based indicators. He closely emphasised the importance of deliberate planning and strategic alignment, noting that South Africa's current five-year Medium-Term Development Plan seeks to anchor government activities with measurable impact. However, he raised that issues such as funding misalignment, clean audits without service delivery, and a lack of real-time impact assessment persist.

Dr Nkuna concluded by inviting academic collaboration, especially in the area of local governance, and encouraged students to actively engage with institutions like the DPME to drive meaningful change.

The lecture featured expert insights from Dr Hasani Zitha, Lecturer in the Department of Public and Development Administration at UNIVEN, and Professor Thanyani Madzivhandila, Professor of Development Studies at the University of Limpopo.



Dr Hasani Zitha, Lecturer: Dept of Public and Development Administration

Dr Hasani Zitha emphasised the importance of integrating scholars, practitioners, and students to improve public sector transformation. He underscored the Theory of Change as a key tool for guiding policy implementation and evaluating government effectiveness. Despite strong policies and a robust constitution, he noted that poor implementation remains a major challenge.

Prof Thanyani Madzivhandila highlighted the need for stronger collaboration between academics and public service professionals to bridge theory and practice. He stressed that poor departmental coordination undermines development efforts, citing cases like infrastructure lacking basic services. He questioned the complexity of implementing monitoring and evaluation in a Government of National Unity with varying political ideologies.

Moderated through a hybrid format, the event was also accessible online via Microsoft Teams, allowing broader participation from a diverse range of stakeholders.

This collaborative engagement formed a greater commitment to promoting responsive governance and academic discourse on issues affecting public administration in South Africa. The Department of Public and Development Administration at the university continues to position itself as a hub for thought leadership, policy critique, and innovation in the field.



Attendees

True progress in public administration happens when knowledge, practice, and accountability come together



Dr Ephraime Mahole giving vote of thanks



Prof Harry Munzhedzi handing over a token of appreciation to Dr Robert Nkuna



Prof Harry Munzhedzi handing over a token of appreciation to Dr David Makhado, who accompanied the Director-General

Celebrating the Next Generation of Innovators



Attendees of the UNIVEN-TIA awards ceremony

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) together with Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) held the awards ceremony at the University Sports Hall to recognise innovative projects and research, fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and community engagement through a competition that included capacity-building training sessions and pitching of innovative projects, intending to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for innovation and drive real-world solutions.



UNIVEN Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni, joined the event virtually

Joining the event virtually, the University of Venda's Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni, welcomed guests and partners, particularly the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA), and expressed gratitude for their dedication to fostering innovation in South Africa. He said, "Your dedication to foster innovation for South Africa aligns seamlessly with our institutional objectives." Prof Nthambeleni highlighted the university's commitment to innovation, entrepreneurship, and community engagement, noting that "innovation is not just a goal, but it is a responsibility." He mentioned that the university aims to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for entrepreneurship and innovation.



Mr Patrick Krappie, Executive Innovation Enabling

Mr Patrick Krappie, Executive Innovation Enabling at TIA, expressed his gratitude to the University of Venda for hosting the innovation event and commended the university's efforts in fostering innovation and community engagement. He said, "We need to bring all of this behind purpose, and whatever we do, we need to be driven by that." Mr Krappie expressed that collaboration between academia, industry, government, and civil society is vital as it drives innovation and solves real-world problems. He shared an example of a grassroots innovation programme in Chile that provides funding and support to young innovators, particularly those from rural communities. Mr Krappie concluded by expressing his excitement about the potential for the University of Venda to play a leading role in driving innovation and entrepreneurship in South Africa.



Dr Sheldon Beangston, Senior Engineer - Generation New Business: Engineering Innovation and Localisation

Dr Sheldon Beangston, Senior Engineer - Generation New Business: Engineering Innovation and Localisation at ESKOM,

expressed his gratitude for being invited to the event and commended the University of Venda's efforts in fostering innovation. He highlighted South Africa's history of innovation and resilience. Dr Beangston also shared his company's efforts in fast-tracking innovative solutions to energy requirements in South Africa, including localising the production of battery storage cells and motor operating cells. He expressed his excitement about partnering with the university.



