



# The university of global excellence

In many ways, and this is as it should be, the *South African Journal of Science* is at the heart of what may be termed the ‘establishment’ of academic and research life in South Africa. As a journal soon to celebrate 120 years of operation, we are part of our country’s science history and present, marked by the intertwining of science with instruments of power and influence. In recent years, we have been very active in trying to increase access to our pages and to broaden our readership, as evidenced, for example, by our [Inclusive Language Policy](#). But we are not a journal which sets up to disrupt, and our [Vision and Mission](#) are cast in very general terms, with a wish to include and diversify, rather than to take a specific political stand as a journal. Although we do not have the data to support this view, we imagine that among our authors and readers there are wide differences of opinion on what the statement “excellent South African research for the local and global academic community,” part of our Vision, does and should mean in practice.

This said, the heart of good science (and of good academic practice more broadly) is constructive, robust debate, and we are pleased that we are able to showcase debates in our journal. No academic, however much a part of the ‘establishment’ they may be, should shy away from critique and contestation. Dogma is the enemy of sound academic practice. It is in this spirit that when we came across Sioux McKenna’s poem, ‘Welcome to the University of Global Excellence’, we asked her if we could include it in an editorial in our journal. We are delighted she agreed. Sioux McKenna is the Director of the Centre for Postgraduate Studies at Rhodes University in South Africa, a globally known expert on higher education and a disciplined and thoughtful scholar on a range of topics – including the neoliberal university. We like her poem for a number of reasons; for example, it is great fun, and it speaks directly to experiences that many academics globally (and especially in South Africa) will recognise. Everything is there in the poem: the corporatisation and branding of universities, the peddling of ‘wellness’ in a context of increasing academic demands and precarisation of the academic workforce; the chasing of numbers and rankings when true quality in context is much harder to measure; the universities in the Global South still being in thrall to metrics designed from and for the Global North; and even the peddling of ‘decolonisation’ as a marketable product. And to top it all, this poem is meticulously referenced, with pointers to very important scholarly works.

## Welcome to the University of Global Excellence

Dear New Staff Member,

Congratulations!

You are joining a prestigious brand,  
ranked in the Top Five<sup>1</sup>  
hundred or so<sup>2</sup>.

Most of our permanent academics<sup>3</sup>  
rated working for us to be satisfactory<sup>4</sup>.

Student evaluations indicate that our lecturers<sup>5</sup>,  
are four and a half on a scale of 5.

Please ensure that you sign your performance agreement.<sup>6</sup>  
KPIs are publications.<sup>7</sup>

Terms and conditions are not negotiable.

Please join the Division of People’s Wellness and Culture<sup>8</sup>  
for online Meditations-at-Midday<sup>9</sup>  
to enhance productivity in afternoon meetings<sup>10</sup>.

Our Division of Customer Services is here to serve our students<sup>11</sup>,  
who are reminded to sign the disciplinary code<sup>12</sup>.

Every assignment must include a statement of originality,  
and be added to Turnitin’s® database.

Our Division of Teaching Excellence and Policy Compliance<sup>13</sup>  
drives throughput in regulation time.

Please join their monthly NAFFE workshops:  
Necessary Acronyms For Full Engagement.

The Division of Quality Enhancement, Assurance, Reporting,  
Monitoring and Evaluation<sup>14</sup>  
kindly requests that templates be completed quarterly<sup>15</sup>.

They must be signed off by the  
Executive Head of Department,  
Executive Dean<sup>16</sup>,  
and the Executive Director of the Division of People’s  
Wellness and Culture.

Welcome to the University of Global Excellence!  
We are an African University committed to decolonised education.

Sioux McKenna

Not everyone will agree with all the sentiments in the poem, and not everyone will agree with our decision to publish it, but that is the nature of debate. We enjoyed reading the poem and learned things at the same time – and we hope that our readers do as well.

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