

NWU acting vice-chancellor receives international awards for outstanding research

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The acting vice-chancellor of the North-West University (NWU), Prof Linda du Plessis, clearly sets the example after she was awarded her second doctorate in 2020, and has also been praised for the quality of her study by two international academic institutions and associations.

After she completed her doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) at the University of Bath in England, Emerald Publishing Limited – a scholarly publisher of academic journals and books in the fields of management, business, education, library studies, healthcare and engineering – awarded her the Emerald Award for Outstanding Doctoral Research in 2020. Emerald Publishing Limited considers candidates who completed their studies in the past three years for this award.

It is clear that Prof Du Plessis's research fills a gap in the literature by investigating how university executives meet the demand for legitimacy from internal and external stakeholders during unplanned radical change.

"The exploration focuses on institutionalised practices that triggered radical change at South African public universities; the influence of legitimacy demands on universities' ability to deal with radical change; and the identification and reconsideration of rational myths during radical change. Because of the complexity of the higher-education environment and the involvement of multiple resources and relationships with internal and external stakeholders, a single theory cannot cover all the aspects affected by the radical change," Du Plessis says.

"The informed analysis of the sense-making of legitimacy during radical institutional change provides insight for future leaders on steering change in a complex environment, coupled with the multifaceted dynamics of highly institutionalised organisations," she says. Education is globally perceived as a key enabler in providing a better future for the youth and reducing inequality. Sustainable Development Goal Four of the United Nations (UN) calls for inclusive, equitable and quality education for all. The topic Prof Du Plessis covered, leadership during crisis, is important yet largely overlooked in higher-education studies.

What is the Outstanding Doctoral Research Awards all about?

Emerald partners with the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association (HETL) to recognise and reward exceptional doctoral research. It offers two annual international awards: the Emerald Outstanding Doctoral Research Award, and the Emerald/Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association Education Outstanding Doctoral Research Award.

According to Emerald, their goal is to help find solutions to the disparities across the world by supporting researchers working in this area.

"We are proud to support the global research community through an award programme that recognises exceptional doctoral research that addresses the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN. These goals are an urgent call for action by all countries to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, peace and justice."

The Richard and Shirley Mawditt Prize

As if these accomplishments were not enough, Du Plessis was also awarded the Richard and Shirley Mawditt Prize for

outstanding performance on the DBA and notified about this on 28 April 2022.

“It is my pleasure to let you know that – in addition to your doctorate in Business Administration qualification – you have been awarded this prize, which was conferred by a panel of the DBA academic team and approved by our Board of Studies,” says Prof Dan Davies, director of the Higher Education Management Programmes of the University of Bath.

“Receiving these awards is such a great honour for me. One often doubts one’s abilities, but this topic was something close to my heart and was such an enriching experience. I would like to thank my study leader, Prof Hong Bui, for tremendous support and contributions towards this. The value of this DBA is multifaceted. I have new appreciation for the important role study leaders and promoters must fulfil in providing guidance and constructive academic advice. Furthermore, the networks established because of this study are invaluable,” Du Plessis concludes.

It is clear that Prof Du Plessis’s determined and sustained contributions towards raising the bar with regard to international academic excellence do not go unnoticed globally.

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