

EXCERPT FROM THE FINAL ADDRESS TO THE STAFF OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GUYANA

by
Professor Lawrence D. Carrington
Outgoing Vice-Chancellor

As many of you already know, my contract with the UG ends at March 31st. I want to take this opportunity to update you on where we are in the progress of the University and to ensure that you are conscious of the direction in which we are headed.

My plan is to report on initiatives that have been completed, inform you on those that are incomplete and in train, and comment on the factors that have affected our success as well as on those that could induce failure if we are not vigilant. I feel it is important to include reference to some other matters, not directly part of my own stewardship, but which are parallel developments of a progressive nature contributing to our institutional well being.

Physical plant and environment

We have had some success in dealing with our physical plant. I need not detail these improvements as they are visible. On the other hand, the so-called new wing of the Library remains a cause for concern since its subsidence into the soil has been uneven. I reassure all of you that we are taking the necessary technical steps to appraise the integrity of the structure and to ensure that it remains safe for use. We still have the Stables operational; Communication Studies is suffering and SEES still has no home.

I wish to urge that the University should never allow the position of Director of Estate Management to be unfilled or to fall into abeyance. The maintenance of an estate of this size requires a very highly trained professional who must be given the support of appropriate financial provisions to stay ahead of the decay that besets every structure that is left unattended in a country with the topographical characteristics and climate peculiar to Guyana.

Within the same area of concern (i.e. our physical plant), I wish to compliment Mr. William Harris and his colleagues in the Faculty of Technology and the students of the architecture programme for the work they have been doing in creating a master plan for the Turkeyen Campus. The work on the master plan for the campus is sufficiently advanced that we can begin to use it as a reference for decisions on building provisions that will be coming to us. We must associate the master plan initiative with the work that was done by our ten working groups on the infrastructure of the University. Together, they provide a proper record of the state of the Turkeyen campus, a rational projection for its future physical development and an index of the priorities that we would want to attach to the long list of desirable additions to the campus if the University of Guyana is to adequately serve this nation.

The campus master plan will also allow us to correctly accommodate a new health facility on the campus for which preliminary drawings have already been prepared. We need here to pursue aborted interaction with the Ministry of Health of the Government of Guyana to advance that development.

Perhaps, the single most important success that we can report is the negotiation of the World Bank Science and Technology Support Project. The project should see an input to the University of Guyana of about US\$10 million over a five year period aimed at three broad areas – the rehabilitation and refurbishing of our science and technology laboratory facilities in four of our

faculties at Turkeyen; the review and reform of our science curriculum and some support for research towards low carbon themes. The proposal includes the creation of a fibre-optic ring and networking for IT capacity in the Turkeyen Campus and appropriate complementary capacity and linkage at the Berbice Campus. The loan to the Government of Guyana is not yet activated because the Minister of Finance is still to sign a crucial financial loan document. Work on the World Bank loan involved scores of you in repeated data-gathering exercises and many internal meetings as well as meetings with visiting World Bank teams. My hope is that the university will continue to press for this loan to be activated and to cooperate with the processes that it will entail.

Operational environment

The governance structure of the university is archaic. I made the observation in 2009. Our statutes, rules, regulations, procedures and policies belong to an era long past and cannot be left to clutter the 21st century. We need to bring UG in line with what obtains at other universities around the world. To this end, we have succeeded in obtaining from the Caribbean Development Bank a substantial grant to allow us to engage a consulting firm to review our regulatory framework to improve our operations. We have gone through the rigorous procedures required by the Bank for managing the bidding process and in a matter of days we are scheduled to engage in negotiations with the successful bidder.

What do you have to do with this, you might ask. The review of the regulatory framework of the University is not a matter exclusively for the administration of the University. It concerns all of us in a very intimate way. It is an opportunity to debate and propose the solutions at a structural level that would lead us into genuinely contemporary operational styles. In short, this project is our opportunity to change significant aspects of UG. It will happen only if you all make a concerted effort, not merely to collaborate with the investigative processes but even more importantly, to press our higher committees to make the changes that come from the recommendations of the review. The outcome of the project must not be another shelf report. It has to be an active engagement in change of the many oppressive and inhibiting features of the UG that have prevented it for many decades from fulfilling the potential it was expected to mobilise. The archaic governance and management and administrative structures of the University must no longer be allowed to provide an excuse or a shelter for inefficiency and incompetence.

