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

8 JULY 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 Robert Balfour	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning, NWU
Ms Charlotte Mokoena	Advisory Board Deputy Chair; Executive Vice-President, Human Resources and Corporate Affairs, Sasol Limited
Mr Nico Vermeulen	Retired/former Executive Director, NAAMSA
Mr Christo Botes	Former Executive Director, Business Partners; currently Small Business Consultant
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 Sonia Swanepoel	Executive Dean: Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, NWU
Mr Stavros Nicolaou	Senior Executive, Strategic Trade, Aspen Pharmacare
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.

1.1 Apologies

Prof Parsons said that apologies had been received from Prof Sonia Swanepoel, Kgosi Mabe and Stavros Nicolaou.

1.2 Personalia

Prof van Romburgh and Prof Parsons conveyed their best wishes to all those Advisory Board members who had been directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the meeting was adopted.

3. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 MARCH 2021

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 March were approved and signed by Prof Parsons in his capacity as Chairperson.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 Prof van Romburgh to approach/liaise with a number of alumni regarding the staging of a ‘dry run’ or ‘mock’ AMBA visit prior to the actual AMBA visit in October 2021**.**

Prof van Romburgh indicated that they were busy finalising the agenda for the AMBA accreditation ‘visit’ from 18–20 October 2021, which will be virtual. The Business School has engaged the services of an outside consultant to assist in the making of videos with selected alumni. Although Prof van Romburgh has not personally engaged with any of the alumni, the plan to involve alumni is on track.

In response to a question from Prof Parsons, Prof van Romburgh indicated that the participation of the Advisory Board during the accreditation visit will be worked into the three-day agenda and given careful consideration – particularly as only brief video time slots will be allocated for inputs from various parties. He said he would circulate the relevant information to the Advisory Board in due course. **Action: Prof van Romburgh**

4.2 Prof van Romburgh to include certificate programmes in his operational report. **Actioned**

4.3 Prof van Romburgh and Jeremy Sampson to discuss the merits (or otherwise) of co-branding Business School events with a body like SABSA and how the Business School can leverage such collaborations without eroding its competitive advantages. **Actioned**

Prof van Romburgh reported that he and Jeremy had had some fruitful face-to-face meetings and email exchanges, and that he valued Jeremy’s guidance. Jeremy said it was encouraging that many people were approaching and wanting to work with the NWU, which was a sign that the university could become a ‘potent force’. However, given the university’s limited resources, he added that it was very important to remain as focused as possible.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR BUSINESS SCHOOL BOARD AND EXCO

Prof van Romburgh reported that much energy had gone into the formalisation of the ‘autonomy’ of the Business School and that it was important to have terms of reference detailing how the Business School and its various constituencies would work. It is from the terms of reference for the Business School Board, he explained, that the Exco’s role would be fashioned. With the assistance of legal experts, draft terms of reference had been prepared, which still require further consideration and improvement.

Prof van Romburgh added that the Chief Director of the Business School now takes part in the NWU's Senate meetings, which is a significant development in terms of the Business School's journey towards greater autonomy.

Prof Balfour said that, in other faculties at the university, the board is the primary consultation and decision-making body that makes strategic recommendations on behalf of the faculty. He said that the Business School needs the same sort of governance structure, with the role of the board being distinct from the day-to-day management of the School – the latter resting with the management committee. In other words, governance and management cannot be conflated. He added that the Chief Director of the Business School represents the Business School at Senate but, as a Senator, also needs to act in the interests of the institution as a whole.

Nico Vermeulen asked when the Advisory Board is likely to receive the draft or final terms of reference document. Prof Balfour explained that Advisory Board members will still have an opportunity to comment on the draft document. Prof Parsons proposed that inputs from Advisory Board members be solicited through a 'round robin', a procedure that members indicated they were comfortable with.
Action: Prof van Romburgh

6. PROJECT PROTON

Prof van Romburgh introduced 'Project Proton' to the Advisory Board members – the Business School's strategic plan for the next five years, focusing on several core areas, such as teaching and learning, research, building expertise and developing executive minds in Africa. Prof van Romburgh showed a short video summarising the key deliverables that are at the centre of the strategic plan – from attracting national and international thought leaders to share their expertise on the MBA programme to building a stronger African research culture and assisting staff, students and alumni to leverage lifelong learning opportunities with a view to boosting their career prospects. Quality, expertise, ethical leadership and engagement with Africa will be key drivers of Project Proton in the years ahead.

The video was well received by the Advisory Board. Prof van Romburgh acknowledged the talent and commitment of the marketing team who have been involved in giving Project Proton a visual identity.

Christo Botes expressed some concern about the ambitious, multi-dimensional nature of the plan and the fact that the School may not have the capacity to tackle all its envisaged initiatives effectively. Prof van Romburgh concurred, saying that the staff are currently very stretched and that it is challenging keeping everyone motivated – particularly in the current COVID environment which has induced so much uncertainty. As a result, Prof van Romburgh indicated further that the Business School is giving priority to three focus areas: the MBA programme, teaching and learning, and research. He also stressed the importance of keeping close to staff on a ‘one-on-one’ basis to better understand their needs and concerns.

