



**The Bench Marks Centre  
For Corporate Social Responsibility:  
Closure Report**

**September 2019**

## **1. Background**

Initial discussions by the Bench Marks Foundation (BMF) with the North West University began in 2006. Discussions continued the following year (2007) with Professor Freek Cronje of the NWU's Sociology department around developing a teaching and research centre linked to Bench Marks Foundation at the university.

After years of collaboration around research and after lots of negotiation, Bench Marks Foundation entered into an MOU with the North West University and launched the Bench Marks Centre in 2012. This was amongst much fanfare and enrolled about 14 students in master and doctoral studies. Now we had our research and teaching centre and one big task was given to a PhD student, Johann van Wyk to take the Bench Marks Global Principles-Bench Marks for Corporate Social Responsibility and develop the case for a corporate personality test as to whether a corporation has a personality and if so how this could be measured using both compulsory and voluntary international instruments to develop a rating instrument. The initial research was completed in 2012. A significant number of students passed through the centre completing graduate up to doctoral studies.

## **2. The death of Prof Cronje**

Professor Cronje's sudden death on 1 April 2016 proved to be a watershed for the Centre, as he had been the driving force behind its establishment and the main point of contact between BMF and the NWU.

In its tribute to Prof Cronje, BMF said: "Freek was a polymath in the classical sense, professor, and lecturer, Chairperson of the South African Sociological Association, father, activist, sportsman, and friend. He excelled in everything he tried his hand at. Always friendly, always accommodating, always challenging. We have lost a friend and a colleague. A gap has opened which will be difficult to fill."

## **3. Challenges experienced**

### **3.1 Appointment of a successor**

Following Prof Cronje's death, the NWU with the BMF started the process of appointing a successor to Prof Cronje. The aim was to appoint someone who reflected the demographics of South Africa. An advertisement for the position was placed by NWU in July 2016, stipulating transformation and an understanding of communities as key components for the appointment.

### **3.2. Short list and final interviews**

A pre-selection panel in September 2016 shortlisted five applicants out of the approximately 20 received. An interviewing panel, including the Executive Director and Chairperson of BMF, conducted interviews in October 2016. This resulted in a fallout with the university when we could not agree on a replacement and the preferred candidate subsequently withdrew his application.

### **3.3. Efforts to resolve difficulties**

A meeting with senior representatives of the NWU and BMF was held on 21 April 2017 to discuss the fallout being experienced in the relationship between the two organisations. BMF was advised by NWU that a consultant had been appointed to evaluate the programme/centre.

The consultant interviewed BMF representatives on two occasions. The consultant lacked understanding of the relationship between Bench Marks Foundation and the Centre and made recommendations to the university to terminate the relationship and disburse the students across disciplines.

## **4. Official closure**

In March 2018, the Chairperson and Executive Director of BMF held a meeting with, among others, Prof Robert Balfour (Deputy Vice Chancellor, Teaching and Learning) and Prof Duvenage. At this meeting, BMF was officially informed that a decision had been made by NWU to close the Centre down. BMF was advised that there was a mismatch between ideologies.

## **5. Bench Marks Foundation's final response**

Following a meeting of the Bench Marks Foundation board in 2018, the Executive Director of BMF addressed correspondence to the NWU in which he advised that at the Board meeting of BMF the issue of the termination of the Centre without consulting Bench Marks was tabled for discussion. While understanding the overtures emanating from NWU, the Board was of the opinion that BMF should terminate its relationship with the NWU. However, the Board noted that were the university to reconsider the decision to close the Bench Marks Centre, and take this matter back to council to explore if this was the correct decision, BMF would be open to further engagements. To date, no further response from the NWU has been received.

*Thus, we have reached the end of the road with NWU. We are now engaging other universities on collaboration and exploring the setting up of the Centre elsewhere.*

**John Capel**

**Executive Director**

**Bench Marks Foundation**