Ms Tshembani Khupane, Senior Programme Manager at TIA

Ms Tshembani Khupane, Senior Programme Manager at TIA, provided an overview of the innovation competition process, stating that the goal was to "activate the cultural innovation within the campus and build and increase the kind of commercialisation." The competition included capacity-building training sessions on innovation, intellectual property, business model development, entrepreneurship, and funding proposal writing. According to Ms Khupane, the funds would be used for "idea development and money and validation, and would be spent on customer discovery and validation, teaching systems-based development as well as prototyping and designing." The competition featured various innovative projects, including Vitality, Plastic Upcycling, Electronic Production, and AI-powered solutions.



Vuyisela Hobololo, Head of Indigenous Knowledge System at TIA

Vuyisela Hobololo, Head of the Indigenous Knowledge System at TIA, provided feedback on the student business pitching competition. He highlighted three key aspects: collaboration, multidisciplinary, and quality of thinking. According to him, the teams that impressed the judges had members from different technical backgrounds, showing a good understanding of the problem and solution. Mr. Hobololo stated that the multidisciplinary approach is quite important for investors, for anyone who is going to put money into an innovation because it shows that this person pays enough attention, "you get the closure by the technical solution that you are looking for." He also commended students for their innovative ideas, saying that even those who didn't win would still have opportunities to work with the Technology Research and Transfer (TRT) team to further develop their innovations.

Innovation thrives when creativity is nurtured through collaboration and purpose. Together, we empower the next generation to turn ideas into impactful solutions

Celebrating the Next Generation of Innovators *continued...*

The winners of the innovation pitching competition were announced as follows: In the Researcher Category, Sigabe Mulweli's "Beyond the Smile" project was identified as the overall winner and walked away with R35 000, while Sifiso Dlamini's "CTG Interpretation Mobile App" was announced as the 1st runner-up and walked away with R20 000. In the Student Category, Given Maboko's "Camellia Innovations" project was crowned the overall winner with the amount of R35 000, followed by Dakalo Milicent's "BizVhembe" as the 1st runner-up; they walked away with R20 000, and Asmah Lashkari's "EpiBliss" as 2nd runner-up and they were awarded R15 000.



Prof Vhonani Netshandama, Director of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation

Prof Vhonani Netshandama, Director of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation at UNIVEN delivered a vote of thanks, thanking attendees, researchers, supervisors, and coaches. She mentioned the need for a new approach to supervision that fosters innovation and technology transfer. She also encouraged the students and researchers to bring others along and create a ripple effect of innovation.

Innovation flourishes when talent, mentorship, and collaboration come together to create lasting change



Award winning recipients under the student category posing for a photo with UNIVEN, TIA and Eskom dignitaries



A group photo of students who participated in the Innovation Pitching Competition



UNIVEN-TIA awards participants and dignitaries concluded the event with pride and unity

Bridging Divides, Building Capacity: Promise's Mandela Washington Fellowship Journey



After nearly eight years of applying to the prestigious Mandela Washington Fellowship, Promise Nyalungu was finally accepted into the programme. An alumnus of the University of Venda (UNIVEN) and a passionate advocate for youth development, currently attached to UNIVEN Centre for Entrepreneurship (UCFERI) in the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation as a Marketing Officer.

Over a period of six weeks, the University of Delaware hosted a fellowship that brought together more than 650 emerging leaders from Africa, selected from a pool of 58,000 applications. Promise participated in the Leadership in Civic Engagement track where fellows engaged in academic sessions, leadership training, and cultural exchange. The programme included site visits to institutions such as the United Nations Headquarters in New York City and Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., providing a global perspective on governance, advocacy, and innovation. One of the most transformative takeaways for Promise was the role of storytelling in leadership and business development.

Learning how lived experiences can be transformed into powerful narratives to influence policy, inspire communities, and drive social change were a defining moment of the fellowship.

Fellows also participated in hands-on workshops addressing barriers to development, such as governance challenges, resource limitations, and public apathy. The programme emphasised proactive leadership, the importance of focusing on what can be controlled or influenced and building collaborations for sustainable impact.

Promise returns with a strengthened action plan and a renewed commitment to drive change within the university and the broader community. The fellowship reaffirmed the value of African stories, voices, and collaborative leadership, encouraging a collective approach to local and global challenges.

This milestone serves not only as a personal achievement but also as an opportunity for the University of Venda to strengthen its footprint in global academic and leadership networks.



