

Introduction and acknowledgements

Mr Vice Chancellor, members of management, and staff present here, good morning and welcome to this special opening of the academic year in which we reflect on the highlights and achievements of 2018 and share directions to be pursued in our core business in 2019. Thank you also to members of the management team who provided inputs into this address, and the Vice Chancellor for making time to be with us in welcoming academic and administrative staff at the official Opening of the University. Certainly we want 2019 to be the year of consolidation and development and so the theme of my talk today is the “best is yet to come” in terms of our research and innovation, teaching-learning and community engagement. Kindly allow me to begin by also thanking members of the student leadership of the University, for your presence this morning.

Our Strategy Statement is “To transform and position the NWU as a unitary institution of superior academic excellence with a commitment to social justice”. Please learn these words by heart this year so that if at any moment it seems to you that you are feeling lost, or have lost your way, or cannot recall the purpose for being here, that these words become your map to the stars for 2019. What are we doing? We are transforming the University. How are we doing it? We are positioning ourselves as a unitary institution. Why are we doing this? We are committed to academic excellence and social justice in our academic project. Excellence and social justice are integrated concepts. All our efforts as University are geared to supporting student success and the extent to which we develop our academic and administrative staff to ensure the future success of our beloved university is commensurate with our awareness that our students are the future of our beloved country.

At the beginning of this year as registrations have been finalised in these last two weeks for contact as well as distance students alike, it seems as though we will easily reach our targets for new and returning students. In 2018 NWU had just over 62 558 students enrolled on this three main campuses, Vaal Triangle, Mafikeng and Potchefstroom, with the overall target for 2019 being 71 758 students. The following information¹ is worth bearing in mind as we start the academic year.

