

# Habib tagged as 'preferred candidate' for Wits

University of Johannesburg deputy vice-chancellor Adam Habib has emerged as the top candidate for the position of vice-chancellor at the University of the Witwatersrand. Incumbent Loyiso Nongxa, is to leave the post in May, after a 10-year stint.



It will fall to the new vice-chancellor to manage the tension between financial sustainability and a long-term vision of being a world-class institution.

The Wits senior appointments selection committee tabled its report to the Wits university council on Friday(7 December) and comments from some members of the committee suggested Habib is the preferred candidate for the post.

The university is set for a shakeup in senior management, with the post of vice-chancellor (academic due to be advertised next year.

The post of vice-chancellor (finance and operations) has already been filled by the dean of the faculty of humanities, Tawana Kupe who takes up the post next year.

Prof Habib, has already submitted his vision for Wits and has been through interviews with various committees, as have two other candidates: Yunus Ballim - who is Wits deputy vice-chancellor (academic), and Liesbeth Botha, the executive director of materials science and manufacturing in the senior management team of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

The job description suggests that a candidate's vision needs to mesh with Wits' existing vision for the next then years. This vision includes enhancing Wits' international standing as a research institution, as well as lowering the staff and student ratio.

Wits wants to see a higher proportion of post-graduate students emerging at a time when management and academics are deadlocked on a range of issues, including benchmarking academic standards and research funding.

At the same time, Wits together with SA's 22 other public universities, is set to see a nominal decrease in state funding of one percent next year, followed by two percent the year after and finally three percent in 2015. Already there is mounting pressure on universities not to increase student fees.

|The first issue on the agenda for the new vice-chancellor at Wits is the tense labour relations at the university. Wits academic and support staff have engaged in strike action on more than one occasion this year.

Labour negotiations are expected to resume next year, and although academics suspended their strike, they are adamant their demands are reasonable and affordable and need to be met.

Habib said in an interview last week that both the University of Johannesburg and University of KwaZulu-Natal had reaped the benefits of encouraging productivity and research among academic staff.

Habib said Wits would need to balance increasing under-graduate enrolment with teaching loads. The university would also need to focus on the changing higher education landscape and look at different funding formulas, despite Wits' strength in the fields of science and engineering.

Botha said finding a balance between under-graduate enrolment rates and academic pay and research time, could present opportunities for the institution.

Wits also needed to attract "third stream" income - such as state support for poor students, and policy incentives to ensure that talented students were retained for postgraduate studies.

Source: *Business Day* via I-Net Bridge

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