

Wits defends staff exodus as 'strategic need'

Restructuring at the University of the Witwatersrand has seen an exodus of senior academic staff, but the institution's leadership maintains that some departures were the result of strategic re-organisation while others were for personal reasons.

By [Thuletho Zwane and Dineo Bendile](#) 26 Sep 2013



Last week, the dean of commerce, law and management, Prof Nqosa Mahao became the latest academic quit, leaving academic circles "puzzled". His resignation took many by surprise.

"The notice issued last week comes without warning and will therefore inevitably disrupt the smooth running of the faculty," said the president of Wits' academic staff association, Prof David Dickinson.

According to a review report on Wits' commerce, law and management (CLM) faculty, there have been nine deans in 12 years. The report says in addition to the high turnover of deans, the heads of schools in the faculty stayed for not more than 2.3 years.

This was described as an "unusual phenomenon".

The CLM faculty has in recent months lost 17 senior academic and management staff from a combination of resignations and dismissals. This figure is made up of 11 senior staff members from the school of accounting sciences and the school of economic and business sciences.

Resignations are widespread

Among these is Prof Jackie Arendse of the school of accounting sciences, who left in the past five months, and Prof Jonathan Klaaren of the school of law.

The Wits Business School has also lost five staff, including Prof Wendy Ngoma, its former director, who has been replaced by acting head Dr Adam Gordon.

Wits' human resources department also confirmed that Prof Judy Backhouse, of the school of economic and business sciences, had resigned and will leave at the end of this month. Outside the CLM faculty, other senior staff have resigned or been placed on special leave since the new vice-chancellor, Prof Adam Habib, began his term.

The director of transformation, Nazeema Mohamed, resigned last month, while the dean of student affairs, Prem Coopoo, has been placed on special leave with no indication of when she will return. No official reasons have been given.

The dean of health sciences, Prof Ahmed Wadee, left his post after being "recalled" by the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS). This is believed to be a suspension.

New vision for Wits

Prof Adam Habib said in an e-mailed response to questions that some of the departures were related to the management team's plans and their implementation. "For now let me say that some of the departures are indeed related to our plans and their implementation.

"Implementation of our vision and plans is what I am paid to do, and yes, if I cannot make firm decisions after five months of engagements, then I am not up to doing the job. Other departures, however, have nothing to do with me or our plans and are the consequence of personal or other issues external to Wits," Habib said.

"The matter of the dean of health sciences, for instance, is a matter related to the NHLS, and not Wits," he added.

Director of special projects Oliver Seale said Wits was undergoing a process of reconfiguration to realign and reposition it.

He said the process would be reviewed in about a year's time.

"The university was pushing ahead with its Vision 2022 plan but some resignations were not linked to the restructuring," Seale said. He suggested that some faculty members might not have bought into the plan.

"Don't confuse the restructuring with what's happening with the deans, it's a timing issue," he said. "It's a case of where there were parallel processes happening.

"What happened with the review, for example of CLM, also fed into the restructuring process because we needed to see what the best way would be to ensure that the processes and the systems are workable," Seale added.

Source: Business Day via I-Net Bridge