

## LEADING AN INSPIRED ONE SMART UNIVERSITY

### THE POWER OF GREAT IDEAS AND THE VALUE OF ALL VOICES

Standing here today, I am reminded of the profound and powerful words of Kofi Annan when he said:

*“We may have different religions, different languages,  
different coloured skin, but we all belong to one human race.”* – Kofi Annan.

This is the CPUT I want to describe today. I will structure my talk around three parts as follows:

1. The value of education and the call for smartness
2. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology smartness in context and content
3. My commitment in inspiring Cape Peninsula University of Technology towards smartness.

I stand here today as the Vice Chancellor and Principal of Cape Peninsula University of Technology. That is the position to which I was appointed two hundred and fifty-two days ago, I also stand here today as a boy from Paul Roux.

My story is not a unique story. It reverberates and resonates through the hearts and minds of many of our predecessors and many of those that will follow us. The boy grew up in the rural fields of the Free State. He is defined by his birth and the traditions that surrounded him in the hinterland of Paul Roux also known as Fateng Tse Ntsho. He is not remarkable. Indeed, he thought simply, spoke simply, ate simply and lived a simple life. In my case, my late father Mlindazo Nhlapo, fervently believed that if one does not wake up early, there is no progress on anything. He encouraged waking up before daybreak, when almost everyone else around was still asleep, because that is when creativity soars and energy and productivity double. According to him, these habits contributed to health, wealth and wisdom. This routine engendered the development of keystone habits and a framework for the expression of greatness. This is still my wiring, even if there are no cows to milk and the cold Free State winters have been replaced by the mountains and blue oceans that surround our Mother City.

Coming from the hinterland with a very strong agricultural background, it was easy to relate to the remarkable scientific principles and discoveries:

- The discovery of the Laws of Gravity made perfect sense and related to apples falling from the trees straight to the ground;
- The clear skies with bright shining stars (selemela, makolobe, tosa, mphatlalatsane and motjhotjhonono), that were known by their names and by their meanings in relation to the seasons, made astronomy and universal gravitation very real; and
- Swimming in the dirty dams and rivers made it easy to relate to Archimedes's 'Eureka!' moment and the Archimedes Principles, and I fondly related to Einstein's Laws of Relativity in this way.

The boy dreamt of studying at the University of Fort Hare (UFH) in the then Republic of Ciskei. The reasons were simple:

Firstly, all the greatest Leaders of Africa had studied at Fort Hare. Pres [Kenneth Kaunda](#), Sir [Seretse Khama](#), Mwalimu Kambarage [Julius Nyerere](#), [Robert Gabriel Mugabe](#), [Joshua Nkomo](#), [Mangosuthu Buthelezi](#) and [Madiba](#). Secondly, coming from a family where neither parent could read or write, the long-term effects of parents' educational and occupational success on children were obvious, even though, at that time, success meant having Junior Certificate, in rare cases, a matric or, in very rare cases, just the ability to read or write a letter for 'ugogo'. That dream did not transpire as the study permit never arrived. He attended the second stream education system and then, through sheer circumstance was allowed into the Potchefstroom University for Christian HE. The boy from Paul Roux was now a PhD student in Chemistry in a primarily Afrikaans speaking HE environment. It was an enriching and fulfilling experience of which knowledge was the key. The boy from Paul Roux became Dr Chris Nhlapo. Ladies and gentlemen, history defines us, but it does not determine our future. It is ours to create.

I have elected this path and humbly accepted the appointment as your Vice Chancellor and Principal, not because I am better or more qualified than anyone else, but because I believe in the nature of smartness that describes the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, the power of great ideas and the value of our collective voices.

