Notes from the meeting regarding new appointments to the NWU Business School Advisory Board

8 February 2021 at 13h00 (via Zoom)

In attendance

Prof Raymond Parsons (Chairperson, NWU Business School Advisory Board)
Ms Charlotte Mokoena (Deputy Chairperson, NWU Business School Advisory Board)
Prof Jan van Romburgh (Chief Director, NWU Business School)
Ms Ali Parry (Minutes Secretary)

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1. Background and purpose of the meeting

Prof Parsons explained that, given the NWU Business School Advisory Board's new terms of reference, there was an opportunity to appoint four more people to the Advisory Board, to complement the existing experience and expertise. This would add strength to the existing Board membership by identifying any 'gaps' in available expertise, interest groups and commitment within the School's existing strategy, with due regard to diversity.

He added that the purpose of the meeting was therefore to initiate the Advisory Board enlargement process by agreeing four key focus areas in which the new Board members should have experience and then proposing potential candidates in line with these focus areas. Prof Parsons said that 'first prize' would be to manage the process expeditiously enough to have new Board members able to attend the next meeting of the Board scheduled for 25 March 2021.

Prof van Romburgh emphasised that the appointment of new Advisory Board members needed to be in line with the Business School's mandate and market positioning strategy.

2. Four key focus areas

After some discussion, it was proposed that the four key focus areas that would broadly guide the Advisory Board member nomination and selection process to fill the new vacancies should be:

- Africa footprint
- North West province interest group
- Ethical corporate leadership (including an anti-corruption stance)
- Marketing and stakeholder relations

Visible activity in these areas (which the new Advisory Board members could help to facilitate) would give the Business School a more distinctive profile in a highly competitive market. Ms Mokoena remarked that there was an opportunity for the Advisory Board to become more diverse and representative, and that the Africa identity in particular would be a strong competitive advantage.

It was agreed that it was important to identify potential candidates who would not simply be lured by the title and the opportunity to advertise their Board member status. Rather, they should be prepared to put in the necessary time and effort, and to add value to the Advisory Board and the Business School. A strong sense of commitment was needed.

3. The next steps

After further discussion, it was agreed that it would be premature to already recommend potential candidates at this particular meeting. Prof van Romburgh would first report back to the NWU Business School's Exco on the proposed focus areas and modus operandi for enlarging the Advisory Board. In consultation with the Advisory Board Chairperson, Prof van Romburgh would then craft a suitable communiqué to Board members regarding the next steps, bearing in mind the next meeting of the Board on 25 March.

As far as the nomination/appointment process was concerned, it was agreed that the Advisory Board (acting under the guidance of Prof Parsons and Ms Mokoena), together with the Chief Director, would be responsible for identifying and recommending candidates to the Business School's Exco. The Exco may also want to suggest names. Ultimately, the Exco would evaluate the Board's nominations and ratify the final appointments.

Prof Parsons closed the meeting at 14.00.

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Prof Raymond Parsons
Chairperson: NWU Business School Advisory Board

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY BOARD OF THE NWU BUSINESS SCHOOL (VIA ZOOM)

25 MARCH 2021 AT 10:00

MEMBERS PRESENT

Prof Raymond Parsons:	Advisory Board Chairperson, NWU Business School
Prof Jan van Romburgh:	Chief Director, NWU Business School
Prof Sonia Swanepoel:	Executive Dean: Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, NWU
Ms Charlotte Mokoena:	Advisory Board Deputy Chair; Executive Vice-President, Human Resources and Corporate Affairs, Sasol Limited
Mr Nico Vermeulen:	Former Executive Director, NAAMSA
Mr Christo Botes:	Consultant, Business Partners
Mr Stavros Nicolaou:	Senior Executive, Strategic Trade, Aspen Pharmacare
Mr Mzolisi Diliza:	Executive Chairman, Strategic Partners Group
Mr Len Hansen:	Human Resources Consultant, Astral Operations Limited
Mr Dewald Olivier:	Chairperson, NWU Business School Alumni Association; Executive Officer, SA Feedlot Association
Mr Jeremy Sampson:	Managing Director, Brand Finance Africa
Ms Ali Parry:	Trade Matters (Minutes Secretary)

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

Prof Robert Balfour:	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning, NWU
Mr Kgosi Moshe Mabe:	Chairperson, North West Provincial House of Traditional Leaders

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1. OPENING AND WELCOME

The Chairperson, Prof Raymond Parsons, welcomed all present and made specific reference to the two new members of the Advisory Board – Mr Jeremy Sampson from Brand Finance Africa and Mr Kgosi Mabe from the North West Provincial House of Traditional Leaders.