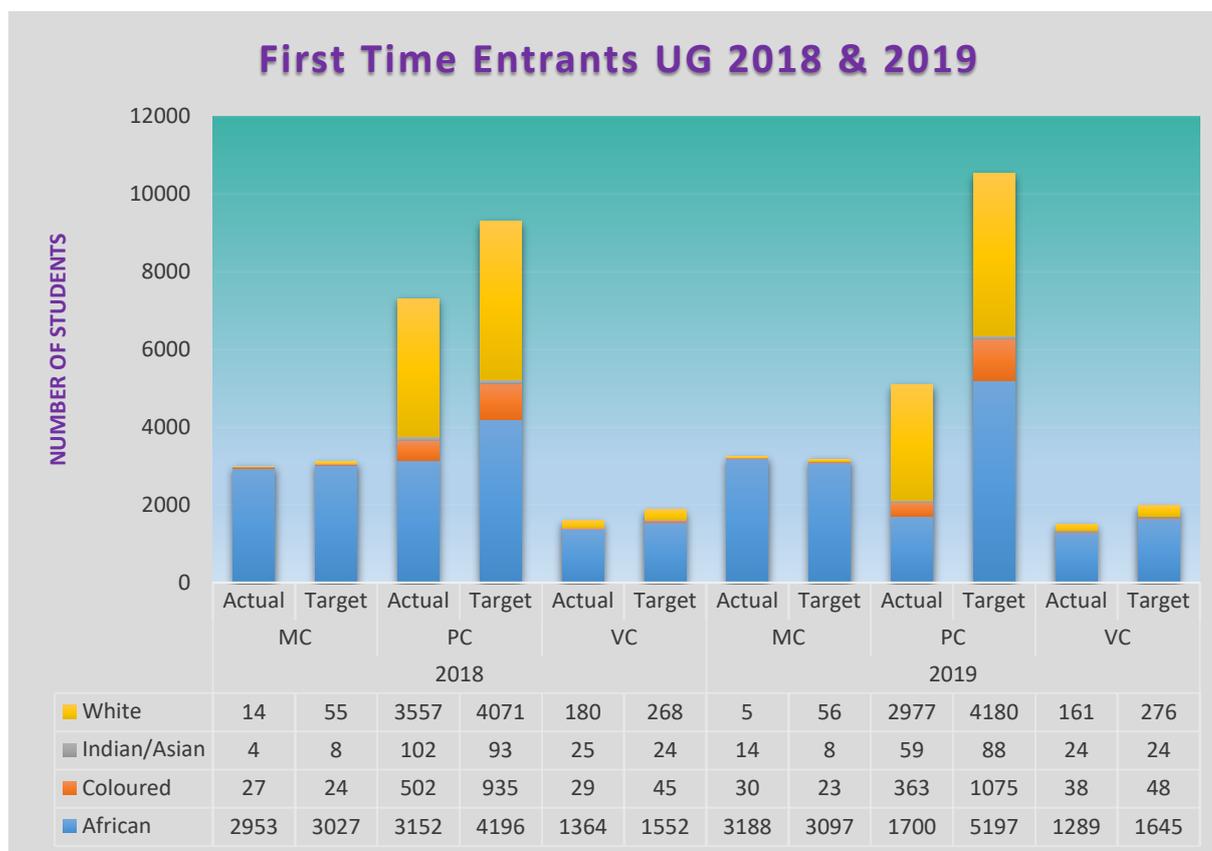


Table 1: Enrolments as at 31 Dec for 2018 and 31 Jan for 2019

The overall target in UG First Time Entrants for NWU increased with 9.92% from 2018 to 2019, from 14 298 to 15 717 students. For 2019, African students accounts for 62.7% of actual First Time Entrants UG enrolments, followed by White students at 31.9%, Coloured students at 4.4% and Asian students at 1.0% (in both contact and distance programmes).

Thus far, NWU have reached 62.7% of our target for undergraduate First Time Entering students.

Table 1.1: Enrolments as at 31 Dec for 2018 and 31 Jan for 2019

Sum of FT Entrants UG per Race 2019			
Year	Race	Actual enrolments	Target enrolments
2019	African	6177	9939
	Coloured	431	1146
	Indian/Asian	97	120
	White	3143	4512
Total		9848	15717

When we glance at our numbers per faculty we note over enrolments in the Faculties of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, Humanities, and Health Sciences. Enrolments are more or less on target in the Faculty of Law, Theology, Education and Engineering, whilst in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, we have some 250 fewer students than anticipated. Overall, what bears noting here is that alignment with the University Strategy of emphasising the SET skills associated with the Faculties of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, Economics and Management Sciences, Health Sciences and Engineering, is steadily coming into place.

Table 2: Actual vs Target First Time Entering Students (Contact & Distance 31 Jan 2019)

