



National Research Foundation
Box 2600,
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South Africa

14 December 2022

Re: Response to An Independent Review of the Customised Management Development Programme for the National Research Foundation covering the Period 2017 to 2021.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft review. We understand the aim of the review was to determine the efficacy of the programme in the period of implementation.

Bid Number NRF/CORP HRM 005/2017 required that the successful bidder was subject to ongoing performance review of the programme annually and a mid-term review in the second quarter of the third year. The specifications adhered to and assessed required that the programmes be relevant to the core and current business objectives and activities of the NRF, were designed according to Leadership Pipeline (Charan & Drotter or equivalent) and strengthened the NRF's competencies in the management of the following: vision and strategy, coaching and relationship, knowledge, organisational transformation and change, stakeholder, research, project, people and leadership, and financial. Special conditions of customisation required that the programmes included aspects of the NRF unique business operations, at the New-to-Management and Strategic level a research component being a case study of an existing NRF business challenge, and that examples relevant to NRF as a state-funded agency be explored.

The panel appointed by the NRF to conduct the review was convened by Prof Frans Maloa (UNISA), with panel members Prof Albert Wocke (Gordon Institute of Business Science: University of Pretoria), Dr Henriëtte Van den Berg (University of the Free State), and Prof Martin Oosthuizen (Southern African Regional Universities Association). We thank them for their valued input and recommendations regarding the contents of the programme with reference to the programme structure, the implementation and support provided to the beneficiaries, and the NRF HR's part in the administration thereof. We understand the methodology included a review of extensive documentation, interviews with relevant groups, and triangulation to validate responses and determine gaps. The report was structured according to the relevance and customisation of the design, selection criteria and process, programme delivery and faculty, administration, embedding the learning, support system, and the action learning project.

There was no evidence in the presentation of the draft of a review of the pre and post NRF leadership pipeline, or the impact on the succession planning process, both elements being central to the purpose of the programme. There was also no evidence of statistical analysis of the return on learning in terms of the action learning projects conducted between 2017 and 2022, with the project presentation date of the final intake at the Strategic level being post the panel review date.

The benefits to the beneficiaries were briefly outlined in terms of familiarisation with the concepts of leadership, the provision of tools to improve leadership skills and form well-functioning teams, and personal impact. The benefits to the NRF were acknowledged as the development of a common or shared language, an



understanding of the interrelationships between different parts of the business, and the competencies developed in terms of development and presentation of a business case, self-awareness of management style and problem-solving approach, stakeholder management, and critical capacity. The latter was defined as the ability to evaluate how consistently management principles and procedures are applied in the NRF and, particularly, in their divisions and sections, which signifies relevance, application and embedding of learning.

The shortcomings were identified as the impact on the professional skills relevant to the specific jobs of candidates being less pronounced, and the need for more attention paid to the development of specific skills that are relevant to the NRF. A review of the programme design at the three levels since the first iterations in 2017 shows that the programmes were reregistered annually based on revised designs proposed annually following extensive discussion and analysis of progress reports and participant evaluations at steering committees comprised of NRF and Stellenbosch Business School Executive Development representatives. With respect to the two synchronous programmes, in addition to revision of learning outcomes, faculty selection, content refreshes, and time frames, various additional support requirements were identified and included such as Line Manager and Sponsor guidelines. Perceived shortcomings related to specific modules in the subject areas of finance and research. With respect to the asynchronous programme, a complete refresh was developed midway in the implementation to ensure the delivery mode was aligned to cutting edge e-learning principles and practices.

Regarding the recommendations on perceived shortcomings, there are some points requiring clarification. Firstly, the NRF Strategic Management Development Programme was consistently registered as such, and never as a Senior Management Development Programme. Secondly, the concern raised regarding the extent to which a coaching programme focussed on personal development can become learning which can be articulated, is not relevant. The Bid specified the NRF competencies required, and the programmes addressed these. The recommendation that the programmes should have covered more content on transformation diversity is valid, as this is a challenge faced by organisations globally and the breadth and depth of shifts in thinking and behaviour required should not be underestimated. The perceived shortcoming that the programme was not sufficiently attuned and contextualised to the NRF sector and environment, requires further investigation. Benchmarking with other international grant-making organisations, if not sufficiently addressed in the current programme, is a relevant recommendation.

