

Unam justifies relocation of geology department

■ Albertina Nakale

WINDHOEK - The University of Namibia (Unam) has sprung to its own defense following a firestorm of criticism from the Namibian Chamber of Mines that feels the decision to relocate the Geology Department from Windhoek to Keetmanshoop "is ill-advised."

Last month, the Namibian Chamber of Mines Chief Executive Officer, Veston Malango, said the Chamber was stunned by this decision, as the mining sector fears there will be no future for the department if this decision is implemented.

Malango says Windhoek is the national hub for earth sciences, saying virtually all mining and exploration companies have offices in the city, and there is a large body of earth science industry expertise accessible to students.

He based their fears on the support disciplines of Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics, saying they are essential precursor subjects that need to be taken at the first-year level as an absolute minimum.

He argued that some subjects, Chemistry in particular, are highly recommended at second- and third-year levels, or as a second major subject, adding that Geography may also be considered by some students as a

second major. He says, unless Unam plans to open full departments in these disciplines in Keetmanshoop, a Geology degree there will be totally compromised.

"It is highly unlikely that some or all existing Unam geology staff members will be prepared to move themselves and families to Keetmanshoop. Short-term teaching periods will in no way be effective, as students at undergraduate level require continued contact time with staff. A consequence might well be that teaching staff of lower calibre, or junior, will be prepared to move to Keetmanshoop. Student expertise will, thus, suffer very considerably," he argued.

However, Unam spokesperson, John Haufiku, said the university's decision to move the School of Geosciences to Keetmanshoop should not be seen as ill-thought.

He said this decision was only taken after a thorough feasibility study was done years ago.

Haufiku said it is normal that there are some fears about Geology department moving to Keetmanshoop, but Unam assured all stakeholders that, despite the incomplete construction of the new campus in the south, all needs of the school of Geosciences have been taken care of.

He reasoned that when Unam decided to establish the Engineering Faculty in the northern part of the country, there were many

who opposed the move. However, today, he said, the Jose Eduardo dos Santos Campus is great monument, inspiring both town and village children to aspire to do great things.

Therefore, he explained, the decision to move South has in part, similarly, a big social component to it to inspire people in the South—the way that Engineering has done in the North.

For Physics, he defended a part time-contract lecturer is found, and will be able to offer these modules at the start of 2019.

Salatiel Kapofi, who graduated with double majors of Physics and Chemistry, and is a holder of a Master in Science, is the proposed candidate.

For Geophysics, Haufiku said the department has not been able to fill this position and relied on part-time lecturers, and now recently is making use of China University of Geosciences (CUGB)'s Geophysicists. The latter arrangement will continue.

For Chemistry, he said there are qualified Chemists who are able to handle these, saying also Southern campus has two tutors on the ground who are funded through the NaMiComp Project.

For Mathematics, Haufiku said a position is approved for a full-time lecturer to teach all the mathematic modules, including one statistics module at Year 1.

Malango said graduate expertise will be hugely compromised, and the degrees obtained will not be competitive in standard, compared with other universities.

"Fewer students will consider registering at Unam. Recruitment of Keetmanshoop graduates by industry will also be hugely compromised if degrees are not competitive in standard. The decision to move the Unam Geology department to Keetmanshoop has been taken with total disregard of the recommendations of the department's external advisory committee, whose recommendations are based on the above alluded considerations," Malango noted.

He said the Chamber of Mines requests Unam to rescind this decision, saying the Chamber and mining industry are looking towards a prosperous Geology department, but this decision is effectively setting the department for failure.

Haufiku defended that a number of the lecturers who are in the department, especially those who completed their degrees under Unam Staff Development, knew that their duty station will be Keetmanshoop, as this was stated in their contracts.

He said only one senior staff member has indicated reluctance to move with. All other senior lecturers and professors have accepted in writing.