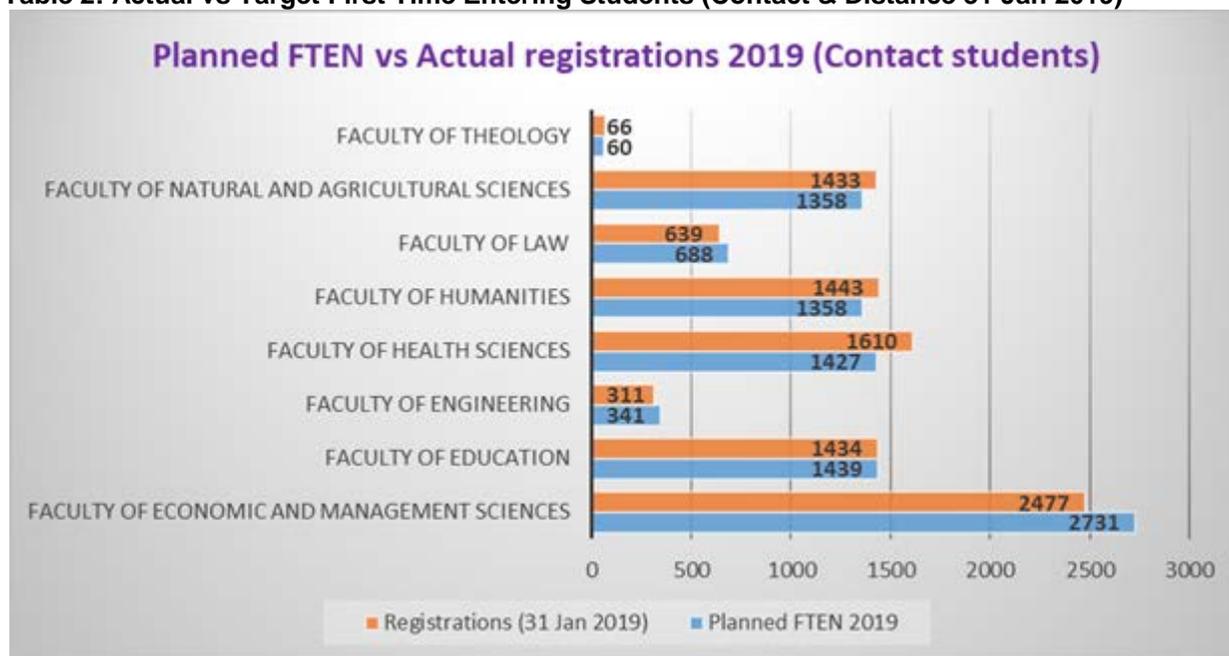


Table 3: 2019 Planned vs Actual First Time Entering students per faculty (31 Jan 2019)

In relation to postgraduate studies enrolments for 2018 were 11 140 when compared to 12 626 in 2017, the drop being explained by a reduction in the numbers of Honours and students Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate students¹. So far in 2019 we have accepted 169 PhD and 792 Masters students, with the total planned M & PhD enrolments being 4 569. This leads me in the next section of my talk focussing as it does on research and innovation 2018 achievements and 2019 initiatives.

The Research and Innovation Project at NWU: 2018 achievements and new initiatives in 2019

We remain one of the top 7 institutions in South Africa in terms of research outputs; the only institution without a medical school in this category. In 2017 we registered 1300.04 published research outputs units in spite of a preoccupation with institutional restructuring. The University was ranked the 6th institution in South Africa in 2018 in terms of the number of NRF rated researchers with more than 220 rated researchers. In 2018 26 new ratings and 24 renewed ratings were achieved, and by the end of the year we had graduated 91 PhDs and 193 Masters graduates. Also in 2018 14 National and International Research Awards were accorded to members of the NWU staff and NWU was named the top university in

¹ In 2017 there were 6177 students when compared to 4620 in 2018.

innovation in South Africa in the SARIMA Report (2017), a fact affirmed by the 5 out of 5 stars we also for innovation in the QS Rating. NWU was declared the most BRICS active university in South Africa by DIRCO in early October 2018, as evident also in the strengthening of our relations with Chinese and Russian stakeholders.

NWU boasts 11 Research Chairs. In 2018, 7 of these were renewed. Then several totally new Chairs were added: two new SARChI chairs and the new UNESCO Chair – the first of its kind at NWU. Of the 40 research entities of the NWU, 11 were internally evaluated in 2018. NWU continues to occupy critical space in the South African national science system hosting 7 national entities linked with national and international imperatives: Department of Science and Technology/CSIR Hydrogen South Africa, DST/NWU Preclinical Drug Development Platform, DST Indigenous Knowledge Systems Centre, the Department of Trade and Industry Centre for Advanced Manufacturing, the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADILAR), DST Metabolomics Platform that continues to enhance research and innovation excellence, visibility, and impact. In addition to the 1st NWU Biennial Research and Innovation Conference held in December 2018, the University also hosted 12 high level public lectures throughout the year as part of the DVC's initiative to strengthen NWU visibility and national and international networks.

In terms of capacity development approximately R1m of our UCDP funds was provided to staff to complete their postgraduate studies and we secured 23 DST/NRF internships across all faculties for 2019; 208 postdocs were hosted; our annual postdoc conference took place and R15 million was spent on research equipment. In the face of declining NRF funding to rated academics Senate approved a series of strategies to sustain NWU's conducive research environment including the strategy for supporting A & B rated researchers and our NWU Research Chairs. In terms of stream-lining and efficiency the research ethics committees were restructured to fit our unitary model: 1 faculty, 1 research ethics committee across the three campuses. Finally, high level and prestigious research grants were secured in the form of the USAID grant to the value of USD 1700 000 USAID obtained by the NWU African Nutrition Leadership Programme; the Hydrogen South Africa grant of R31 107 758.00, and the R 16 830 160.00 research grant for the hydrogen platform for clean mining.