The shortcomings relating to selection criteria and process pertain to the role of the NRF HR and were addressed by Sino Simpson in her response during the presentation. These included that her suggestions to the panel were not included, that the NRF Future Managers Development Programme is already annual, that a pre-assessment is already in place, that participation is voluntary, and that the transferability of skills and competencies is different from a requirement for articulation.

Regarding the panel's view on the number of participants, the Bid specified the quantity and unit of measure and therefore not a subject open to consultation at the time of bidding and price commitment. Stellenbosch Business School Executive Development did however consult on participant numbers as well as postponement because of the Covid pandemic, and amicable compromises were reached.

It is pleasing to note that the faculty were highly regarded and considered knowledgeable experts in their respective fields. The perception that Faculty members were seen as facilitators of conversations and not as lecturers, is significant in the adult learning domain and particularly as NRF is a custodian of research and knowledge creation. Regarding programme delivery, enhancing the diversity of the presenters through the inclusion of senior executives of the NRF to present guest lectures in the relevant modules, is welcomed.



Regarding the modality, blended or hybrid approaches which bridge the divide between synchronous and asynchronous learning are integral to Stellenbosch Business School Executive Development's process. It is also pleasing to note that administration is rated highly.

Moving to the finding related to the embedding of the learning at an individual and organisational level, a formal system or process to promote the integration of learning into employees' performance and development plans, would be beneficial. Additionally, the realisation of the full potential of the programme to contribute to organisational learning through an analysis of the implementation of the action learning projects since inception, is low hanging fruit. Stellenbosch Business School Executive Development would see this as a logical next step in the scoping of future programmes. The panel's conclusion regarding the BDAL process adopts a binary view on whether the primary outcome of the programme is a solution to NRF challenges, or whether the primary objective is the achievement of learning outcomes for participants, and that a choice in emphasis is necessary. The Stellenbosch Business School Executive Development's philosophy is that action learning enables a number of shifts in thinking and behaviour at an individual, team and organisational level, and that the research framework, process, phases, marking rubrics and feedback implemented provide rigorous and transparent metrics. The selection of topics centres on focus, scope, and depth, and is relative to the aligned NQF level, moving from operational, through tactical to strategic. The level does not limit the learning to being either individual or organisational. The learning is both/and at all levels.

Regarding the overall quality assurance findings of the panel, the Triple Crown Accreditation takes into account both the formal qualifications of the Business School as well as the open enrolment and customised short courses offered by Executive Development. Responsibility for the academic quality assurance of University academic offerings, including short courses, rests with the Senate. Control measures for the quality assurance of academic offerings are described in the Regulations for the Quality Assurance of Short Courses, which Stellenbosch University adheres to through the Short Course Division. The duration of short courses is therefore dictated by policy, which is aligned to the maximum periods specified in the Bid. A programme is therefore by definition an event with start and end dates. The finding that an absence of an annual report on the training occurred is incorrect. All annual reports were submitted during the implementation period. The closeout reports for 2022 have been completed following the completion of the Final Presentations at the Strategic level and will be submitted under separate cover. As mentioned previously, this occurred after the panel review.

The panel view of sustainability of student participation is not evidence based. The lack of feedback platforms and the reiteration of the most important recommendations appears quite random, and certainly the last point relating to failure to complete a module requires clarification. Requirements of a certificate of competence are standardised, clearly articulated and communicated across all Stellenbosch University short courses. All modules are compulsory and a minimum pass of 50% is required in executive education. One resubmission is allowed should a student fail to meet the minimum requirement on the first submission based on the feedback supplied by the faculty. An objective synopsis of both the benefits and areas for improvement would have made for a holistic conclusion.

This concludes our response. We wish to thank all stakeholders for their input, and the NRF for the long-standing relationship and the mutual learning that occurs when partnering with an institution of the calibre of the NRF.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Trish Koning'.

Trish Koning, Commercial Director (MCom Indus Psych)