7. OPERATIONAL REPORT BACK BY PROF VAN ROMBURGH

7.1 AMBA and other accreditations

Prof van Romburgh said things were on track regarding the preparation for AMBA accreditation in October and that the documentation had already been language edited. He added that the Business School would soon be making a permanent appointment to the position of manager of accreditation.

The Business School is also firmly on track with its application for AABS accreditation, with the preliminary interview scheduled for October 2022. Work on AACSB and Equis accreditation will start once the AMBA accreditation process has been completed and the accreditation manager has been appointed. These two accreditation paths will become regular items on future Advisory Board agendas and will be driven very hard, said Prof van Romburgh.

7.2 Infrastructure and technology

Prof van Romburgh reported that at present, the Business School had too many offices on the university campus in Mahikeng, with the 15 available offices currently being occupied by three people. Thus, the space is unlikely to be optimised in the foreseeable future. He also said that he was of the view that the Business School should not be on campus because it is exposed to the unrest and disruptions to which the Mahikeng campus is frequently exposed.

He said that in Vanderbijlpark, the Business School is at an advanced stage of renting offices and is currently engaging on issues such as space and pricing. However, there were a lot of legalities involved. It is not possible to open a university teaching and learning site without ministerial approval, but a marketing and administration office can be opened without such approval. Prof van Romburgh said he hoped that the occupation date would be 1 August and that the Business School would be settled in the new venue by around the middle of September.

7.3 Business School location in Gauteng

Prof van Romburgh reaffirmed the Business School’s intention to have a presence in Gauteng, but steps will be taken in that direction only once the location of the Business School in Vanderbijlpark has been sorted out. He said that he hoped Advisory Board meetings could be held at the Business School’s Gauteng office and, furthermore, that the Advisory Board could make use of the office facilities when required.

Nico commented that, as far as a Gauteng presence is concerned, Midrand would be accessible to both Johannesburg and Pretoria and could therefore be a good location for the Business School.

7.4 Teaching and learning

Prof van Romburgh dealt fully with the MBA enrolment figures for 2021 and how, if the Business School's administrative system had been able to 'catch last year's interest' more effectively, the School would have ended up with about 40 more MBA students. He emphasised that, although it had a sustainable cohort this year (just short of 80 students), the Business School operates in a competitive environment and has to act quickly – otherwise, it will lose out to its competitors. He reported that the other aspects of the operation are going well and that the School had been able (with considerable effort) to meet the AMBA requirement of 'one-on-one' interviews with MBA applicants.

Christo Botes suggested that it may be a good idea to 'oversubscribe' in terms of MBA student numbers (for example, take 120 for a target of 100) as there is a natural fall-off later once the programme gets under way. Missing the enrolment target affects the Business School's income, he said.

7.5 Executive education

Executive education is going well, according to Prof van Romburgh, and the financial problems have largely been sorted out. He said he wants to 'unleash the devil' by introducing a system of incentives to encourage people to bring business to the Business School. However, he admitted that such a system carries a lot of risks and would need to be well considered and introduced at the right time. He added that he wants to see executive education grow by 20% per year (as per the strategic plan).

Prof van Romburgh said that going the full online executive education route (not just Zoom lectures but full-blown online offerings) was not being considered at this stage, although it could have potential in the future. Online executive education would call for a very quick response to an identified need for a course as well as significant infrastructure and technological capacity. It would also mean that the Business School would effectively become a global player competing with offerings from all over the world.

7.6 Research and innovation

Prof van Romburgh acknowledged the efforts of Dr Lekunze in overseeing the Business School's research agenda and research-support activities, such as regular colloquia and scientific committee meetings and the annual MBA research day. He added that he is comfortable with the way things are going, especially the selection process, and is particularly heartened by the fact that the PhD programme is still oversubscribed. Moreover, the Business School has a number of international partners (professors and associate professors) who are adding to the Business School's research efforts.

7.7 Africanisation and internationalisation

Prof van Romburgh reported that much energy had gone into the various initiatives under the broad banner of 'Africanisation and internationalisation' – particularly the Bon-Bons in the first half of 2021, which hopefully will see similar momentum in the second half of the year. The Bon-Bons in August will give special attention to women in Africa.

Prof van Romburgh said that the Business School will be introducing a four-day, remote learning programme on project management as a contribution to skills development in Africa. The programme will be free of charge and therefore a direct expense for the Business School. However, the School should gain valuable exposure from the initiative and solicit interest in other, later offerings (which will carry a fee). Kenya and Botswana have already agreed to participate in the project management course and negotiations are currently under way with Nigeria.

