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Alumnus Prof Mpandeli Scoops Six Top Honours at National WRC Employee Awards



Prof Sylvester Mpandeli carrying the six awards he received at the Water Research Commission (WRC) Employee Recognition Awards

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) has proudly congratulated its distinguished alumnus and Adjunct Professor, Prof Sylvester Mpandeli, for an outstanding achievement, winning six prestigious accolades at the Water Research Commission (WRC) Employee Recognition Awards held on 27 March 2026 at Irene Country Lodge in Centurion.

Prof Mpandeli emerged as the standout recipient of the evening, receiving multiple honours from WRC Chief Executive Officer, Dr Jennifer Molwantwa. His recognition underscores a career defined by global

impact, academic excellence, and leadership in water research and climate resilience.

Among the accolades, Prof Mpandeli received an “Award of Excellence” for his significant contribution to global knowledge as Honorary Vice President Honoraire of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID). Notably, he is the youngest African to hold this honorary position since the organisation’s establishment in 1950.

A second “Award of Excellence” recognised Prof Mpandeli and his team for securing the first World Heritage Irrigation Structures (WHIS) award for South Africa, based on their work on the Douglas Weir System in the Northern Cape. The honour was conferred at an International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID) event in Sydney, Australia in 2024.

His third accolade recognised his leadership in coordinating the South African National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage (SANCID) alongside Stellenbosch University partners, which led the team to win the ICID WatSave Technology Award at the 4th World Irrigation Forum in September 2025.

Further cementing his legacy, Prof Mpandeli received a fourth “Award of Excellence” for spearheading efforts that secured four additional WHIS awards for South Africa. These were awarded for work undertaken at Darlington Dam (Eastern Cape), Hartbeespoort Dam (North West), Koppies Dam (Free State), and Woodhead Dam (Western Cape). These achievements have propelled South Africa to the top position in Africa, with five WHIS titles since 2024, and into the global top ten, surpassing countries such as Egypt and Morocco. The awards were presented in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in September 2025.

The fifth “Award of Excellence” was awarded to the team for its “Best Paper” at the same global

forum, highlighting the academic strength behind its practical achievements.

Rounding off the evening, Prof Mpandeli was also honoured with a “Certificate of Recognition of Service” for his more than a decade of dedicated contribution to the WRC.

Beyond these accolades, Prof Mpandeli continues to distinguish himself as a globally recognised expert in climate change adaptation, agricultural water management, and the water-energy-food nexus. In 2024, he was ranked third globally among leading authors in this field. His international stature is further affirmed by his appointment as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Tsinghua University and his participation on numerous global advisory boards.

As a committed supporter of UNIVEN, Prof Mpandeli also sponsors the top three final-year students in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture, demonstrating his ongoing investment in nurturing future talent.

UNIVEN has hailed his achievements as a source of immense pride, applauding his continued excellence and global influence. “Prof Mpandeli continues to fly the UNIVEN flag high on the global stage, an inspiration to current and future generations.”



UNIVEN adopts data-driven and targeted recruitment strategies to attract high-quality applicants



The University of Venda (UNIVEN) has taken a decisive step to strengthen its student recruitment strategy by convening a two-day Student Recruitment Planning Workshop with its faculties on 25–26 March 2026 at The Park Hotel in Mokopane. The workshop forms part of a strategic response to the Executive Management Committee's directive to deepen faculty involvement and improve institutional coordination in achieving enrolment targets.

Bringing together faculties and key administrative units, the workshop created a platform for developing a cohesive and integrated recruitment approach. Central to the discussions was aligning institutional enrolment strategies with faculty-level recruitment plans, with a focus on identifying priority programmes and responding effectively to the evolving higher education landscape in South Africa.