Prof Parsons also acknowledged that Prof van Romburgh was attending the meeting for the first time in his new capacity as the Business School's Chief Director.

1.1 Apologies

Prof Parsons reported that apologies had been received from Prof Robert Balfour and Kgosi Mabe.

1.2 Personalia

Prof van Romburgh said that things were generally going well with the staff and that one staff member who had contracted COVID-19 had subsequently recovered well.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The meeting agenda was briefly discussed and Prof van Romburgh asked that an item be added under General. The agenda was then adopted.

3. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 NOVEMBER 2020

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 November 2020 were approved and signed by Prof Parsons in his capacity as Chairperson.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The Advisory Board sub-group (Prof Parsons and Charlotte Mokoena) and Prof van Romburgh to propose a strategy to search for and appoint new Board members. **Actioned/in progress.**

Two vacancies on the Board have been filled and more candidates will be considered in due course with a view to filling the other two vacancies.

4.2 Prof van Romburgh to approach certain alumni to participate in a 'dry run'/'mock' AMBA visit prior to the actual AMBA visit in October 2021. **In progress.**

In this regard, Prof van Romburgh has identified a selection of alumni and is liaising with them.

4.3 Prof van Romburgh to prepare a one-page summary of financial highlights to be circulated before each Board meeting. **Actioned.**

A comprehensive pack of documentation, including financial summaries, was circulated to Board members prior to the meeting. The chairman explained that special circumstances had delayed the distribution of the supporting documents on this occasion but it was intended to send them out earlier in future.

4.4 Prof van Romburgh to send Advisory Board members an honorarium form for completion. **Actioned.**

Prof Parsons requested that any Board member who had not yet returned their form, should do so.

5. OPERATIONAL REPORT BACK BY PROF VAN ROMBURGH

5.1 AMBA and other accreditations

Prof van Romburgh reported that the preparation for the AMBA accreditation visit this year was generally going well under the direction of Prof Anet Smit. However, it was a challenging process with a great deal of information having to be sourced from various parties within the Business School. The plan is that, in the longer term, archived material and other accreditation-related documents will be better coordinated and made more accessible, which will streamline future applications. Prof van Romburgh said that the accreditation 'visit' would be in September or October, although it is uncertain at this stage whether it will be an actual visit or a virtual one. The required documentation needs to be finalised and submitted to AMBA by June.

Prof van Romburgh reported that he and colleagues had had useful engagements with the Wits Business School and Rhodes Business School, both of which had recently had AMBA accreditation visits and were able to share useful insights with the NWU Business School as it prepares for its own AMBA visit. Prof Parsons acknowledged the value of learning from other Schools' experiences but stressed that undergoing an AMBA accreditation exercise does not necessarily mean that these Schools have all the answers, and that the NWU Business School needs to follow its own distinctive path.

Prof van Romburgh added that the NWU Business School had been successful in its application for accreditation with AABS (Association of African Business Schools). One of the next steps is for a mentor to be appointed for the Business School in order to take the process forward. While the School can appoint its own mentor, it is not clear who will bear the cost.

5.2 Infrastructure and technology

Prof van Romburgh said that the Business School premises at the Mahikeng campus were now occupied by the staff and while things were not yet fully operational, they should be by the time of the AMBA visit later in the year. Prof Parsons pointed out that the AMBA accreditation team is likely to ask about the original plan to house all Business School staff in Potchefstroom under one roof.