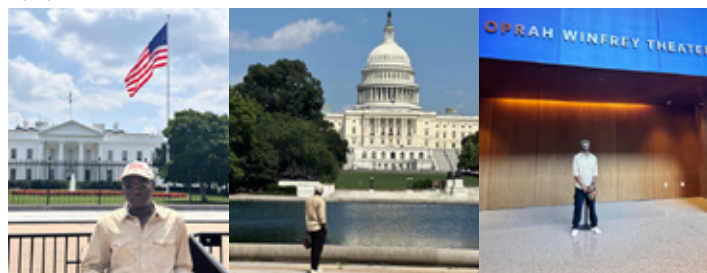
Networking sessions, distributing food at the Food Bank and assembling equipment at Project C.U.R.E



Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester, Senator Chris Coons, and Governor Matt Meyer of Delaware



Highlights at the United Nations headquarters



Highlights from Washington D.C (White House, Capitol Hill and OW Theatre)



Snapshots from the farewell and awards ceremony



University of Venda 2025 cohort during the welcome ceremony

Strengthening Queer-Inclusive Research and Partnerships in Higher Education: A Collaborative Engagement Between the University of Venda and the University of Fort Hare



Group photo of the participants

On 28 July 2025, a transformation engagement meeting between the University of Venda (UNIVEN) and the University of Fort Hare (UFH) was held at UNIVEN's Health Sciences Building Boardroom. The purpose of the engagement was for UFH to share their research findings on *Breaking Barriers Towards Queer Inclusivity*, a report exploring the experiences and perceptions of LGBTIQ+ inclusion at UFH. The session brought together students and student support personnel from both institutions with the aim of strengthening collaboration and sharing best practices on inclusive research focused on queer students in higher education.

This initiative forms part of the University of Venda's (UNIVEN) wider commitment to equity, diversity, and the rights of all students, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+).

True diversity means creating spaces where every identity is acknowledged, respected, and celebrated



Mr Victor Sigama, Head of Operations, University of Venda

During his welcome address, Mr Victor Sigama warmly expressed gratitude to staff members from the University of Fort Hare and other honoured guests highlighting the shared identity of these institutions. Mr Sigama underlined the significance of the meeting as an opportunity to learn from one another, share best practices, and strengthen collaboration in areas including student support, research, and policy development.

He encouraged open engagement and active participation throughout the event, noting that benchmarking and partnership are essential for institutional growth and transformation. Mr Sigama concluded by inviting visitors to enjoy the hospitality, make full use of the campus facilities, and benefit from the knowledge exchange to foster more inclusive and equitable academic environments.



Dr Bellita Banda, Interim Chair in Sexualities, Genders, and Queer Studies at UFH

Dr Bellita Banda began by expressing gratitude and stressing the importance of collaboration between the University of Fort Hare and institutions such as the University of Venda, particularly around promoting queer inclusivity in higher education. She highlighted ongoing efforts at Fort Hare, including research, awareness programmes, and institutional involvement aimed at creating a supportive environment for queer students. She expressed that the day's discussions would strengthen partnerships and advance diversity and inclusion.

In her keynote address, Dr Banda highlighted the challenges and opportunities related to queer inclusivity, noting University of Fort Hare's historical significance and ongoing struggles with patriarchy and exclusion. She referenced a COVID-era study on student attitudes towards queer identities, which saw limited participation due to fear of outing, religious stigma, and discomfort. The study used a mixed-methods approach and revealed a lack of safe spaces for queer and

non-binary students. Dr Banda presented this research as a starting point for reform, highlighting progress through campus initiatives like Queer Indaba now form part of the university's regular calendar.

One of the key components of the event was a panel discussion hosted by the University of Fort Hare's Queer Ambassadors and Gender Champions, during which four Queer Ambassadors presented research findings drawn from an in-depth study on queer student experiences at the Alice campus. These presentations provided crucial insights into the lived realities of LGBTQIA+ students, focusing on topics such as campus climate, safety, support systems, and institutional response mechanisms.

The discussions explored critical themes including student mental health, policy gaps, societal and cultural stigma, and the responsibility of universities in advocating for social change through research and inclusive policymaking. The University of Fort Hare shared its unique approach to queer student research, highlighting support models that have contributed to cultivating a more inclusive learning environment.

The second session, titled "Building Partnerships for Change", showcased the evolving collaboration between the University of Venda and the University of Fort Hare. Both institutions committed to strengthening engagement on inclusive research on queer student studies, laying the groundwork for joint projects, mutual learning platforms, and shared frameworks to support queer student wellbeing.