Staffing, staffing policy and the competitiveness of the UG as an employer

There is a significant amount of unfinished business in the area of conditions of service and staffing policy. The elephant in the room is the matter of staff salaries. At the last annual business meeting of the University Council held on November 11th, I made the following points.

Beyond dealing with the physical environment and the overall governance provisions, we must also address the quality of our staff and how we provide for them to be effective and efficient. That involves interlocking factors such as the competitiveness of the university's **salaries and benefits**, the **terms and conditions** of service, the **confidence** that staff can have in the **fairness of appraisal**, the systems of **incentives, rewards and recognition**. We will not justify the label of university if all we can show in a teaching and research staff of three hundred and fifty-nine (359) academics are nine (9) professors and seventeen (17) senior lecturers. Only two departments are headed by professors, both temporary and only four by senior lecturers, one temporary. If all we can offer a professor at the top of our scales is the equivalent of US\$1,725 per month, we will not be able to compete with a Caribbean competitor offering the equivalent of US\$8,429 at a comparable level. **So our planning has to shift the matter of emoluments to the top of the agenda.**

Friday, January 27, 2012

2:00p.m.

University of Guyana, Turkeyen Campus

What have we done in this area? We have more proposals than concrete achievements. However, I do wish to have you know of a few baby steps that relate to the matter of terms and conditions of service.

We shaped an initial proposal for the improvement of salaries which involved a simple knock out of the bottom tier of the scales and the addition of another tier at the top – sort of global shift of everyone up one step on the scale ladder. It has stalled though in the face of severe budgetary handicaps but it can be revived as part of a more widely conceived review of the salary issues.

We have comparative data from all the campuses of the UWI to give us some reference points for our own adjustments and this can be made available to those of you who will be working on new proposals for salaries. Salaries are not the only issue in staff satisfaction and I must make mention of a few other pieces that are pertinent.

We have a design for a system of Awards for Excellence but we have not been able to mobilise it yet. We succeeded in broadening one small benefit so that what used to be the book allowance is now an academic materials allowance. We established a credit line to Dell computers that allows the University, its staff and other members of the University community to purchase those computers at significantly reduced prices through our Bursary. We have done significant work on reviewing the University's policy on attendance and punctuality in relation to promotion. We have also delved into changing the policy on the participation of members of the UB and UA non-academic staff in study programmes that require attendance during standard working hours. The last of these baby steps is that the road is open for us to formulate proposals for duty free concessions on the purchase of vehicles on a wider scale than is now the case.

Most recently, we have drafted proposals for improving our policy on staffing and staff recruitment and it has already been discussed at the level of the University Council. For several years, we have functioned with an academic staffing policy that is based on the calculation of full-time equivalent staffing. The policy is accompanied by a recruitment practice in which we advertise for recruits in the subject areas in which we anticipate need for teachers but we do not specify the level of appointment.

An unintended consequence of our recruitment policy and practice has been that our recruitment is biased towards lower level appointments in the academic hierarchy. That bias reduces the mentoring capacity of the faculty and mentoring opportunities for faculty members. That in turn compromises the development of excellence and special competences because it tends to favour general proficiency at the expense of specialisation. Furthermore, the reliance on FTE reference points for composite staffing by areas necessary for programme delivery invites abuse by fragmentation of teaching loads across part-time staff with small allocations.

I have recommended instead that the University should determine an establishment of full-time core staff for each of its units, departments, faculties and schools. The University would then advertise vacancies against that establishment and seek to fill them at the level advertised. The approach should have the effect of

- increasing our capacity for postgraduate offerings,
- increasing the capability for faculty to develop specialisations that are pertinent to the national agenda,
- enhancing the probability of experienced senior leadership within departments, and
- avoiding the negative aspects of recruitment based on the existing policy.

The University's Council is very well disposed towards the idea and wants to have fuller propositions including details on the structure of the core staffing for our departments. The onus is

Friday, January 27, 2012

2:00p.m.

University of Guyana, Turkeyen Campus

now on the staff to follow up this initiative. We must be aware though that a policy of that nature cannot work in isolation from more attractive terms and conditions of work and sensibly competitive emoluments and rewards.

Financing the University

One of the activities that I regret not having been able to advance is a consultation on the financing of tertiary education for Guyana. We need to bring together a select group of the many internationally recognized persons who have dealt with the issue of financing tertiary education in other countries. We need persons from countries with a variety of developmental profiles so that we here at UG and in Guyana can apply ourselves to crafting sensible national and institutional policies and practices on financing tertiary education.

