



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

ADDRESS: ASSOCIATION OF UNISA RETIREES ANNUAL MEETING

PROTEA RESTAURANT

10:00 AM

06 APRIL 2017

- Mr Johan Muller: Chairperson of the Association of retirees
- Representatives of Moso Consulting Services who are the spokespersons for our medical Aid
- Members of Unisa management and staff present this morning
- And our most important guests today, our Unisa retirees,

Good morning, and a very warm welcome to this annual meeting.

I gather from the hum of conversation about me as I walked in this morning that you are already enjoying your reunion and reconnection with the familiar faces of old colleagues and friends. I must also confess to a real sense of pleasure as I too recognise many familiar faces of former colleagues and Unisa staff. It is good to see all of you again! You are all most welcome to this meeting, where in true Unisa tradition no doubt, you will be attending to your business and addressing those matters that are of concern to you with the thoroughness and professionalism that was the hallmark of your generation of academics and staff.

At our recent meeting of some of these colleagues in my office ladies and gentlemen, you communicated to me your desire to hear about what is happening in the academic environment at Unisa and so let me turn immediately to fulfilling that request.

INTRODUCTION

Managing a higher education institution in South Africa today, or anywhere in the world, for that matter, is a complex and challenging task that requires a delicate balance between day-to-day operational management and strategizing and planning for the future. You will no doubt have been dismayed at the volatile and destructive protests on so many of our campuses in 2015 and 2016, - and I suspect many of you felt some relief that you were not being exposed to that on a daily basis. I also assume that were concerned about Unisa, and how we were faring in that time. Well, normal university business was indeed interrupted by the #MustFall and insourcing movements during this period, requiring a dramatic rethinking of our mission, objectives and long-term planning as we tackled insourcing and funding of needy and 'missing middle' students in an already underfunded higher education environment. I am pleased to report that with the support of Council, Management and the whole Unisa community we have weathered the immediate storm. We will, however, have to recalibrate our planning and targets, as well as manage the university's resources extremely carefully in the next few years. Now more than ever before we are called to ethical financial stewardship, and we are determined that we will fulfil that obligation.

The vision of the university, which has transitioned from being *the African university in the service of humanity* to *the African University shaping futures in the service of humanity*, is still central to Unisa's commitment to life-changing transformation. The new vision presents to the world a university that has broadened its narrower national scope towards becoming a fully African institution that is committed to advancing the South African and African educational agenda and to making its voice heard in the global arena, as a confident leader in Distance Education that is distinctly African, and not merely an imitation of business models which currently characterise global Open Distance and e-Learning. Having said that though Unisa is committed to taking its place as a peer in the global higher education environment. Now, more than ever before, our focus is on quality, service and excellence.

Legislative and regulatory requirements have profoundly affected our operations and the additional administrative requirements have placed a considerable burden on many staff. The new reporting framework has changed the shape and content of the Annual Report and administration practices, which now include auditable evidence, accurate monitoring, evaluation and measurement, risk awareness and management, compliance and accountability, as well as Annual Performance Compacts with the Minister of Higher Education and Training. Just yesterday I had a meeting with our academics and they were complaining about the intrusive administrative burden, but unfortunately this has become a fact of life for all Unisa staff. Claims of performance in performance agreements and commitments in our operational plans now have to be proven using auditable evidence. To use academic parlance – we are now well and truly “corporatized!”

NATIONAL FOOTPRINT

Unisa remains a national and continental asset because of its size, reach and reputation. National HEMIS data for all South African institutions are used to establish the Unisa footprint. Note that the third and final submission of each institution for 2016 is not yet available, which means the data may vary slightly in the audited statistics.

Of the 985 212 students registered nationally, the 337 944 at Unisa represent 34, 3% on headcount. Although down from previous years because of system challenges, Unisa still had 190 878 of the 678 842 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, representing 28% of the total enrolments. Full-time enrolments represent an accurate benchmark of course load across higher education institutions and allow us to make meaningful comparisons. When these full-time equivalent course enrolments are summarised, based on the CESM category of the modules in which students were enrolled, Unisa had 39% of FTE enrolments in Education, 34% in Business and Commerce, 34% in Other Humanities, and 12,5% of FTE enrolments in Science, Engineering and Technology.

These figures highlight the significant impact Unisa has on the sector and show that relatively small changes in the size and shape of Unisa have large impacts on higher education nationally.

Unisa's overall degree-credit success rate, based was a commendable 66.1% in 2015. This is exceptional for a distance-education university.

In 2016, Unisa hosted 116 graduation ceremonies, during which we awarded a total of 47 777 degrees, diplomas and certificates. This number included 243 doctorates and 1 011 master's degrees, putting us at the forefront of postgraduate success in South Africa.

When it comes to our contribution to graduates in South Africa, the audited figures for 2015 indicate that:

- 21 percent of all South African graduates come from Unisa.
- Unisa also produces a fifth of all doctoral degrees in Education (including 56% of all Foundations of Education qualifications, 23, 4% of all Teaching, Leading and Researching in School Contexts [grade R and Foundation Phase] qualifications, and 73,5% of Teaching and Learning Support qualifications).
- We produce nearly 25% of all Business and Commerce degrees (which includes 29,1% of all Accounting and related service degrees, 41,9% of all Business Administration, Management and Operations degrees, 21,5% of hospitality administration/management, and 18% of Business Economics and Management studies). In fact I just received the latest update from the College of Accounting Sciences, which advises that former students of CAS have performed very well in the professional assessment examination of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA). The Initial Test of Competence (ITC), written in January 2017, demonstrated clearly once again, Unisa's strong contribution towards the CA profession.

