

This is more than just UG business

Dear Editor,

It has been almost a week since media houses in Guyana have broadcasted to the general public, sometimes rival versions, though always relevant aspects, of the same story unfolding at the University of Guyana. Despite the abundance of information, many Guyanese are still starved for want of understanding the fundamental issues affecting UG. Presently, we wish to address two of these issues: (1) the need for business continuity of the overall operation and administration of the University and, (2) that, the tipping point of frustration reached by staff and students alike, regarding the extant deplorable and embarrassing situation at UG appears to escape the general public. It is not our intention to appeal to the media houses to expose all the fundamental issues to the nation. Rather, we only wish to highlight the issues that have been overshadowed by others of lesser importance that have emerged.

With respect to the first issue, we write concerning the occupation of the post of Vice-Chancellor (VC). The VC is the Principal and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the University. To understand the significance of this role, one needs only to visualise the combined roles of the Principal of a school and the CEO of a business firm. In essence, the VC is responsible for all aspects of the functioning of the university. The VC's contract and remit are of such local, national and international importance, that it is negotiated and issued at the level of the University's Council, chaired by the Chancellor. It is important for stakeholders to separate the business functions of the University from the role of monitoring and evaluation of the University.

While some may argue about the relative performance of past and present VCs, in this write up, this is not the concern. The reason being is that tenure of each VC has occurred in different contexts and attendant circumstances. While it is useful to compare apples with apples, our situation at UG is not a simplistic one. An analysis of the performance of the VCs, in the contexts in which they led the institution, is critical. Moreover, performance must be assessed with due consideration for the underlying pillars of top performing organisations: impact on organisational behaviour, fostering of a system for business continuity, sustainability of meaningful contribution to national issues of development, and the overall business success of the University.

Professor Rory Fraser, a Guyanese living and working in the US, who visited and spent much time with us here at the UG, has done a phenomenal job at summarizing the impacts and performance of our current VC, Professor Lawrence D Carrington. Professor Fraser has given due consideration to the context within which Professor Carrington lead the University of Guyana. We fully endorse his analysis. Professor Fraser has clearly established the undeniable fact that within the existing context, Professor Carrington has done an exemplary job worthy of commendation.

It appears to us that Professor Fraser analysis stops just short of emphasising the need for continuity to guarantee long-term sustainability of initiatives, and an estimation of the relevance of Professor Carrington to the future of the University of Guyana. With regards to the former, the

report which Professor Carrington gave to the University community on Friday January 27th, (now available online at http://www.uog.edu.gy/files/documents/Vice_Chancellor_Carrington_Final_Address.pdf) clearly highlighted unfinished businesses. This includes elements of the following: physical plant and environment, operational environment, staffing, staffing policy and the competitiveness of the UG as an employer, financing, planning and curriculum. Much of these unfinished businesses are the result of the state of the institution when he took the position of VC, and the resistance he faced from those in authority who should have been assisting him - this is also addressed in Professor Fraser's letter. Professor Carrington was hired with a mandate that included the transformation of the University of Guyana into an entity that can attract a suitably qualified and experienced person to the Office of VC. **This is not complete.** If Professor Carrington's address on Friday 27 January was indeed a farewell, then should the search for a new VC begin, the University cannot attract and retain a person of the same calibre as Professor Carrington. Suitable persons may take the position out of a willingness to face the challenge and a philanthropic heart, but unsuitable persons may take it for power and to add to their CVs, the latter will be no good to the University. For this reason the University needs to lean on Professor Carrington's network, reputation and judgement to secure a substantive VC, as he did in the identification of our current Chancellor.

On the matter of relevance for the future, it is clear that while changes have occurred in the composition of the National Assembly, the impact of this is not yet felt at the UG. Until positive impact becomes evident, the reality of yesterday is likely to be the reality of tomorrow. Thus the need for formidable leadership that is impenetrable to powerful negative influences is reinforced. The UG needs Professor L D Carrington in its transition to the next VC, to guarantee its continued development.

The second issue is that there is a general perception that the current state of affairs at the University, is 'UG's business'. This perhaps explains why there has been no public outcry. Worse, is the fact that much of our student and staff population has taken that precise position. Except, they say this is a 'UG Administration business'. As it relates to the issues of lecturers they say, it is the business of the affected Faculties/Departments and Classes. This is an extremely sad reality, perhaps even the beginning of a national abscess.

The University of Guyana is a public institution, not a private entity. Further it is OUR ONLY national institution for higher learning. The inadequate, meagre financing it receives from the State comes from tax payers. The UG was established to serve the Guyanese people. The motto: 'Serve Guyana'. If you at least have nursery education, have ever been sick, had a matter of law to address or require any such professional service, there is a greater than 50% chance that you would have depended on a Teacher, Doctor, Lawyer or Judge/Magistrate first trained at the UG. Institutions which manage our natural resources and environment have 50-100% of their technical staff trained at the UG. Business leaders, technical/administrative personnel and consultants that form the private sector were mostly trained at the UG. Formally educated officers of the Armed Forces that defend us were mostly trained at the UG. There are students in primary and secondary schools who dream of coming to the UG.

Despite its realities, the UG has, and continues to, serve the nation of Guyana. Anything that threatens its effectiveness, efficiencies and its very existence also affects the nation. The current issues in the public are therefore not simply 'UG's business'; it is the business of the **GUYANESE PEOPLE**. Whether or not the conditions of the UG change today shall determine the extent to which the conditions of the nation change tomorrow. Whether or not the UG gets good leadership today shall determine the quality of national leadership tomorrow. Whether or not the UG is allowed to develop today, shall determine the development of the nation. Whether or not the UG survives today shall determine if the nation survives tomorrow. **THIS IS GUYANA'S BUSINESS. GUYANA SHOULD KNOW. GUYANA SHOULD CARE. GUYANA SHOULD ACT.**

Yours faithfully,

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