



STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS
Official Opening of the Academic Year 2026
Vice-Chancellor and Principal: Prof Khehla Ndlovu
Date: Tuesday, 03 February 2026
Venue: Desmond Tutu Great Hall, Vanderbijlpark Campus

Programme Director
Chancellor of the University,
Chairperson and Members of Council,
Members of Senate,
President and Deputy President of Convocation,
Deputy Vice-Chancellors,
Executive Deans, Executive Directors, and Directors
Leaders of organised labour and student formations,
Academic and professional staff,
Our students,
Distinguished guests,
Members of the VUT community,

Good morning.

It is a privilege to stand before you at the beginning of the 2026 academic year, gathered as one university community, united by purpose, responsibility and shared expectation.

Today, we do more than open an academic year.

We open a new chapter in the life of this institution, anchored in evidence, discipline and forward momentum.

An academic opening is not ceremonial theatre. It is a moment of institutional truth. It is where leadership must account honestly for what was promised, what has been delivered, what has been corrected, and what must now be consolidated.

When I was inaugurated in March 2025, I said that VUT had to move beyond episodic reform and enter a period of sustained institutional rebuilding, anchored in ethical leadership, academic coherence and operational sufficiency. That statement was not rhetorical flourish. It was a mandate to act, often in difficult circumstances, and sometimes in uncomfortable ways.

Today, one year later, I report back not with intentions, but with outcomes.

Over the past year, the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) has exited a period of institutional fragility and entered a phase of governed stability. This did not happen by chance. It happened because Council, management, staff and students accepted that stability is not an abstract concept. It is built through systems, discipline and consequence.

Governance at VUT has been materially strengthened. Council has approved and implemented revised financial and procurement policies that restore integrity, transparency and accountability to the use of public resources. A Strategic Risk Register and a 2026 Annual Work Plan are now firmly embedded, ensuring that risk is anticipated rather than reacted to. An Ethics Policy and Ethics Committee, aligned to King IV principles, are operational, reaffirming that ethical leadership is not optional at this institution. In plain terms, governance at VUT now works, and where it does not, it is corrected.

This renewed governance discipline has underpinned financial stabilisation. Over the past 18 months, Council decisions have decisively restored VUT's financial credibility. The University has approved and implemented a balanced institutional budget exceeding two billion rand, with an operational surplus. Long-standing legacy matters have been resolved lawfully and responsibly, including the write-off of prescribed and deceased-student debt, ensuring compliance and balance-sheet integrity. Most importantly, Council has adopted a Financial Sustainability Implementation Plan that moves VUT away from survivalism and towards long-term institutional viability. This matters because no academic excellence survives financial instability.

Staff and students have consistently raised concerns about the cleanliness of our campuses. In 2025, Council approved an emergency maintenance programme that will see the revitalisation of the VUT campuses. You have noticed as you move around the scores of contractors making sure that dignity is restored to our academic, administrative and residential environments.

Stability has also allowed us to move from deferred maintenance to deliberate development. For the first time in many years, VUT is not merely repairing infrastructure. It is intentionally building capacity. The Life and Physical Sciences Building, which for many years stood as a visible symbol of stalled development, has now been formally reactivated. A service provider has been appointed to complete the project, marking a decisive shift from delay to delivery and positioning the facility as a flagship investment in advanced teaching and research.

In parallel, and beyond academic infrastructure, the refurbishment of the Isak Steyl Stadium represents a strategic investment in sport, community engagement, and institutional reputation. Over recent years, the stadium has emerged as one of the University's most visible assets and a preferred venue for professional clubs and sporting organisations within the Vaal region, owing to its well-maintained facilities and secure environment.

The refurbishment programme is intended to consolidate this position, ensuring that the Isak Steyl Stadium remains a facility of choice, contributes meaningfully to the regional sports ecosystem, and continues to serve as a powerful institutional marketing and reputational asset.

Importantly, this investment also directly supports student development and competitive sport. Our football team, one of only eight teams competing in the Varsity Cup, will finally have a permanent home ground on campus, strengthening institutional pride, student participation, and national visibility.

A multi-phase Integrated Infrastructure Master Plan is being implemented across campuses, covering academic facilities, student centres, residences and security infrastructure. Student accommodation expansion, amounting to more than five thousand additional beds, directly addresses student dignity, safety and success. This is not cosmetic development. It is institutional capacity creation.

