



Office of the Vice-Chancellor

TO: STAFF AND STUDENTS

FROM: PROF O AYO-YUSUF, VICE-CHANCELLOR (ACTING)

DATE: MONDAY, 6th JANUARY 2020

SUBJECT: WELCOME BACK MESSAGE – 2020 ACADEMIC YEAR

Compliments of the new Season and welcome back to the new and, the first academic year of the decade at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). I trust that you have all enjoyed your summer break and are excited to start the 2020 academic year. Thank you for choosing SMU as your home away from home. We are grateful that you have chosen SMU as your number one educational destination. I am particularly deeply grateful to each of you for your contributions and extraordinary sacrifice that ensured that the majority of our students successfully completed the 2019 academic year. I am honoured to be a part of such a remarkable community! I very much look forward to the rich and rewarding academic year ahead for just under 7,000 students we expect to pursue their studies at SMU in 2020. As we look ahead and seek to engage with the opportunities and challenges facing SMU today and in the future, we continue to be dedicated to making investments that strengthen our community, create an enabling environment for our students and staff to pursue their passions and position our University for future success.

I anticipate that this will be an important and transformative year for SMU. We would be having the installation ceremony of our new Chancellor! We plan to continue the maintenance/upgrade of our facilities and improve our academic programmes at a pace that would better support our teaching, research, community engagement and service missions. With our consent use ('rezoning') application now approved, we also hope to soon break ground on our new 2000-bed student residence facility! While the dire University's financial position has slightly improved, we will continue to focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations, preventing fraud and corruption and, diversifying the sources of funding. In this last respect, among others, we have developed a commercialisation strategy, institutional advancement policy and embraced the staff and student entrepreneurship initiative supported by DHET. I look forward to keeping you up to date on all these and related developments. It is my intention to provide, in a separate communication to the SMU community next week, a detailed report on developments on various ongoing and planned projects and related challenges on campus.

With a record student application of over 30,000 for just over 1000 first year spaces, SMU's rise to prominence in the 6th year of its existence is as a result of many factors. These

factors include the significant intellectual contributions from dedicated academic and support staff, the commitments of our undergraduate and postgraduate students to academic excellence and, the role played by management, Council and other University's structures with regards to responsible stewardship of the resources that have been entrusted to us by DHET, research funders and our other strategic partners. All with a common goal of ensuring that SMU remains the fountain of knowledge that is owned by students and empowers our graduates to become experts who will help shape tomorrow's health and science industry, thus meaningfully contributing to the fourth industrial revolution.

As the Acting Vice Chancellor, I want you to know that I am here for your progress and success as we continue the search for a substantive Vice Chancellor. You are in many ways the heart of SMU, the very reason the University exists at all. I plan to work more closely together with stakeholder groups to create relationships that are mutually beneficial and respectful, as well as being supportive of each other for a better SMU. We need to challenge each other to improve ourselves and the institution, but must do so within an engagement decorum befitting of a University of our stature.

Finally, while we have made much progress in the past years, such as the significant growth in academic staff with PhD and NRF-rating, growth in student enrolment with high success rates, doubling of research output and proportion of publications in international journals, albeit from a low base, we must also acknowledge that we have faced some difficult situations in the past few years. However, our community has responded to these difficult situations with a strength and sincerity that can often be hard to find among such a large and diverse group. As we engage and interact in 2020 with a view to advancing the University and its mission, we must do so with an understanding that SMU is a national asset that has to be nourished, protected, defended and promoted at all material times. It is a post-apartheid higher education institution founded to advance a democratic project and to create a space in which a universe of ideas matter. It was founded primarily to advance the academic project and all our efforts must be galvanized to ensure that it remains faithful to this noble task.

Now more than ever, we must hold onto that strength and unity of purpose as members of SMU community recommitting ourselves to academic excellence and a culture of respect and performance management.

Thank you for all your efforts to make sure that SMU is a thriving institution.

I wish you all the very best and a productive 2020!



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