Len Hansen enquired about a possible partnership with Mauritius, which had been mooted at an earlier Advisory Board meeting. Prof van Romburgh said that the Business School was exploring possibilities in Mauritius, including entering into a partnership with the University of Mauritius. The NWU has an MOU through which the NWU Business School may be able to offer its MBA programme. Although Len expressed concern about the small size (and thus viability) of the Mauritius market, Charlotte Mokoena said that there may be potential in specific fields in which Mauritius has a competitive advantage, such as governance and hospitality.

Prof van Romburgh acknowledged that COVID-19 has made it difficult to identify and establish contact points in Africa. However, the MOU with the National University of Lesotho has now been signed and a steady, incremental approach will be taken in tapping further opportunities for the foreseeable future.

7.8 Marketing, branding and stakeholder relations

Prof van Romburgh reported that a marketing plan was in place for the rest of 2021 and that the marketing budget for the next six months is double that of the first six months – largely made possible by the fact that staff have not been travelling. Billboards have gone up and fresh efforts will be channelled into podcasts and interviews with alumni.

Jeremy Sampson asked if the Business School has been using any metrics to determine the return on marketing investment, adding that marketing budgets can end up as ‘big black holes’. Prof van Romburgh said that the approach used up until now was to track ‘deliverables’, such as enrolments on a programme. But he admitted that more needs to be done to determine how the market actually perceives the Business School and the relative effectiveness of its marketing activities. He said he would welcome assistance from Jeremy in designing an appropriate marketing-spend measurement system for the School. **Action: Jan van Romburgh, Jeremy Sampson**

Jeremy emphasised that a ‘brand is a total experience’ and that one weak link could derail an entire marketing campaign. He suggested that the Business School may find the ‘conversion model’ useful, which involves taking active steps to move potential customers through a series of stages: awareness—familiarity—consideration—preference—loyalty. Christo Botes added that tracking social media-driven marketing activities was very important and that this could supplement the conversion model to drive and track market interest and reaction. Prof van Romburgh agreed to report back on the School’s social-media activities. **Action: Prof van Romburgh**

7.9 Outreach and interaction

A pilot outreach session with new graduates will be run in July and it is hoped that the Business School will get some traction from that process. The Business School's participation in a number of online events, such as the Career Fair, was 'mediocre', according to Prof van Romburgh, and there is room for improvement, but things are 'not stagnant'.

7.10 Quarterly meeting 2.2021 with NWU top management

Prof Parsons referred to an important innovation introduced this year – regular meetings between the university top management, members of the Business School Advisory Board (specifically the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson) and the Chief Director of the Business School. He added that the holding of these meetings served as important recognition of the key role played by the Business School in the university as a whole. Charlotte Mokoena commented favourably on the initiative, saying that the meetings provided an excellent platform to connect with the university and gain valuable strategic and academic insights.

Prof van Romburgh confirmed that AMBA will be looking specifically at how the university management is aligned with the Business School. He believed that the top management–Advisory Board meeting structure and the work of the Advisory Board in general provide concrete evidence of such alignment.

There was some discussion by Board members on the permissible and optimal size of the Advisory Board. According to the terms of reference, the maximum number of Advisory Board members is 15. Currently, there are 13 members of the Board. Prof Parsons explained that two of the original four vacancies had been filled and two more could be filled in due course, depending on how the current, 'new-look' Board operates and whether any gaps in expertise emerge, which would influence the selection process. It was agreed that if any of the Advisory Board members has suggestions for additional candidates, they should send them to Prof van Romburgh and Prof Parsons. **Action: All**

8. FINANCIAL REPORT BACK BY PROF VAN ROMBURGH

8.1 General overview and outlook

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

He was pleased to report that, following successful negotiations with the university management, the Business School's sizeable, accumulated negative reserve amount had been written off, leaving the School with positive reserves of some R6.4 million for 2021. This development was welcomed by different members of the Advisory Board as an opportunity to start from a 'clean slate' and an important step towards stabilising the School's finances.

Prof van Romburgh explained that the Business School is 'making money', but this does not come to the School directly. What he does have control over, however, are operating and capital expenses which, because of COVID (and the lack of travel and accommodation, and various other cost savings), are significantly reduced this year. Board members commented on the presentation of the figures and it was agreed that Prof van Romburgh would revise the format of certain financial tables for future Board meetings in the interests of clarity and consistency. **Action: Prof van Romburgh**

9. PERSONNEL

Prof van Romburgh reported that there had been several developments on the staffing front (resignations and impending retirements) and that a process of staff reassignment and/or new appointments is currently under way.

10. GENERAL

No general items were raised.

11. CLOSURE

Prof Parsons thanked the Advisory Board for their active participation and inputs, saying that it had been a 'good-news' meeting and a clear indication that the Board is making a valuable contribution to the Business School. Prof van Romburgh, in turn, thanked the Board members for their commitment and loyalty, adding that many other business schools were not so fortunate in having a strong team providing direction to the Business School in its many endeavours.

Prof Parsons declared the meeting closed at 11.35.

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Chairperson