Delivering the welcome remarks, Dr Takalani Dzaga, Director of Marketing, Branding and Communication, set the tone by emphasising the importance of early, integrated planning in both student recruitment and career development. He highlighted that programme

information should be finalised well in advance to enable effective marketing and meaningful engagement with prospective students. Dr Dzaga further stressed the importance of collaboration between Marketing, Branding and Communication (MBC), faculties, and other stakeholders to ensure the delivery of accurate academic, career, and financial information. He also called for a coordinated recruitment calendar that includes school visits, career exhibitions, and international engagement, while promoting inclusive and targeted strategies to improve access, diversity, and student empowerment.

Adding to this perspective, Adv Rolien Roos, Director from the Teaching and Learning Division underscored the value of collaboration in breaking down institutional silos. She encouraged a shift from a purely numbers-driven recruitment approach to one that prioritises the quality and suitability of students, particularly in critical fields such as STEM, health sciences, and accounting sciences. Adv Roos further highlighted the need for the university to position itself as a preferred institution by actively showcasing

its academic support systems and student success initiatives, thereby attracting students well aligned with its academic offerings.

The workshop programme featured in-depth discussions on enrolment projections, recruitment trends, and reflections on previous recruitment cycles as well as the importance of leveraging digital platforms in student recruitment initiatives. Faculties engaged in dedicated planning sessions to develop targeted strategies, including school outreach programmes, participation in career exhibitions, digital engagement initiatives, and identifying specific marketing support requirements. These faculty-driven plans were consolidated into a unified institutional recruitment framework.

The expected outcome of the workshop is a more structured, collaborative, and strategic recruitment approach that effectively integrates academic insight with marketing and outreach efforts. This is anticipated to enhance programme visibility, strengthen engagement with prospective students, and support sustainable enrolment growth.

Overall, the workshop marks a significant

milestone in strengthening UNIVEN's recruitment capacity. It reinforces coordinated planning across faculties and administrative units, ensuring the institution is well-positioned to meet its enrolment targets and broader strategic objectives.

This two-day workshop was attended by a diverse group of stakeholders, including directors from key portfolios such as Marketing, Branding and Communication; Teaching and Learning; and International Relations and Partnerships. Participation also included faculty managers, academic staff, representatives from the Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning, as well as Institutional Research and Planning. The Marketing, Branding and Communication team played a leading role in facilitating the engagement, further reinforcing the collaborative spirit of the initiative.

As a united team, participants pledged to drive student recruitment with passion, purpose, and persistence. The team is committed to acting with integrity, innovating boldly, and collaborating fully, ensuring that every effort made opens doors, empowers futures, and strengthens UNIVEN.

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.

NEW VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

VISION AND MISSION

"Vision is the art of seeing the invisible"
~ Jonathan Swift

Our vision defines what we want to become by 2040. It is an aspirational description of what we would like to achieve in the long term.



VISION

A University leading in engaged scholarship



MISSION

The University of Venda produces graduates who are locally relevant and globally competitive

INSTITUTIONAL VALUES

The University of Venda is guided by a set of core institutional values that shape its culture, inform decision-making, and underpin the university's strategic priorities. These values include:



