

## **Stellenbosch University enters the war on corruption**

Equipping public sector officials with the skills to root out corruption within their own departments might be the “missing link” in tackling this growing problem in South Africa, Professor Gavin Woods of Stellenbosch University’s (SU) School for Public Leadership (SPL) said in his inaugural lecture last night [26 October 2010].

Many government structures “do not have the knowledge or appreciation necessary to employ the anti-corruption options which are available. The Centre through its courses hopes to provide the missing link between managers and appropriate action which has thus far frustrated the overall anti-corruption approach of government,” he said, referring to the establishment of the University’s new Anti-corruption Centre for Education and Research (ACCERUS), which he will head up.

Woods, a former MP and chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa), described corruption as a “serious problem” that has “become systemic within the operations of government in South Africa”.

He said corruption impacted negatively on “ordinary people’s living standards” because it caused “investment to be deterred, employment levels to be lowered, international trade to suffer, resources to be misallocated and a country’s international reputation to be damaged”.

The government seemed unable to arrest the problem, Woods said, pointing out that there had been a proliferation of anti-corruption laws, policies, institutions and other initiatives the past fifteen years, yet public sector corruption continued unabated.

The Centre sees a role for itself in providing education and training to government officials to help make existing anti-corruption mechanisms and regulations more effective, and in removing much of the confusion

in academic circles around the nature and causes of corruption. The establishment of the Centre ties in with SU's recently launched HOPE Project, a set of development goals through which the institution aims to tackle pressing needs in society through its knowledge base and expertise.

Designing a curriculum and developing course materials for the Centre has taken almost three years, Woods said, adding that he was able to draw on "the substantial accumulated experience of the School for Public Leadership" (formerly known as the School of Public Management and Planning) and its ongoing interaction with senior public officials who make up almost all the school's learners.

Woods said most perpetrators of corruption are not sophisticated criminals, but rather individuals who respond to temptations in environments where there are low risk opportunities to be corrupt. "There is an international consensus based on statistics which indicates that out of every 10 people there is one who will never be corrupt, one who will easily be corrupt, and the rest who can be swayed."

Therefore, equipping the public service with the required skills to eliminate the opportunities for corruption would be the way to go, Woods argued.

"In a number of other developing countries the experience has been that the battle against corruption is much more difficult to win than to lose. In South Africa we still have the chance to prevail, if we all play our part. The Anti-corruption Centre for Education and Research is ready to play its part."

\* Contact the Anti-corruption Centre for Education and Research of Stellenbosch University (ACCERUS) on tel. +27 21 918 4122 or email [gavin.woods@spl.sun.ac.za](mailto:gavin.woods@spl.sun.ac.za).

\* Visit <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/4836> to access the speech in full.

## PROFILE:

Gavin Woods has had a working career which has spanned banking, accountancy, financial management, policy research, politics and teaching at tertiary level.

After spending ten years as head of a policy research institute linked to the former KwaZulu-Natal government he became a Member of Parliament in 1994. His parliamentary career covered both economic policy issues and public financial management.

In this latter capacity he spent fifteen years as a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA), four of which were as chair of the Committee. Amongst other positions held in Parliament was his chairmanship of the ad hoc committee which researched and wrote the Public Finance Management Act and as a member of the standing committee which oversaw the work of the Audit General.

While still a Member of Parliament he was appointed extraordinary professor at the School of Public Management and Planning at Stellenbosch University where he taught public finance at a postgraduate level on a part-time basis. In July 2009 he joined the University as a full-time professor in public finance. In addition he has recently been appointed as director of the Centre for Anti-corruption Education and Research at the University. He is also a commissioner with the Public Service Commission in South Africa.

He holds junior degrees in accounting, economics and sociology and master's degrees in economics, public finance and business administration. He also has a doctorate in economics. His publications include his co-authorship of the text book *Managing Public Money: Systems of the South* and other nationally prescribed educational materials.