In 2019, we will focus on support strategies for improved academic integrity in conjunction with research productivity, quality, excellence, visibility and impact. In this regard, we will continue efforts to create a conducive research and innovation environment by addressing workload balance, the institution of a Research Chairs Day, the launch of the NWU organization for Women in Science, as well as institutional support for new book projects initiatives that meet DHET requirements. We will support writing retreats/workshops as well as academic integrity-related workshops and provide faculty-based research mentorships for junior researchers to grow and publish. To improve our visibility and impact, we will ensure researchers are ORCID registered, have scopus profiles, prioritize publications in scopus accredited journals; and engage in bibliometric benchmarking and strategies to improve our status. Academic integrity is not simply related to research, but extends to all our processes and practices as support and academic staff, and so it is important in our work going forward that we protect the University by observing its processes concerning research ethics, ethics in the classroom, and in the workplace and that we alert authorities to the risks concerning our ethics. Ethical conduct is of course grounded in values and our values as University entail a focus on work within and with communities of various kinds.

The Community Engagement Project at NWU: engaged learning, teaching and research: achievements and new initiatives for 2019

Community Engagement at the NWU has always been part of the University's dream and purpose as part of its contribution to social justice. Our strategy is to focus on addressing relevant needs and to find sustainable solutions in collaboration with all stakeholders. Utilising trust relationships with communities in equal partnerships, the University is able to negotiate opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills in order to reach specific learning outcomes. We endeavour to have a collective impact on the economic, social and environmental well-being of society by sharing the expertise within the University and providing capacity building not only for our students, but also with civil society. In 2018 we focussed on supporting the unitary model and Deputy Deans for Community Engagement were appointed to bring about alignment of CE activities across the campuses. Last year the CE Office worked closely with the Office for Student Life to align Student Volunteer and Outreach activities of the Student Campus Council Community Engagement portfolio. Students from each campus identified community projects for outreach based on the Sustainable Development Goals and relevant needs within communities, within a radius of 30 km from each campus. This has led to a total of 95 student led community engagement projects in 2018. With over 250 registered CE projects overall at the NWU more than 3000 students volunteered and engaged in community projects in 2018.

The Community Engagement Office together with academic staff in 2018 facilitated training for 120 student leaders to plan, engage, coordinate and implement community projects in partnership with communities. Some projects have an international dimension such that undertaken with Hanseo University students visiting South Africa from Korea. In 2018 two workshops with staff were held to focus on the integration of the community into the curriculum through service learning.

Much of the research done by the NWU can be considered engaged research which links existing research strengths as a catalyst to support further scholarship of engagement to contribute to impact. An example of this type of research among many projects, was the research contribution made in 2018 to the declaration of the Groot Marico Biosphere Reserve². We have contributed to impact research data for corporate partners such as Impala.

² An article on how to measure the impact of universities in communities was also published in Development South Africa.

In 2018 6 academic staff members and their teams were also recognised for their contributions in community engagement excellence during the annual Vice-Chancellors Excellence Awards and of these, 4 were for engaged research. An example of this is the “We deliver” project which consists of a multi-disciplinary team (from all our campuses) focussing on “Holistic service delivery to older persons... through Information and Communication Technologies”. NWU academics assisted with the design of a cell-phone application for the elderly to communicate with several key stakeholders and service providers and assist with aged-related needs.

In 2019 the University will focus on strengthening of our relationships with provincial and local government and some traditional leadership groups such as the Premiers’ office, Kwa-Ndebele, Royal Bafokeng, Amahlubi and Barolong, to link University expertise to NGO/civil society partnerships. Partnerships are important not only in terms of community engagement, but indeed also in the context of teaching-learning where transformation of the curriculum entails rethinking our relevance with students as well as industry as stakeholders.

The Curriculum Project at NWU: 2018 achievements and initiatives for 2019

In 2018 NWU shone as a University celebrated for its teaching–learning quality. The University was awarded an impressive 5 out of 5 stars in the QS Rating for Teaching-Learning, Employability of Students and several subject groups and fields received praiseworthy international rankings. For example, the recent findings of the Shanghai Ranking Consultancy’s global Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) of 1600 universities in 83 countries places NWU’s Geography, Psychology and Environmental Sciences and Mathematics, among the top 500 in the world. With regard to other subject groupings, Politics and Education are among the top 400 whilst the University’s subject group Atmospheric Sciences ranks in the top 300. Furthermore, according to ARWU, the NWU excels in the subject grouping Hospitality and Tourism in the top 200 globally. Our Mining and Mineral Engineering subject area was ranked among the world’s top 100. The NWU is one of only two South African universities where both atmospheric sciences and Mathematics rank in the top 500. And, the University is also only one of two South African universities that have Mathematics (on its own) in the top 500. Closer to home our BA Graphic Design subject group was ranked as South Africa’s No.1 Graphic Design school with staff taking away a total of 11 Pendering Awards and 3 Gold Loerie in the 2018 awards ceremonies. NWU’s School of Accounting Sciences remains within the top three Schools in South Africa in terms of SAICA Board examinations with NWU graduating a record number of black CAs in 2018, and the School received an Excellence Award for the best Masters Degree study nationally in 2018.