EXCELLENCE

Striving for the highest standards in teaching, research, and service



INTEGRITY

Acting with honesty, ethics, and transparency in all we do



ACCOUNTABILITY

Taking responsibility for our actions and delivering on our commitments



DIVERSITY

Embracing and promoting inclusivity, equity, and different perspectives



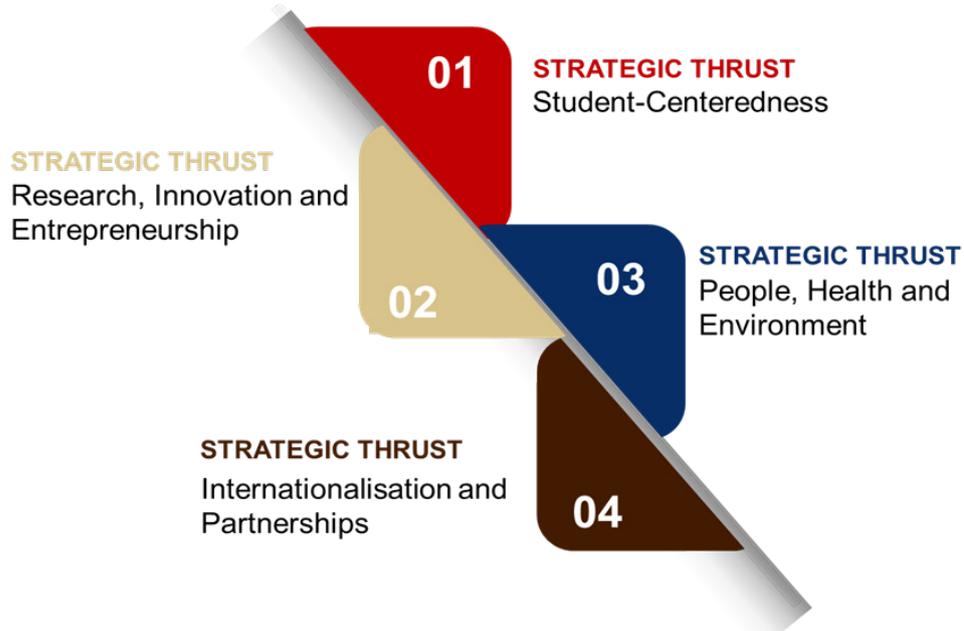
RESPECT

Valuing the dignity and contributions of every individual

POSITIONING STATEMENT

Positioning the University of Venda for Relevance, Excellence and Impact

Did you know that the UNIVEN Strategic Plan 2026-2030 has four Strategic Thrusts listed below?



13-17
APRIL
2026

University of Venda in partner with Wadhvani Foundation Presents the

IGNITE BOOTCAMP

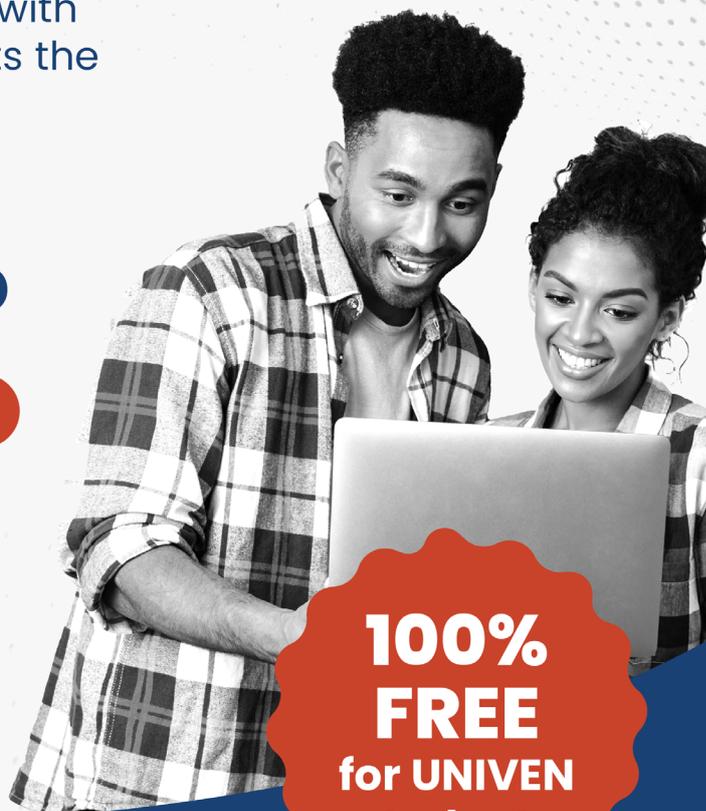
STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Time: 16:00-18:00 Daily



Venue: Virtual (Zoom)



100% FREE
for UNIVEN students

DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION: 12 APRIL 2026

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