## PART 1: THE VALUE OF EDUCATION AND THE CALL FOR SMARTNESS

Education is the great equalizer of the conditions of men and the balance-wheel of the social machinery. [As succinctly stated by Madiba: "Education is the most](#)

*powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*” It is the key to eliminating gender inequality, to reducing poverty, to creating a sustainable planet, to preventing needless deaths and illness, and to fostering peace. In a knowledge economy, education is the new currency by which nations maintain economic competitiveness and global prosperity. It was in this context that, amongst others, one of the most important points of the first meeting of All-African Peoples' Conference at Accra in 1958 was adopted. Africa was to be free and united. In today's terms, at the center of the true African revolution and unity is education. Therefore, given where we are as a developmental state, we must stand on peace and stability in the education sector. Our students have the right to education and to the creation and sharing of knowledge.

The concept of smartness is not new. There is much written about smart universities. It talks to the smartness in the academic and research offering and the campus infrastructure. It is quickly becoming a fundamental requirement of how universities behave and who and what they set out to be. Cape Peninsula University of Technology is more than that. We are the remarkable people that took Cape Peninsula University of Technology through inception as a University of Technology to the highlights that we often celebrate. We have achieved many firsts:

1. I think of the continent's most advanced nano-satellite launched from the Russian space center on 27 December 2018 that put Cape Peninsula University of Technology and the African continent on the global space maps.
2. I think of the fully-owned 100% HOLDING COMPANY AONYX registered. I think of Amaya Space. The company aims to be the first truly transformed space company, by Africans, for Africans. Indeed, Cape Peninsula University of Technology is possibly the University of Technology with a fully-owned registered Holding Company – fully-owned by Aonyx Holdings.
3. I think of SARETEC (the South African Renewable energy center). We only have one planet. We have been favoured and it is time we reciprocate. Clean and renewable energy is the future for the entire continent. We as Cape Peninsula University of Technology will make it our top priority to play a critical role in SA's energy transition which can be beneficial to all. SA government is backing renewable energy, more has to be done to get everyone one on board.
4. I think of the following technologies that has been commercialized by our technology transfer portfolio: space technologies, braai tools, post-operative male circumcision, Nutri Caro-E and Omega Caro-E and

Rooibos SlowRedT.

I think of the considerable work done in science, quantum computing, renewable energy, food technology and the health benefits of rooibos tea, cardiometabolic health and many more. That is us. That is the essence of ONE SMART Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Cape Peninsula University of Technology's smartness refers to our unique technology focus which has always been the identifying factor in the Cape Peninsula University of Technology DNA. Moreover, it is in the smartness in our talented people, our staff and our students, that is, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology smart society. It is in the stories we tell and the legends and heroes we celebrate and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology uniqueness as expressed by our specific engagement and uptake approach and the internationalisation efforts we pursue.

These are the measures that set us apart and tell the story of our smartness. We take seriously our technologyness (or, rather, our university of technology'ness) as expressed by our University of Technology status. From a macro-perspective, we as South Africans, need to get to grips with the phenomenal opportunities and innovations that are 4IR. I am sure that there are vast pockets that are still under explored. I believe we find ourselves very much on the cusp of a digital world of AI, robotics, big data and analytics and the sheer power of our device and human connectedness. It is the latter that encapsulates the future of our university: Our human-centricity as more than our technologyness, the latter has been established already. That is our role to play in HE.

I look at the students of today, I imagine the students of tomorrow and I envy their excitement and enlightenment about technology. I remind myself that they are not younger versions of you and me. They are the future and, what we do today, will give them that power. As for myself, the boy from Paul Roux grew up away from any developments, but it is that boy who stands here in front of you today.

**PART 2: THE CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY'S SMARTNESS  
IN CONTEXT AND CONTENT**

The Cape Peninsula University of Technology has come a long way. We can no longer be viewed as 4% (that is one out of 26) of the South African Higher Education landscape. We have become a significant role player in the South African National System of Innovation (SANSI).