Internally to NWU we hosted the Annual Teaching-Learning Excellence Awards event in early 2018 with some 62 recipients of various levels of teaching-learning recognition being celebrated. Faculties delivered on the finalisation and submission of their Integrated Teaching Learning Plans in which ICT integration and the development of existing programmes for online and open distance learning purposes have been described. The NWU Centre for Teaching and Learning delivered on the request of Faculties to re-align its structure to better fit a faculty-based CTL support model with development-teams allocated to Faculties from January 2019 to assist with the implementation of initiatives described in the Faculty Plans. Two new teaching-learning centres were approved by the NWU Council: The Centre for Health Professions Education, and the Centre for Engineering Education. At a policy development level, the NWU Policy on Continuing Education and the Policy on Language were approved by the Council together with the Declaration on the Decolonisation of University Education and the Declaration on Open Education Resources use and development. But policy alone is guarantee of quality as we know.

In total, and excluding site visits by professional or statutory bodies, the NWU has externally evaluated 80 programmes (comprehensively) since its establishment, testimony to our robust, frequent and routine processes concerning peer-driven quality assurance of our programmes as University. In 2018 there occurred two external programme evaluations/reviews (Structured Masters Programmes) in the Faculty of Health Sciences. The Masters in Social Work: Child Protection “Met Minimum Standards”, whilst the MSc Dietetics and MSc Nutrition received a “Commendation”. Since the establishment of the NWU 15 years ago, this Programme is only 1 among 3 programmes to receive this outstanding category of Commendation at our University. You may recall that in 2014 the BCom Transport and Logistics Management received such as Commendation, as did the Masters Programme in Business Mathematics in the same year.

In addition to the above, in 2018 the University was visited by one accreditation body: ECSA (Engineering). ECSA accredited all the programmes offered by the Faculty at undergraduate level for a further three years, an altogether great achievement for the Faculty. We are still awaiting feedback from the CHE regarding the accreditation status of the NWU LLB. In 2018 a report was tabled reflecting on the status of M/D programmes within some Research Entities. Several recommendations were made in support of Improvement, but also in preparation for the upcoming National PhD Review in 2020 for which the NWU has appointed a task team under the leadership of the DVC Research and Innovation.

In 2019 there are two external evaluations scheduled for the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences for the Adv Dip-Special Needs Education, and the BScHons Applied Radiation Science, respectively. Additionally, the University expects to host the site visits of the South African Pharmacy Council (May), a further visit by ECSA to undertake the first accreditation of Faculty of Engineering’s Industrial and Mechanical Engineering (June), a visit from the HPCSA to the Faculty of Education for the BEd Honours in Education Psychology (October) and an HPCSA visit to the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences for the BCom Honours Degree in Industrial and Organisational Psychology (Nov). Finally, the new NWU enrolment plan was duly consulted with Faculties, in two rounds of consultation to align with Teaching-Learning Plan initiatives, in 2018 and is due to be submitted to the DHET in April 2019. In the course

of 2019 plans for the development of a Centre for Higher Education Development, and the professionalisation of University teaching at the NWU through the development of a postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education are also afoot for the year and we shall be focussing on Race and Gender as key themes for cross-curricular engagement between academics and students of the NWU. It promises to be a very exciting year ahead everyone.

Infrastructure also receives a boost in 2019 with a capital investment of almost R370m approved by Council in order to improve and increase teaching-learning spaces availability and purposes in terms of alignment to the Teaching Learning Strategy of the NWU. These include projects that are part-funded also by the DHET as part of their Infrastructure and Efficiency Funding. The larger projects are related to facilities for Health Sciences, Natural and Agricultural Sciences as well as Education, across the three campuses. The attention we focus on our core business depends of course on the capacity of our single most valuable resource, you and so in the next section I focus on leading for change at NWU.

