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Ref Experiential training placements for 2021

Dear Industry Stakeholder

Compliments of the new year, and I hope you are fine and safe during this time.

Over the past year, our university community had to adapt to new ways of teaching and learning to complete the 2020 academic year whilst prioritising the safety of our students and staff. We acknowledge that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought much difficulty for various stakeholders within our forestry industry as well. As a result, our experiential training programme is currently faced with a challenge of which we would like to request your assistance.

As part of the Forestry Diploma programme, our 2nd year students are scheduled to commence their experiential training from the 1st of March 2021. Prior to this, students will participate in a one-month structured practical in February, which will be facilitated by the NMU. However, to date we had limited success in securing hosts for the students for this nine-month period. A total number of 87 students are supposed to participate in the experiential training programme. However, to date only 28 students have secured hosts, while the remaining 59 students have no placement yet, even though they have applied to many potential hosts. This phenomenon is of concern to us since it will result in serious disruptions to our academic programme as well as in the lives of our students.

The experiential training component of our academic programme is a compulsory part of the qualification. The expectations and requirements of the NMU are well documented in terms of the aspects of the forestry value chain students need to be exposed to. For your convenience, a copy of our guidelines is attached to this correspondence. We therefore need to reach-out and request for your assistance in accepting our students for placement. If you have any capacity to host students, it will be greatly appreciated. Please note that during the nine-month experiential training a student can be

accommodated by multiple hosts. Therefore, even if you have capacity to host a student for a few months, it will also be acceptable – it will certainly provide them with an opportunity to gain experience as they look for alternative placements. It is important to note that many NMU students already receive financial support for their experiential training from two different sources: Firstly, the FP&M SETA provide funding through a discretionary grant in the form of a stipend to qualifying students, and secondly, all financially needy students will benefit from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) while on experiential training. This will certainly alleviate pressure on hosts in terms of financial contributions when serving as mentors to our students.

Grower Companies, contractors, forestry institutes or any private entities who are willing to assist as hosts can contact Mr Jansen (Jan.Jansen@mandela.co.za) who will serve as the Experiential Training coordinator, or alternatively Dr Ramantswana (Muedanyi.Ramantswana@mandela.co.za) who is the Forestry Programme coordinator.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof. JH Louw