

## VISITING HELENA LANGE SCHULE EXCHANGE LEARNERS AND TEACHERS AT NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY: A CERM-ESA ENGAGEMENT

### 1. Introduction and Background

On March 3, 2026, the Department of Secondary School Education in the Faculty of Education at Nelson Mandela University had the great pleasure of welcoming a group of exchange learners accompanied by their teachers from Helena Schule in Oldenburg, Germany. This visit served as a reciprocal engagement following a trip undertaken by Dr Ayanda Simayi, a CERM-ESA alumnus, to Oldenburg university and Helena Lange Schule in April 2025. The initial school visit in Germany was facilitated by Dr Malve von Moellendorff, the CERM-ESA coordinator in Germany, and Mrs Christiane Pasternak, a teacher at the school. Dr Simayi's presentation on science, cultural diversity and Indigenous Knowledge, and the new Dome, got a lot of German students and teachers interested, leading to this return visit.

### 2. Delegation Composition and Programme Organisation

The visiting German delegation was comprised of 15 learners and three teachers: Mrs Christiane Pasternak, Mr Remo Jauernik, and Ms Tanja Radspieler, *see picture*. Their visit to South Africa formed an integral part of a pre-existing school exchange programme, which also involves 15 learners from Sancto High School and Willow Academy in Gqebera. The local coordination of the exchange programme was managed by Mr Wesley Blignaut and Mrs Novy Blignaut.



From the right, Dr Ayanda Simayi, Mrs Christiane Paternak, Mr Remo Jauernik (at the back), Ms Tanja Radspieler, Mrs Novy Blignaut and Mr Wesley Blignaut

*Photo Credit for all*

*photos: Mr Thato Moshesh, the Faculty Public Relations Officer*

### 3. Programme Activities

#### 3.1 The Faculty of Education Science Laboratory

Despite the intense heat of the day, the programme proceeded as planned. Dr Simayi started the visit by collecting the team of German and local learners and teachers from their meeting point to the Faculty Science Laboratory. Here, the visiting group had the opportunity of meeting students taught by Dr Simayi in the Bachelor of Education Third year and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes, specialising in Natural Science. This provided a glimpse into the pedagogical training of future science educators at the university.

#### 3.2 Campus Tour and Journey to the Ocean Sciences Campus

The group walked to the Ocean Sciences campus to see the ‘promised’ Digital Dome. Throughout the walk, the visiting learners expressed great enthusiasm for the university's architecture and natural surroundings and high rising building with the name of the university inscribed boldly for all to see. A group photograph was taken outside the Dome, with participants seemingly undeterred by the heat in their eagerness for the upcoming presentation, see below.



Outside the Dome at Ocean Sciences centre

#### 3.3 Visit to the Future Talent (FIT) Centre

The group was warmly received by two reception staff members, led by Athabile Jim, who outlined the centre's protocols. The first point of interest was the Future Talent (FIT) Centre,

an AI-driven educational hub officially launched on 31 January 2026. Two ICT technicians provided the group with a demonstration of the tablets' functionalities and explained how to access further information about the university using uniquely shaped, portable barcodes. The centre is equipped with modern technologies, including tablets and robotics kits, designed to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and STEM education for students and the wider community, see *pictures*.



### 3.4 The Digital Dome Experience

The pinnacle of the visit was the experience within the Digital Dome, led by Dr Simayi. The Dome was launched in March 2024, and it features a 15-metre, 138-seater 3D planetarium with an immersive theatre environment. Its advanced 360-degree high-resolution projection technology is used for astronomical visualisation, educational films, and interactive research, with the core aim of promoting science engagement. The reaction of the entire group to the immersive content, which included astronomy visualisations and marine life presentations, was one of profound excitement and awe. Audible gasps and involuntary physical reactions where some wanted to hide from the moving visuals that seemed as if they were coming down to hit them, underscored the powerful impact of the technology. It was particularly noteworthy to

observe the genuine admiration and enthusiasm from the German learners, despite hailing from a context with advanced technological resources, showing evidence that kids are kids irrespective of their contextual background, *see pictures*.



Group picture inside the Dome after conclusion of viewing

The session concluded earlier than desired due to a pre-existing lecture booking for Dr Simayi's students although the visitors expressed a keen interest in a longer viewing.

### 3.5 Additional Campus Visits

Following the Dome experience, the group visited the university shop located within the Science Centre and took photos as groups, *see pictures*. The final leg of the campus tour included a visit to the statue of Nelson Mandela, located opposite the library, and a stop at the international unit to view the display of international flags, symbolising the university's global connections.



### 4. Acknowledgements

Sincere gratitude is extended to the funders and individuals whose support was instrumental in the event's success. The primary funding for the finger lunch and refreshments was generously provided by CERM-ESA, facilitated by Dr Malve von Mollendorff. This support was particularly meaningful as it assisted Dr Simayi, a CERM-ESA alumnus, in hosting the delegation. Appreciation is also conveyed to the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Prof Heloise Sathorar, for granting approval for the event. Finally, heartfelt thanks are due to the Head of Department, Dr Badroen Ismail, and the department administrator, Ms Pam Roach, for their invaluable assistance and support in making the day possible.

## **5. Conclusion and Future Outlook**

The visit by the Helena Lange Schule, Sancto High School and Willow Academy delegation to the Faculty of Education was a great success. The primary objective, to foster cross-cultural academic exchange and showcase the university's unique facilities, was achieved. The integration between the South African learners from Sancto High School and Willow Academy, the Faculty of Education science students, and the visiting German cohort was seamless and natural. The overwhelmingly positive feedback and expressions of gratitude received from the visitors and their home institutions in Oldenburg confirm the day's significant impact. The event has undoubtedly strengthened the bonds between the partner institutions.

***May this academic relationship continue to grow - "Möge diese akademische Partnerschaft weiter wachsen."***

*Report compiled by Dr Ayanda Simayi.*