In planning our smart journey, we should learn from our predecessors and the stories from our history. Through torch-relay, we will constantly take steps forward and strive for perfection and innovation. We shall listen to the views of different stakeholders in and out of the University, build communication pathways for staff, foster mutual trust and pool ideas together to work out how to move the University forward. We are better sharing our voices and sharing our great ideas as a smart society. We will formulate strategies and tactics to pursue only excellence and relevance by refining our curriculum with a view of making our university globally impactful and our students successful in the world of work. The latter is the biggest measure of our success

Our university has a unique contribution to South Africa with respect to the mandated pillars and our future smartness: Teaching and Learning, Research Technology and Innovation (as our extended research value chain) and Work Integrated Learning. These are pursued under the following focus areas that contribute to the National Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals and thereby give relevance and excellence to the Cape Peninsula University of Technology product nationally and globally. In other words, these are our mainstays:

1. The Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability
2. Space Science and Engineering and Space Technology
3. The Digital Society (more than economic growth and international competitiveness)
4. Human and Social Dynamics
5. Smart Energy
6. Bio-Economy and Biotechnology.

Prahalad (2011) provides succinct advice when he posits:

*'The big challenge in creating the future is not predicting the future. It is not as if there is one future out there that is going to happen, and that the only challenge is trying to predict which of the potential futures will actually be the right one. Instead, the goal is to try to imagine a future that is plausible – the future that WE can create.'* (in Toffler, Toffler and Gibson, 2011).

Prahalad likens this to the analogy of the creation of a canvas and maintains that the boundary conditions are the uncertainties about life and work, technology and the regulatory environment. Using this analogy, we have the canvas for Cape Peninsula University of Technology ready and the future that we can create is in the making. We call this journey, ONE SMART Cape Peninsula University of Technology. We don't need to predict the future; we do need to create the future. We strongly encourage human-centricity in a largely technologically-enabled world.

Let me turn to education again. Education grows in its importance and value to enabling development at the individual, group, regional, national and international levels. This is clearly expressed in the 17 SDGs identified by the UN in its 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Under the banner of 'quality education' it calls for quality primary education and lifelong learning for all children, young people and adults – coordinated and aligned to specific needs and circumstances. It goes further and identifies poverty, lack of food and water, as important prerequisites for global sustainability.

The Cape Peninsula University of Technology has a role to play in this. Our products, processes and people need to be realigned. We need to embrace the new industries that are fast emerging (the gaming industry, for instance, is now the biggest sport in the world). The fact that we are a University of Technology and plays out in the applied science and engineering fields is important to South Africa's Science and Technology development. We have the tools to be the bastion of excellence, to be smart, to be inspired.

You may ask: What is the role and significance of Cape Peninsula University of Technology in this? Firstly, the answer lies in education and the smartness of our education. We, as humans, must take up our rightful places in a world more and more populated by machines and machines, at that, that are increasingly intelligent. It is this latter aspect that becomes the challenge, i.e. the extent to which we as human find our survival and future in the increasing complexities of an environment filled with artificial intelligence that goes beyond the usefulness of Internet of Things. I have good news. There is solid evidence from the past that we as humans have the ability to upskill.

However, in order for HE to deliver future generations with the relevant skills set and knowledge, an imperative question has to be asked regarding how HE institutions would be affected by the 4IR and how the delivery of education will be transformed. The answer lies, in part, in the development of a smart society and the skills that set us apart from machines, i.e. our creativity and innovation and our ability to think non-linearly.

Secondly, the answer lies in remembering who we are and our embedded commitment to African engagement. When in 1963, Kwame Nkrumah's 'Africa Must Unite', was first published, it was suggested that he was pursuing a 'policy of the impossible'. Impossible? No, not at all. Not if we join our voices and the collective power of our great ideas. This was fueled by Mwalimu Kambarage Nyerere, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B Du Bois, Haile Selassie, Malcom X, Muammar Gaddafi and Kwame Nkrumah. Positing that the unity and solidarity of Africans would help the continent achieve its full potential. We want to continue our engagement in the development of the cities and region in a concerted effort to foster genuine knowledge exchange and co-creation with external actors in the African diaspora. A University of Technology offers technological career-directed educational programmes, focuses on innovative problem-solving research and engages with government/business/industry with communities as end users. The mighty U6 plus consortium is a classic successful story: A collaboration of six universities from South Africa, Ghana, The Gambia, Kenya and Nigeria.

