

Gibs appoints new dean

The appointment of Nicola Kleyn to succeed Nick Binedell as dean of Pretoria University's Gordon Institute of Business Science might look like a safe option but experience at other schools shows there is much to be said for the old adage: if it ain't broke, don't fix it.



Nicola Kleyn. Image source: [BDive](#)

Kleyn has been at Gibs since 2000, the year it was launched with Binedell at the helm. Last August, Binedell announced his resignation after 15 years in charge. He will remain at the school as a teaching professor, a role he says will allow him to spend more time on issues that excite him.

Kleyn, who will take charge on 1 April, was appointed deputy dean in January 2014, in addition to her role as Gibs's head of academic programmes. However, the university conducted an exhaustive international search for a new dean before naming Kleyn to the top job.

University vice-chancellor Cheryl de la Rey says they want to build "a globally competitive and internationally recognised business school". Under Binedell, the school has already enjoyed remarkable success in that direction. It is regularly named among the world's top providers of executive education in the authoritative annual rankings of the Financial Times, and has begun to make its mark in MBA rankings. Its programmes are offered in several countries, and a number of foreign academics are among its faculty.

Some other leading SA schools have decided the best way to become "international" is to appoint foreign deans - a trend which has had mixed results. Says Kleyn: "I don't believe that for a school to be international, it has to have an international dean."

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By the same token, she dismisses the idea that after so long under one leader Gibs needs fresh ideas that can come only from outside. The school's success shows it's on the right path, she says, and revolution is unnecessary. Implementing change for change's sake could be counterproductive. "That doesn't mean we will remain static. Gibs has made its name by making bold leaps and that will continue."

One area she thinks the school can improve is in spreading its ideas beyond SA's academic community. "We have great quality thinking in this school and perhaps we need to find better ways to share it."

Gibs is based in the Johannesburg suburb of Illovo, near the hub of SA's business and financial centre. Kleyn acknowledges that it won't be easy stepping into the shoes of Binedell, whose name and voice have become almost synonymous with those of Gibs.

In the past two years, however, she says he has encouraged individual faculty to become more vocal and visible. Kleyn, whose specialist academic expertise is in marketing, says: "I think I'm relatively well known in the marketing community but I have work to do with internal and external Gibs stakeholders so they know who I am."

In any case, she says that after more than 20 years of leading schools, first at Wits Business School and then at Gibs, it's inevitable that Binedell should have a high profile.

She acknowledges hers will have to rise but says she is in no rush to emulate her predecessor. "Where appropriate, I will have things to say but, to begin with, I will be listening more than I am talking."

She adds: "A leadership brand is critical but not as important as the school brand. Gibs has a great reputation so the changeover of dean must not affect that.

"I would like to think outsiders will not notice any difference in their dealings with us."

Kleyn, who signed a five-year contract as dean last week, will join a short list of women to head major SA business schools. Adele Thomas (briefly) and Wendy Ngoma have led Wits, and last year Renosi Mokate was appointed at Unisa.

Apart from a couple of others at small schools, the female leadership cupboard has been rather bare.

"The situation tallies with that of corporate SA," says Kleyn. "We need more gender and race diversity in senior leadership. We all need to be concerned with the lack of representation.

She adds: "Actually, Gibs has a lot of senior women leaders. In international rankings, we are among the top 10 in that regard."

Kleyn, who holds an MBA and DBA, is a former Wits University lecturer and was head of learning and development at financial services group Investec.

Binedell (61) will spend the next two months handing over the reins to Kleyn, then take a sabbatical. When he announced his resignation last year he said there was no special reason for the timing. "It had to happen sooner or later."

Source: Financial Mail