This University has been skillful in doing more with less. I admire what our colleagues have been able to accomplish with the pittances that represent their annual budgets at the departmental and faculty levels. The cry from outside has been that we should increase our efficiency in the use of funds. Heaven knows we try. Others say we must run the University like a business enterprise. But they do not talk of the capital investment that businesses start with in order to earn their profits. These are not excuses. They are realities. In order to earn one *has* to invest.

We have exposed our need very clearly by submitting deficit budgets to the government. We have sought to have adjustments in fees when we offer new programmes in an attempt to recover the costs of the specific programmes. We also tried to get ourselves listed for tax relief allowances on donations to the University. In respect of active expenditure, we have worked towards adjustment of the fees that we pay to the UWI for their oversight of our law programme. However, the financing of the University has to be addressed with much wider reference points than those we have been using. Part of the input has to be a clear state policy on the place of tertiary education and research in national development. My hope is that the University will be able to use the beginnings that the administration has sketched in this regard and advance towards a consultative dialogue that will produce a significantly more tenable financial position for the UG and the genuine development within it of a capacity to sustain itself.

As far back as January 2010, we enjoyed a marvelous consulting intervention from a team of UWI colleagues who offered a workshop on quality assurance. Quite apart from the instructional aspects of their work with us, their report was comprehensive in its recommendations on how we might proceed in establishing our quality assurance systems. Regrettably, we have not been able to finance the project. We appointed a QA coordinator, Mr. Gary Mendonca, but his hands have been tied by the lack of dedicated financial support for the initiative. This is an area that we should give absolute priority in shaping the new strategic plan for the University.

Planning matters

In April 2009, we had a stalled strategic plan. It was supposed to cover 2006 to 2011 but there we were in 2009 with a stalled plan. Dr. Marlene Cox worked with me to help me understand the background to the plan and explained very carefully what had contributed to the stall. It was vital knowledge for me in leading us to a new plan, 2009-2012. We are now at the point where we need a new plan. I record here my appreciation and admiration for the team which undertook the mid-term review of the strategic plan. The review has been widely circulated to all members of the Academic Board, the Committee of Deans, the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the University Council. It is not a privileged document and Deans can share it freely with staff.

The review of the 2009-2012 strategic plan and in particular the section entitled "Where do we go from here" at pages 24 to 26 is an important plank for the University to build its new plan to take it into its second half century. Our fiftieth year of existence will be 2013 and you will have to build the next half-century by making wise and bold decisions in shaping our new plan.

We continued to address the national needs in respect of the low carbon development strategy. During 2010, we held a string of workshops to identify research projects that this University could undertake with appropriate financing to support that policy. We came up with seventy (70) different project sketches in support of the strategy. More recently in 2011, we conducted a groundbreaking public consultation on the development of an International Centre for Biodiversity Research and Low Carbon Development (ICBR). The initiative was interrupted by the shift of national attention to the recently concluded elections but all the work is fully documented and is ready for resumption of the thrust to take advantage of the Guyana-Norway agreements that are to support the LCDS. I might mention that the World Bank Science and Technology Support Project to which I made reference, includes funding for feasibility studies for the ICBR.

Curriculum

Related to this attempt to serve the nation are our initiatives to engage in serious curriculum review. The Faculty of Social Sciences was the first off in starting to look at itself in relation to contemporary social science knowledge and the needs of Guyana in their fields of work. The Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry has advanced further because they have received support from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA) to overhaul their curriculum and they have wisely associated the Guyana School of Agriculture with that initiative. The World Bank loan has funding earmarked for curriculum reform in science and technology.

Most recently, I have made proposals to the Committee of Deans and to the Academic Board on initiating programme renewal. I would urge the Academic Board to consider the pathway towards change that I articulated in that document and to adopt some version of it as a coherent work plan to propel the University forward. In the absence of this or some other plan, UG will continue to drift or stagnate. Piecemeal efforts, no matter how attractive each piece, cannot provide the forward momentum required if the University is to support the developmental aspirations of Guyana.

Finally, let me restate my purpose in making this presentation. I am offering you an agenda for action after my departure. I would hope that you would also be persuaded to persevere with initiatives that you have already begun at individual and unit levels for the development of the University.