

Race for Nust VC post heats up

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News

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By Confidente Reporter

THE financially struggling Namibia University of Science and Technology (Nust), is in the final process of selecting a substantive Vice Chancellor for the institution. The final candidate will be announced in the coming two weeks.

The successful candidate will replace former Vice Chancellor Tjama Tjivikua, who retired in March last year. Tjivikua had been at the helm of the tertiary institution since its formation as the Polytechnic of Namibia in 1995.

The two shortlisted candidates were expected to give public presentations on the topic, ‘A long-term strategy aimed at ensuring sustainable development and competitive advantage for Nust, during the Fourth Industrial Revolution, global and domestic economic downturn, Covid-19 and beyond’.

The interview panel was represented by an independent expert, Professor Thandwa Zizwe Mthembu, from the Durban University of Technology.

First candidate Dr Eroid Naomab holds a PhD in chemistry from the University of Nottingham and obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry and molecular and physiological biology at Unam and followed this up with a master’s degree in science at the same university. He then did a master’s degree in strategic resource management at the University of Nottingham before completing his PhD. He previously served as the head of Unam’s chemistry and biochemistry department.

His broad presentation was titled ‘463 transformation agenda #Unleash Nust’ and it touched on a wide array of topics.

“The current situation at Nust is that there is a financial recession which was implicated by Covid-19, weak relevance and impact, under performance in core functions, financial sustainability down in all four revenue streams, uncertainty about the signature and ideology and unsatisfactory services. I am bringing my vision 463 transformation agenda 2024.

Naomab explained that the institution needs to look at how Nust is going to respond to the challenges that they are currently facing:

“We have to look at the sustainability from the financial perspective and all the major incomes of the institution as consequences of Covid-19. We need to look at how we harness the ICT infrastructure to set up the economic infrastructure. We need to change our internal system such as governance and leadership. We should invest substantially into the future; here I am proposing the 463 transformation agenda which means we are going to look at impact at four different levels and then pursue six different goals. The three stands for the 360 degrees manner in which we are going to measure performance.

Naomab proposed the 1 Billion rising revolution to support Nust’s transformation.

“I am also proposing the 1Billion digital revolution which aims to support NUST transformation into an efficient business, enhances financial procedures and sustainability, transform services to professional services and enhance performance culture. The other goal is to enhance teaching and learning excellence, which aims at digitalising of teaching and learning, improve financial sustainability at programme level, enhance academic performance flexible, and enhance skills required for future workforce.

“Moreover another goal is advance research innovation and enterprise development, which aims at improving quality, set up smart business hubs in all regional centres, establish commercial holding company and improve financial sustainability,” he said.

On the other hand the other contender, Professor Frednard Gideon holds a PhD in applied mathematics (banking and finance, risk management and Basel II) from North-West University, and a master’s degree in science and mathematics from Rhodes University. He completed a Bachelor of Science degree at Unam. Gideon served as the dean of the faculty of science at Unam and was the first Namibian to occupy that position.

Gideon in his presentation outlined his first goal which aims at governance and leadership.

“The first strategy is very important. For a good managed university we have to plan; we need to plan for the great challenges of tomorrow. We will try to take the already Nust strategy to accommodate our new thinking, our plan will have a strong focus on people.

“My question is do we have the right people with the right skills? We will also clearly define our values and missions to ensure that Nust becomes a university of choice. We have to comply with material aspects of the SOE Act. The only asset any organisation has is its people. We have fewer professors and people with PHDs so we need to put an aggressive staff development to address this. Nust needs to be managed as a good cooperate citizen,” he said.

His second strategy focused on learning and teaching: “Young and old learners are moving around looking for employment. We need to make sure that our education is very broad and we need to revamp it. How can we do this? We are proposing that Nust becomes a model of virtual learning environment. We need to increase the students number to 30 000 in the next three or four years, and we should also have online learning.

“Covid was a good thing because it brought transformation. I am proposing an initiative of one student, one laptop. We will also have a strong work integrated programme that allows all the final year students to be in the industry. We will address graduate employability, instead of having departments we must build academic clusters,” he said.

In an equally wide-ranging presentation, Gideon also delved into research innovation and development, where he explained about a need to conduct research for the benefit of the society, transiting from basic research to applied research.

Gideon concluded saying, “The (first) 100 days in the office are very important even for a new leader. We will engage stakeholders. I will engage my executive to understand what is important, assess the organisation and develop the strategic plan by widely consulting and have their buy-in and have council approve it and then implement it”.

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