Even more, how do we marry our identity with the inevitable convergence between man and machine? We do not need to lose sight of who we are. In an interview with Kwame Appiah in the early eighties, Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe spoke about the difficulties of defining the "African Identity". This is not amazing as identity is a very fluid concept and one that is constantly open to often dismissive allegations of social "constructedness" and essentialism, but it can also, if used wisely, be a constructive, unifying and enabling force.

Yesefu (1972) wrote: '*An African university must not only pursue knowledge for its own sake, but also for the ... amelioration of conditions of life and work of, the ordinary man and woman. It must be fully committed to active participation in the social transformation, economic modernisation, and the upgrading of the total human resources of the nation*'.

### PART 3: MY COMMITMENT IN INSPIRING CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY TOWARDS SMARTNESS

When I agreed to become your Vice Chancellor, and Principal, I thought this out carefully and I agreed to dedicate myself to Cape Peninsula University of Technology and to our futures and that of the generations that follow us. I did not make this decision lightly and I accept the responsibility of the position and the duties and obligations it requires. I will not let you down.

Most importantly, we need to develop a mind-set of inspiration. Inspiration is required for creativity and innovation. It provides us with a Zeitgeist and mental model of what can be achieved. That leads me to pertinent questions we should engage in and the value of our voices:

1. Student-centricity. Who are our students? How do they engage? What do they need to learn and how?
2. Institutional-centricity. How can we be smart? What effective and efficient practices do we require to prepare and capacitate our students?
3. Channel-centricity. What is the content and context of HE and the place of a smart Cape Peninsula University of Technology as a University of Technology in South Africa?
4. Human-centricity. Centricity on belonging, on citizenship and a proud Cape Peninsula University of Technology identity in terms of who we are. Belonging has emerged as a key factor in student and staff retention and is closely aligned with concepts of academic and social engagement. It relates to connectedness and value as a person and our Ubuntu.

I extend my greatest gratitude to the previous Vice-Chancellors of this Institution for their remarkable stewardship of this majestic institution. You have bequeathed us a faculty rich in intellectual diversity, a unique and stunning architecture was designed by the best in the late Revel Fox whose magnum opus is known worldwide, and numerous academic and research programs that are amongst the best in the world.

Thanks to my family, and, in particular my wife Regina, for joining me here, in the Western Cape, at the expense of her then blossoming career in the Free State. Though there is no tradition of “first ladies” or “first spouses” in the tertiary world, her support and strength has been instrumental in everything I have achieved so far. I

thank all my family, friends and colleagues who have traveled to share this day with us. All have significantly contributed in different ways in who I am today.

I approach today's installation with a sense of honour and commitment. I am indeed most humbled by the trust the Council of Cape Peninsula University of Technology has bestowed on me. I also want to thank the members of the University community for their welcoming embrace. The honor of becoming the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology is one that fills me with great joy and wonder. The legendary Jimi Hendrix is quoted as having said that *"When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace"*.

I stand before you today as the boy from Paul Roux and the Vice Chancellor and Principal of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and I stand here alone. I am not alone. This is our SMART Cape Peninsula University of Technology and I invite you to walk this journey with me and help paint that canvas. To remind me when I do not listen, to engage with me, to commit with me and, most of all, to share with me our aspirations and inspirations in restoring our pride.

In the words of King Solomon to the Israelites some 3,000 years ago:

*'A fool will believe anything; smart people watch their step.'*

*'Isiyatha siya kukholwa nantoni na; Abantu abahlakaniphile bajonge isinyathelo sabo.'*

*'n Dwaas sal iets glo; slim mense kyk na hul stap.'*

(Proverbs 14:15-25).

We are smart and this is our canvas.

Today, I am proud to say that we made it. And, in having done that, I can say with surety and clarity, that we can achieve much more. Because we are smart.

Enkosi mawethu ndiya bulela. Thank you. Baie dankie

Prof Chris Nhlapo

Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology

10 April 2019