Academic renewal has progressed in parallel. Since 2024, Council and Senate have approved new qualifications, including the Master of Health Sciences in Medical Laboratory Science and the Diploma in Ecotourism. Progress has been made towards audit readiness by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), as well as the University's blended learning self-evaluation, positioning VUT as a quality-driven institution rather than one that merely complies with minimum requirements. An Institutional Enrolment Plan for 2026 to 2030 has been endorsed, aligning growth with staffing, infrastructure and research output targets. This is how academic credibility is rebuilt: quietly, rigorously and systemically.

However, members of the VUT community, a State of the University Address would be incomplete, and dishonest, if it did not address the matter of investigations. Students, staff and partners deserve clarity, not rumours.

Let me therefore state this plainly.

The historical trajectory of VUT has not always been steady. Over several years, the institution contended with governance, administrative and control weaknesses that eroded confidence and institutional coherence. These challenges are neither denied nor minimised. They form part of the context within which decisive corrective action has been undertaken.

When I assumed office, I made it clear that institutional integrity, ethical governance and accountability are non-negotiable, and that legacy issues would be confronted openly rather than concealed. In that spirit, a number of investigations are currently underway, not as reactions to media pressure, but as part of a deliberate institutional clean-up.

The University commissioned an independent investigation into admissions and academic integrity matters, conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers. This process was initiated before recent media reports and forms part of our broader effort to stabilise governance and strengthen internal controls. The investigation is at an advanced stage, and its findings will inform disciplinary and consequence-management processes in accordance with labour legislation and University policy.

In addition, the University is addressing information received through whistle-blowing channels. Individuals involved in the relevant processes have been identified, information-gathering is underway, and where necessary, precautionary suspensions have been effected to protect the integrity of the process.

Council has established a dedicated Task Team to oversee these matters and has appointed external service providers to ensure independence and credibility. Furthermore, the Special Investigating Unit is currently on campus, conducting state-mandated investigations into historic governance and operational matters following a Presidential Proclamation. This process is part of a national effort to restore institutional integrity and address systemic weaknesses.

Let me be clear. Investigations are not signs of collapse. They are signs of correction. They are evidence that this institution is willing to confront its past in order to secure its future. Where wrongdoing is confirmed, consequence management will follow. Where systems are found wanting, they will be strengthened. And where individuals have acted with integrity, that integrity will be protected.

In parallel, preventative measures have already been implemented. Admissions and registration controls have been tightened. Verification processes have been enhanced. Governance and compliance frameworks have been strengthened. The Fraud and Ethics line remains active and resourced. Trust, as I have said before, is earned through action, not assertion.

Colleagues and students, as we approach VUT's 60th anniversary in 2026, we are not celebrating longevity alone. We are celebrating direction.

The Strategy 2033+, adopted and signed by Council, commits this University to leading innovation for a digitally-smart industrial transformation. The Jubilee year marks a pivot point: from recovery to performance, from planning to execution, and from ambition to impact. This is the year where strategy stops being a document and becomes daily practice.

Central to this is our decision to position VUT as a hybrid university. Council has endorsed this not as an emergency response, but as a permanent institutional posture. Flexible delivery modes, investment in digital infrastructure, faculty development for blended pedagogy, integrated student support services, and data-driven monitoring of student success are already visible across the institution. Hybrid learning at VUT is not experimental. It is institutional policy.

Transformation, however, does not occur through structure alone. It occurs through people. Over the past year, Council has approved new salary scales and adjustments aimed at retaining institutional talent and stabilising the workforce. Contracts for more than three hundred and seventy staff members will be phased as we implement the new human resources structure arising from Council approved organisational refinement.

Importantly, as we now move into the implementation phase of Organisational Refinement, the University has commenced a formal skills audit, including fixed-term contract employees, to ensure that capability, experience and institutional memory are properly recognised. This process is not about exclusion. It is about alignment. Where skills and roles are matched to the refined structure, the intention is to convert long-serving fixed-term contracts into permanent appointments, in a manner that is fair, transparent and compliant with labour legislation.

This work is complex. It must be done carefully and responsibly. But it is necessary if we are to build a stable, motivated and future-ready institution.

Let me end where leadership is tested, not celebrated: with responsibility.

Strategy does not implement itself. Council resolutions do not execute themselves. Transformation does not happen by announcement. It happens when academics teach with purpose, when professional staff enable excellence, when students engage with discipline, and when leaders act with courage.

As we open the 2026 academic year, we do so not with slogans, but with substance. We have stabilised. We have rebuilt. We are consolidating. Now, we must perform.

May 2026 be remembered as the year VUT turned structure into strength, strategy into systems, and ambition into lived experience.

I wish you a focused, disciplined and successful academic year.

I thank you!