Strengthening Queer-Inclusive Research and Partnerships in Higher Education *continued...*



Participants sharing ideas insights during the discussion



Simphiwe Matyila, an Honours in Psychology student and Anti-GBV Champion at UFH

Simphiwe spoke on the university's strengthened stance against gender-based violence. She detailed the work of the Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Gender Diversity Office (GBVGD), established under the Vice-Chancellor's Office, which provides wide-ranging services including psychosocial support, emergency housing, and a 24/7 reporting line.

With a strong student voice at its core, the office drives campaigns such as #GBVPreventionIsForPrisoners, #ReclaimingASafeUFH, and #KnowYourLimits.

A 2024 study conducted by the office identified key GBV threats, including sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and cyber abuse, particularly affecting LGBTQIA+ students and first-years. Recommendations included engaging male students, combating harmful gender norms, and fostering supportive environments for vulnerable groups.

As a way forward, both UNIVEN and UFH expressed satisfaction with the depth and openness of the conversations and committed to strengthening their collaboration. They agreed to pursue joint research initiatives, establish mutual learning platforms, and develop shared frameworks for supporting queer student wellbeing. This engagement laid a strong foundation for sustained partnerships aimed at building more inclusive, equitable, and socially responsive universities.



Ms Velencia Maupye, Head of Transformation at University of Venda

Ms Velencia Maupye, Head of Transformation at the University of Venda and chair of the meeting between the two universities, indicated that the research conducted by the University of Fort Hare would serve as a strong foundation to strengthen transformation efforts at UNIVEN. She further elaborated that this research complements the ongoing work of the Transformation Office, which includes the establishment of the Gender Desk, advocacy around gender-based violence (GBV), and engagement with key internal stakeholders.

Ms Maupye also acknowledged the transformation programmes shared by UFH during the engagement, recognising the value of learning from their experiences and approaches. She emphasised that transformation is an ongoing process advancing one step at a time. While inclusivity is often preached in principle, she noted that practical implementation sometimes falls short, underscoring the importance of deliberate, effective actions to ensure genuine and sustainable transformation within higher education institutions.



Mr Andisani Mathelemusa, Head of Student Governance at University of Venda

Mr Andisani Mathelemusa expressed sincere appreciation to all delegates, reinforcing the value of cross-institutional partnerships, especially among historically disadvantaged universities. He shared practical examples of how benchmarking exercises have promoted institutional growth, academic mobility, and improved governance. Despite its rural location, he affirmed that the University of Venda competes favourably with top institutions across the country, offering quality infrastructure and student services.

Mr Mathelemusa encouraged attendees to consider UNIVEN a second home and to remain engaged beyond the event. He concluded by thanking the organising departments for their commitment and urged participants to continue cultivating inclusive, just, and academically empowering spaces for all students.

The transformation engagement between the University of Venda and the University of Fort Hare marked a significant step towards fostering queer-inclusive research and student support within higher education. The discussions highlighted the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ students, the gaps in institutional policies, and the vital role of universities in driving inclusive transformation. Both institutions affirmed the need for safe, supportive environments where all students can thrive regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Collaboration is the foundation for campuses where equity and safety are not distant ideals, but lived realities



University of Venda Extends a Warm Welcome to Warwick Exchange Students in a Celebratory Cultural Gathering



Group of attendees

On Friday, 1 August 2025, the University of Venda, through the International Relations and Partnerships (IRP) Directorate, hosted a warm welcome function for the Warwick exchange students at the GTCI Boardroom. The event provided an excellent opportunity to introduce the visiting students to the rich cultural heritage and vibrant community of the university and the surrounding areas.

With a series of insightful speeches and presentations, the occasion celebrated cross-cultural exchange and emphasised the university's commitment to supporting international students throughout their academic journey. The gathering was further enlivened by a special performance from the University of Venda Entertainment Group, adding a festive and engaging atmosphere to the welcome.



Mr Matome Mokoena, the International Relations Officer

Mr Matome Mokoena warmly greeted the international students, and expressed his enthusiasm for hosting students from the UK in South Africa. He highlighted the country's rich cultural diversity, languages, and people, encouraging the students to explore the province, renowned as one of the most naturally fertile and beautiful regions globally, often called "Africa's Kingdom," as the starting point of their journey, inviting students to engage with local markets, traditions, languages, and daily life. Mr Mokoena emphasised the inclusive nature of the experience and proudly welcomed everyone to the vibrant university community.

