

External Advisor's Report to the University of Zululand Council on the recruitment and selection of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal
13 March 2016

It gives me great pleasure to provide this external advisor's report to the University of Zululand Council on the recruitment and selection of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University.

My involvement with the process was at the stage of interviewing of the two (2) shortlisted candidates. This process was carried out on Saturday, 12 March 2016 at the Protea Hotel, Umhlanga. The process was chaired by the Chairperson of the University Council, Mr CV Gamede.

The Selection Committee convened at one of the Protea Hotel's boardrooms shortly before 9h00. There appeared to have been some confusion regarding the starting time of the meeting as some Committee members thought that the meeting would start at 10h00. The meeting was constituted by Mr Gamede around 9h27. At the start of the meeting, the Chairperson requested all members of the Selection Panel to introduce themselves, which they duly did. The Chairperson then proceeded to outline what he referred to as "the purpose of the day." Among other things, he indicated that the process of identifying a suitable candidate for the position of Vice-Chancellor at the University of Zululand started some time ago. He further pointed out that candidates had made presentations to a Joint Meeting of Council, Senate and the Institutional Forum (IF) on 7 March 2016 and that the two structures (Senate and IF) had voted following the presentations by the candidates. A detailed agenda for the day was presented and adopted by the Committee. The Chairperson established that a quorum was present and the attendance register was circulated. The attendance register also required members of the Committee to declare whether or not they had any conflict of interest in respect of the matters for consideration by the Committee. The Chairperson then suggested that a set of interview questions be formulated in line with the advert and the expectations regarding the position of Vice-Chancellor at the University of Zululand. He further proposed that a ten-point scale be used to assess the candidates on each question.

The Committee then proceeded to formulate interview questions. After refinement and fine-tuning, the Committee formulated eleven (11) questions which covered a broad range of competences, skills, knowledge and understanding of higher education in South Africa and that of the University of Zululand, in particular. I must commend the Committee for constructing what, in my view, were fair and probing questions.

After the interview questions had been finalised, each member of the Panel was assigned a question to ask. In response to a question by a member of the Committee on whether or not follow up questions would be permitted, the Chairperson suggested that the Committee stick to the set questions in order to ensure fairness to all candidates. The Committee then took a short tea adjournment in order to give time to the Registrar to print copies of the interview questions for the Committee.

The first candidate to be interviewed was Professor J M Blackledge. At the start of the interview, the Chairperson welcomed the candidate and indicated to him that the interview consisted of eleven (11) questions and that he had, on average, 5 minutes per question. He indicated that he would advise the candidate when half of his time had lapsed. The members of the Committee then proceeded with the interview process.

The second candidate to be interviewed was Prof X Mtose. The same process and procedure as had been applied to the first candidate was applied in the case of the second candidate.

At the end of the interview, the Chairperson asked each candidate if he/she had any questions regarding the "process" that the candidates wanted to ask the Committee.

Performance of the candidates

The two candidates were like chalk and cheese in their interview performance.

Prof Blackledge

Prof Blackledge failed to respond fully to the interview questions. He failed to demonstrate his knowledge and/or understanding of the South African Higher education system, in general, and the position of the University of Zululand, in particular. His responses to the questions were an explanation of what happens in the UK and his involvement with City and Guilds. He was completely out of his depths regarding the questions posed to him. Three specific issues were of particular concern to me.

1. He had no understanding of what a 'comprehensive' university is in the South African context.
2. When asked about the fact the University had been placed under administration a few years ago and what he would do to ensure that it did not get back to that situation, his response was that he had "heard" about the university having been under administration. He had no idea what led to that situation.
3. By his own admission, he had not looked at the finances of the University. He did not know the financial position of the University he was hoping to lead.

As the interview process progressed, one could observe Prof Blackledge's shoulders drop and the body sink into the chair. He was finding it difficult to respond with any

level of specificity to the questions that were posed. He became a lot livelier when a question regarding his 'style' of leadership was asked.

In response to an invitation at the end of the interview process to ask questions of process, he pointed out that he was not a South African and wanted to know what the expectation was regarding his interaction with staff and students. His comments at the end of the interview were telling: he seemed surprised that he had even reached the interview stage; he said that he had been "encouraged" to apply; he did not seem to believe that he was a suitable candidate. He indicated that he would "think very carefully" before signing should an offer be made to him.

In my assessment, based on the interview process, Prof Blackledge is not suitable for the position of Vice-Chancellor of the University of Zululand. Even if he were the only available candidate, I would not recommend him for the position.

Prof Mtose

Professor Mtose had an advantage, given that she is already acting in the position of Vice-Chancellor. She has an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the challenges that face the institution. This can be a blessing or a curse. In her case, it turned out to be a blessing. She responded fully and in detail to all the interview questions. She was full of energy and brimming with ideas. Some of her responses to the questions in the earlier part of the interview were so detailed that they had preempted some of the questions that had been prepared for the latter part of the interview. She then ended up elaborating or amplifying on her earlier responses.

In my assessment, based on the interview process, Prof Mtose is eminently suitable to lead the University of Zululand as its Vice-Chancellor.

After the candidates had been interviewed, the scores were tallied and the members of the Committee voted on their preferred candidate. The Chairperson shared with the Committee the outcome of the Senate and IF voting. The outcome of the Selection Committee vote was: Prof Blackledge: 3 in favour and 8 against; Prof Mtose: 8 in favour and 3 against. There were 11 voting members of the Committee. The total of the tallies was also heavily in favour of Prof Mtose, by a big margin.

The Chairperson invited me to comment on the candidates, which I did. He then invited all members of the Committee to comment on the candidates. One member of the Committee raised two concerns/objections which he asked to have recorded. One was in respect of the process and the other in respect of the outcome of the Senate and IF voting.

Following the discussion, the Chairperson of the Committee formulated a recommendation of the Selection Committee to the University Council that the post of Vice-Chancellor be offered to Prof Mtose.

Conclusion

It is my considered view that the Selection Committee conducted a procedurally and substantively fair, objective, transparent, credible and valid recruitment and selection process. Members of the Selection Committee conducted themselves impeccably. Both candidates were treated with respect and dignity. The Chairperson directed the proceedings in a fair and even-handed manner. The recommendation of the Selection Committee that an offer be made to Prof Mtose reflects a fair and just outcome of the process.

I trust that this is in order.