

CTHB CELEBRATES 10 YEARS OF MENTORSHIP AT FABI

The annual lunch to celebrate the achievements of two of the outreach programmes of the DST/NRF Centre for Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) was held at FABI in November and was attended by more than 70 people. Director of the CTHB and FABI, Prof Mike Wingfield welcomed everyone to the lunch including two former leaders of Mpepu Rural Youth Encouragement (MYRE); Samukelo Vilakazi, Sithembiso Kumalo and 2014 MRYE leader Nametsegang Thungela. Prof Wingfield stressed the importance of mentoring and collaboration in every avenue of life. As an example Prof Wingfield referred to the mentoring role that the directors of the original seven DST/NRF centres of excellence (CoEs) established in 2004 were asked to play at a meeting with the new CoEs. A highlight of the lunch was the presentation of certificates by Profs Emma Steenkamp and Wingfield to all mentees who had successfully completed the mentorship programme in 2014.



Mentorship students and their mentors

Postgraduate students at FABI mentor second and third year science students as part of the CTHB mentorship programme. About 20 undergraduate students are chosen every year based on their academic performance, scientific interest in the work at FABI and the availability of suitable mentors. The mentees are taught laboratory skills, scientific principles

and protocol. They also collaborate with other FABI students working in the laboratory. The number of mentorship bursaries allocated to students has grown from 12 in 2005 to 23 last year. The growth of the programme proves the importance of mentorship and collaboration in the development of undergraduate mentees and the postgraduate mentors who train students through this programme.

About 200 undergraduate students and 90 mentors have taken part in the programme since its inception. We are pleased that about 60% of the students who have been trained in the programme have continued to do their honours – though not all of them at FABI - while some have completed Masters and PhD degrees. We have managed to keep record of about 80% of all the mentees passing through the programme and are delighted to note that most have done well in their careers both in South Africa and abroad. The CTHB mentorship programme has proved to be so successful that the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences has modelled its own mentorship programme on it.



The MRYE team with Jenny Hale, Prof Emma Steenkamp and Prof Mike Wingfield

Mentorship is the focus of another CTHB funded programme, MRYE. This initiative has been supported by the CTHB since 2005. About 60 enthusiastic and dedicated undergraduate students from different faculties make up MRYE; all the students come from rural areas and they mentor learners in different rural schools in South Africa. MRYE members visit schools in the rural areas of Limpopo, North West, Mpumalanga, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and

Eastern Cape provinces. During their schools visits, members inform the learners about career paths, the necessary entry qualifications into universities, courses available and funding that will support their studies. They also distribute information brochures and application forms from all higher educational institutes (HEIs). MRYE members mentor students who subsequently come from these rural areas to study at HEIs. As a result of their success, small unofficial branches of MRYE have opened at other HEI. MRYE also, successfully applied to the SRC to be recognised as an official UP student organisation. This will enable the initiative to apply for sponsorship from organisations that fund UP student bodies.