A safe and welcoming campus empowers students to explore, connect, and thrive both academically and personally



Mr Maanda Nemaaxwi

Mr Maanda Nemaaxwi discussed campus safety and security, highlighting that maintaining a secure environment is a shared responsibility involving students, staff, and security personnel. He urged students to stay alert and take an active role in safeguarding themselves and their peers. He explained that campus security functions around the clock, much like standard law enforcement, utilising sophisticated technologies including CCTV monitoring and restricted building access to ensure safety. Students received reminders to adhere to safety guidelines, steer clear of dangerous activities, and promptly report any issues, especially incidents involving gender-based violence or privacy violations. He emphasised that creating a safe campus atmosphere depends on everyone's collaboration and mutual consideration.



Mr Mfaniseni Mnguni, Chief Clerk Hostel Warden

Mr Mfaniseni Mnguni welcomed students to university accommodation, describing residences as supportive environments for academic success, safety, and personal growth. He outlined practical guidelines, including carrying student cards, visiting hours, and maintaining cleanliness and silence, especially during exams. He encouraged active participation in sports, cultural events, and student-led initiatives, inviting students to treat their residence as a "home away from home," with the assurance of ongoing support from housing staff.



Ms Maggie Hlungwani

Ms Maggie Hlungwani, HIV Coordinator at the Campus Health Clinic, presented the clinic's complimentary health services accessible to all students. The facility functions during weekdays with emergency assistance provided beyond standard operating hours. Students are advised to schedule appointments online and utilise available services such as HIV/STI screening, health education programmes, and contraceptive distribution. Ongoing health awareness campaigns featuring the motto "Zikhala Kanjani?" encourage students to make their wellbeing a priority throughout their academic journey.



Dr Avhatakali Makhado, a Tshivenda Lecturer

Dr Avhatakali Makhado, a Tshivenda Lecturer, offered a comprehensive overview of Tshivenda, the predominant regional language, highlighting its cultural and spiritual importance within the local area. He explored traditional customs, musical expressions, handicrafts, and culinary traditions, while instructing students in fundamental greetings to facilitate their integration and respectful interaction with the surrounding community.



Dr Thivhavhudzi Badugela

Dr Thivhavhudzi Badugela, representing the Head of Department in Educational Studies, extended a message of support, emphasising the importance of collaboration and encouraging participants to fully embrace the learning opportunities presented.



Mr Aluwani Mukhithi

Mr Aluwani Mukhithi spoke on the value of educational partnerships, particularly at the primary school level, urging participants to share their knowledge widely. He highlighted that while only three schools in the district currently participate, its success could demonstrate the programme's broader benefits.

Cross-cultural exchange thrives where safety, inclusion, and community meet

University of Venda Extends a Warm Welcome to Warwick Exchange Students *continued...*



Mr Rodney Tshishonga

Mr Rodney Tshishonga, representing the University of Venda students, warmly welcomed the international students as future leaders and encouraged them to seek support from the SRC, sharing contact details and affirming the students' positive commitment.



Mr Daniel Butumbi, President of the University of Venda International Student Union (UNISU)

Mr Daniel Butumbi introduced the Union's role alongside the SRC in supporting international students. He promised a friendly and understanding approach and invited students to engage with their office for assistance, ending on a light-hearted note, encouraging them to reach out even for small comforts like ice cream.



Beatriz Lopez Roxo

The Warwick student representative, Beatriz Lopez Roxo expressed heartfelt thanks for the warm welcome, sharing how integrated and at home they already felt after a week.



Warwick students receiving their welcome gifts



The event was graced by a special performance from the University of Venda's Electro General Entertainment Group, adding vibrant cultural flair and celebration to the occasion.

They praised the hospitality, cultural exchange, and dedication of teachers at local schools where they had volunteered, closing with enthusiasm for ongoing collaboration.

Finally, Mr Tsundzuka Hakamela delivered the closing remarks. He acknowledged the collective efforts of various university departments in making international students feel at home, expressing the importance of social cohesion, friendship, and continuous engagement. He thanked all involved in organising the event and wished everyone a wonderful week ahead, concluding with practical advice to stay hydrated. The function was a heartfelt and inspiring welcome, setting the tone for a positive and enriching exchange experience.



Mr Tsundzuka Hakamela, International Student Administrator

We would like to hear from you!

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