Nico Vermeulen asked for an update on how the Business School is using technology to achieve teaching coherence across the different campuses. Prof van Romburgh explained that COVID-19 had forced the Business School to quickly adapt to online teaching using digital platforms and that this had helped to ensure that students on each campus had access to the same teaching and learning experiences. More recently, with the loosening of restrictions regarding access to the university, the Business School has adopted a blended approach for the MBA programme – with some students in class and some participating online. He said that this blended approach is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

5.3 Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning activities are going well, according to Prof van Romburgh, although he said that the MBA students had been a bit slower to adapt to online teaching than, say, the PGDip students. He said that there is a general feeling among MBA students that they prefer the stimulation of physically attending classes and interacting with fellow students and staff members.

Prof van Romburgh said that, while other business schools had witnessed a decline in MBA student numbers this year, the NWU Business School had seen its MBA enrolment figures rise. In addition, the Business School has introduced a more rigorous application process, including an online test followed by (for those who pass the test) an individual interview. The Business School met its target for PGDip enrolments this year, which is pleasing. Len Hansen requested that in future certificate programmes also be included in the Chief Director's operational report. **Action: Prof van Romburgh**

5.4 Executive education

The NWU Business School is actively pursuing international partnerships and has formed a strategic alliance with the IIBN (International Institute of Business Networking) Business School in St Petersburg (Russia) with a view to sharing expertise and running joint programmes. The IIBN has a great deal of experience in the management development and forensics teaching domains, and Prof van Romburgh anticipates strong interest in such courses when they come on stream. These would embellish the Business School's current executive education offerings.

There was some discussion among Board members about the work of the NWU's Small Business Advisory Bureau and how the Bureau could reach more small businesses – particularly at the 'grassroots' level. Christo Botes remarked that the Bureau had a good reputation in the market and that large corporates (such as Sasol) could perhaps subsidise the training and/or selection of consultants, who would conduct structured research into the SME market and their particular needs, which are still not fully understood.

Stavros Nicolaou added that the forging of alliances between academic institutions and businesses is critically important in South Africa as this can go a long way towards ensuring that higher education offerings cater to the needs of industry.

5.5 Research

Prof van Romburgh said that the Business School had a full research programme and he was satisfied with the current momentum.

5.6 Africanisation and internationalisation

The Business School has been working steadily on acquiring more of an African identity (helped, for example, by its new logo) and growing its profile on the continent. For example, through its new ‘Bon-Bon’ initiative, Business School academics and researchers are engaging with policymakers, academics and business leaders in various African countries, exchanging views and experiences and exploring partnership potential. Prof van Romburgh said that the Africanisation initiative is going well and will in time be something that the Business School can really be proud of. It will also be one of the flagship initiatives discussed during the upcoming AMBA visit.

In response to a question from Charlotte, Prof van Romburgh said that more practical research needs to go into the composition of the business school fraternity across Africa and where there may be partnership potential in the areas of teaching and learning. The fact that online delivery has become the new norm in the wake of COVID-19 opens up many opportunities for collaboration and cross-marketing. However, he said that forming alliances with other business schools takes time as it involves building relationships and finding areas of mutual interest.

The Business School has signed an MOU with the IIBN Business School in Russia (see 5.4 above) and is currently negotiating the terms of an MOU with the National University of Lesotho.

5.7 Marketing, branding and stakeholder relations

Prof van Romburgh provided an overview of the Business School’s marketing activities over the past few months. The ‘Bon-Bon’ initiative, launched in February 2021, involves Business School academics and researchers interviewing prominent individuals across the continent on particular challenges and solutions for Africa. Each recorded interview is then packaged as a ‘bon-bon’ and distributed to the media, alumni and other target audiences. The idea behind the ‘Bon-Bon’ initiative is that, through the exchange of experiences and practical advice on how to leverage opportunities and tackle challenges on the continent, the Business School will be well placed to help Africa change for the better. Africa is very fragmented. Working more closely with other entities in African countries could make a significant difference in the fields of education, business and trade.