Leading for change: 2018 achievements and new initiatives in 2019

At the beginning of 2018 some 72 positions were vacant at the level of School Directors and Deputy Directors, and 12 positions at the level of the Deaneries in Faculties. By the end of 2018 and 152 short-listing and interviewing committee meetings laterⁱⁱ, these positions, with the exception of 2 remaining, have been filled – a mammoth and unforgiving task demanding much from our People and Culture, as well as Registrars Division in terms of attention to process and detail. The demands made of academic colleagues' time in this process similarly cannot be under-estimated and management remains grateful to our staff (academic and support alike) who have attended to these processes and enabled us to put in place a leadership fitting the unitary operating model. Leadership is an expression of care. It takes the form of listening, engagement, guidance and presence. It is the effective functioning of this new leadership group, from the level of the Subject and Programme Leaders right through to the Deputy Deans and Deans that will deliver on the promise of the much needed alignment of programmes, the much needed attention to equity and efficiency of resource distribution, and the commitment to social justice and care of staff as well as students. It is for this reason that People and Culture, and other support divisions such as the Centre for Teaching and Learning are putting into place developmental programmes for the NWU leadership at various levels in 2019. The deepening of our unitariness needs to be experienced by academics and support staff on the ground. Leaders at the level of Deans and Deputy Deans, Directors, or Subject Leaders, or Programme Leaders, must hear and understand and act on their cross campus responsibilities to prevent a silo mentality. You need to make time to meet with your staff (whether using technology or face to face) frequently, as a means of remaining connected to each other, since connection leads to engagement and engagement enables us to better support each other and our students as mentioned earlier this morning, and thus to realise two fundamentally related dimensions of our strategy: a commitment to social justice and an ethic of care. This commitment to care cannot be underestimated or trivialised: leadership needs to be caring, but staff need to be mutually supportive.

In terms of staffing the University employs 5 316 (both permanent and part-time) members of staffⁱⁱⁱ in the service of contact and distance education programmes through a range of support and specialist services in everything from residence and catering services, protection, counselling and academic and administrative staff. These staff are committed people and have between them long years of experience, security and happiness at the University, which in many instances because of the long history of our development as University, make for an ethos and spirit that is people-centred and development orientated. In taking a further step through our new Language Policy to give more expression to our multilinguality as institution, please ensure that your offices and our classrooms are not monolingual spaces, and that every effort is made to support students and colleagues in the use of the English, Afrikaans, Setswana and Sesotho so that the interaction experienced by all members of the University is inclusive and people-focused. We will be asking of academic as well as support units of the University to develop their language plans in 2019 and we will plan how best to support these going forward. This is an important year for the NWU as well as nationally, and I want thus to caution ourselves as we begin, by making sure that the culture of inclusion grows amongst us, and is experienced as such by our students.

Concluding remarks

Finally, the University has made huge strides in implementing its new structure in the course of 2018 with a view to being ready for the academic year in 2019. Inevitably much of the developmental work is still in process, but the fact that the emphasis has moved from restructuring and populating the new structure in 2018, to the development of people and critical capacity in 2019 leads us to believe, with a healthy degree of awareness of our needs as well as confidence in you, that the best is yet to come. On behalf of the University's Management, we welcome you to the new academic year, and we wish our academics and all our support staff well in the delivery of our programmes, the realisation of our research ambitions, and the deepening of our commitment to improving the lives of our communities as a unified NWU.

Thank you.

References:

- NWU Strategy. 2015
- NWU Teaching and Learning Strategy, 2016-2020.
- NWU Learning Interfaces Frameworks, 2017
- NWU Declaration on Open Education Resources 2018
- NWU Declaration on Decolonisation of University Education 2018
- NWU Policy on Continuing Education 2018
- NWU Policy on Language 2018

ⁱ Data verified by Integrated Planning & Strategic Intelligence in January 2019

ⁱⁱ Data verified by People and Culture in January 2019

ⁱⁱⁱ Data verified by Integrated Planning & Strategic Intelligence in January 2019