The Business School also now produces a quarterly newsletter, an informative publication that reaches a wide audience. Prof Parsons mentioned that it may, though, be a good idea to consider a shorter newsletter sent more frequently, perhaps bimonthly. There was some discussion about the Think-Tank (webinar) series, which is proving to be very popular. Jeremy Sampson said that webinars are excellent vehicles for tackling ‘hot topics’ and also for promoting the Business School in general – with the speakers effectively acting as unofficial ambassadors for the School.

There was some debate about the merits or otherwise of SABSA (South African Business Schools Association) co-branding the think-tanks with the NWU Business School. While it was agreed that it would help to give the Business School more exposure, it is important not to dilute the School's brand. Charlotte mentioned that cooperation with SABSA was an excellent idea but that it did not have to extend to co-branding, which could be counterproductive. Prof Parsons added that while academic collaboration should be encouraged, it would not be prudent for the School's competitive advantages to be eroded. He thought it could only be dealt with on a project by project basis. It was agreed that Prof van Romburgh and Jeremy would discuss the matter further in an offline discussion. **Action: Prof van Romburgh, Jeremy Sampson**

Prof van Romburgh reiterated the importance of having a strong presence in the market, but the extent of exposure is inevitably budget-dependent. The Business School's WhatsApp group is proving to be a popular and cost-effective communication tool. Christo mentioned that he is really enjoying being a member of the WhatsApp group, which allows him to 'feel the heartbeat of the Business School'. Prof van Romburgh added that the Business School now has its own dedicated database (soon to be launched), which would make it much easier to engage with alumni, many of whom are well placed to promote the School within their professional networks.

5.8 Outreach and interaction

Prof Parsons said that to some extent the Potchefstroom campus's outreach activities are being adversely affected by the deteriorating state of local infrastructure in and around the city, which is likely to be felt even more acutely when contact activities resume in earnest at the university. This in turn could cast a shadow on the Business School's image. While engaging with the local authorities about the problem is a sensible option, he accepted it is easier said than done.

Christo remarked that appointing a representative of the North West province to the Advisory Board was a step in the right direction. In addition, the NWU Vice Chancellor has requested quarterly meetings with Prof van Romburgh and his team to keep up to date with Business School affairs. Such meetings could provide an opportunity to keep the Vice Chancellor apprised of the growing challenges associated with outreach and the need for intervention at a strategic level.

5.9 Finalisation of TORs for Business School committees

Prof van Romburgh said that this process was being completed and the final list would be sent to the Advisory Board for their interest.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT BACK BY PROF VAN ROMBURGH

6.1 General overview and outlook

Prof van Romburgh made reference to the financial statements that had accompanied the Board papers.

He said that the finances of the Business School continue to be a constraint to its plans and operations. As discussed at previous Advisory Board meetings, the Business School is facing a sizeable (accumulated) negative reserve amount of just under R10 million, which has been carried over for a number of years – the result of contributions promised but not made and also overspending. He said that possible solutions to the problem were currently being sought in consultation with the university's senior management and it was anticipated that the problem would be resolved by the time of the AMBA visit.

On a more positive note, a sizeable amount (approximately R11 million) could potentially be transferred from the UCE (Unit for Continuing Education) at the university to the Business School as part of the process of the latter acquiring greater autonomy over certain revenue streams. Prof van Romburgh also mentioned that he had been liaising with NAFCOC over the possibility of naming rights at the School, which could involve a welcome financial contribution.

It was generally recognised that the Business School makes an important financial contribution to the NWU, particularly via its executive education programme, which has the potential to grow and strengthen through the School's Africanisation and other initiatives.

7. PERSONNEL

There are two vacancies at the Business School for which suitable candidates are currently being sought.

8. GENERAL

On liaison with stakeholders Prof van Romburgh briefly summarised some of the meetings he had had with colleagues on all three campuses as well as with external stakeholders, including the Financial Mail, the North West Provincial House of Traditional Leaders and the Institute for Small Business.

9. CLOSURE

Prof Parsons thanked the Advisory Board for their participation and valuable inputs, and said he was confident that the new, expanded Board would continue to make a valuable contribution to the work of the Chief Director and the Business School as a whole. He reminded members that the next meeting of the Board was scheduled for July 8. He then declared the meeting closed at 11.55.

Chairperson