Candidates who completed the CTA Programme with Unisa have achieved excellent results, with a 69% pass rate for candidates attempting the ITC for the first time, and 60% for all candidates from Unisa. In total, 401 former Unisa students passed the ITC. This represents 21% of all successful candidates. Unisa also outperformed some residential universities in the ITC in terms of the percentage pass rate. With these results, Unisa once again also made a significant contribution to the transformation of the CA profession. A total of 245 successful Black students are former Unisa students (including 149 African students). This represents 23% of all successful Black candidates, thereby contributing more than any other single university to the success of Black candidates. The majority of the successful Black African students, who were successful, were also former Unisa students. Colleagues these are is the kinds of outcomes which I believe are achievable in *all* colleges at Unisa!

- We produce 21,5% of Communication, Journalism and related studies graduates; 22,25% of Language, Linguistics and Literature graduates; 27% of Philosophy, Religion and Theology graduates; 18,4% of Public Management and Services graduates, and 26,6% of Social Services students.

INTERNATIONAL REACH

The 2015 cohort of students represented 29 172 students from 136 countries outside South Africa. In line with Unisa's vision, 27 964 (96%) of the international students were from Africa. The majority, 83,4%, of these were from other SADC countries and a further 12,5% from other African countries.

REGISTRATIONS 2016

In comparison to the reduction in registrations in 2016, probably in the wake of the disruptions on the campuses of contact universities during 2016, the first intake of 2017 shows a dramatic rise. In terms of the college contributions, the College of Education (CEDU) has exceeded their 2016 target (104%), while the College of Law (CLAW) is closest to the target (91%). The other colleges vary between 71% and 77% of the 2016 provisional targets.

The 2016 shape of the student body is 82% undergraduate – which is as planned, but the distribution into the areas of study have deviated from the plan. The area of Business/Management is 27% where the target of 35% has been set for 2019. The proportion of students in Education is 26% against the planned 25% by 2019, and the SET proportion is currently 9% against the 14% set for 2019. Other eccentric trends may be a feature of 2017 as higher education adjusts to the seismic shifts that have accompanied the protests. It may take some time before normal patterns return.

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

The recently released official data of the institution (audited HEMIS for 2015) reveal some interesting patterns. The total headcount of Unisa grew by 2, 9% from 328 492 (2014) to 337 944 (2015). This growth was off the back of a significant decline from 2013 to 2014 of 7, 5%. The 2015 increase takes the institution a little closer to the planned (2019) total headcount of 361 643.

The institution continues to transform in terms of the shape of the student body, the growth in headcount has had the effect of increasing the proportion of female students from 63, 3% (2014) to 63, 9% (2015). Similarly a growth in African students is recorded from 71, 1% (2014) to 71, 9% (2015). A corresponding decline in white students is noted from 16, 2% (2014) to 15, 3% (2015).

Unisa has traditionally targeted a more mature student body, a large proportion of students being employed and seeking to progress further in the workplace or to strive for other opportunities. The 18 to 20 age group has declined from 5, 5% (2011) to the current 4, 7% (2015). The 21 to 22 age group has also declined marginally from 8, 9% (2011) to 8, 4% (2015). The 23 to 24 age group has remained constant at 11%, as has the 25 to 29 age group at 25, 4%. This latter group makes up the majority of the student body, followed by the 30 to 34 age group. It is also interesting to note that this group (30 to 34) is the only one which changed over the period 2011 to 2015, increasing from 17,5% (2011) to 19,8% (2015). This shows that the student body is getting slightly older over time and it means that 67,7% of the student body is between the ages of 25 and 45 years and only 24,5% are 24 years or younger. This younger constituency does however have different expectations of Unisa, as they acclimatise to the ODeL environment after the school experience.

The proportion of undergraduate students remains constant at 83, 7%, varying between 82, 7% and 83, 7% over the period 2011 to 2015. However, doctoral students have doubled from 0, 3% (2012) to the current 0, 6%, while Masters students remain constant over time at around 1, 8%, although a slight drop to 1, 7% is observed for 2015. The major change at PG level is the decline over time of Honours students, from 6, 8% (2011) to 3, 9% (2015). This decline is compensated for by a corresponding increase in other PG programmes below Masters level (PG Diplomas and Certificates). These students have increased from 3, 1% (2011) to 5, 8% (2015). This means that overall the PG component remains stable at around 11, 6%.

ACADEMIC MATTERS

When it comes to academic matters: *at Undergraduate level*, the results from the two examination sittings present an aggregate picture that shows that the combined UG pass rate has increased from a low of 63, 9% (2011) to a high of 70, 1% (2015). It must also be noted that as an institution we had set a 67% pass rate for all UG students in 2015, exceeding the target by 3, 1%.

The overall growth in the 2015 UG exam pass rate was 0, 5% over the previous year (2014). This was made possible by the various contributions of the colleges, most notably the positive changes in CAS and CSET. CAS recorded the highest change with an improvement in pass rate of 6, 3% from 46, 2% (2014) to 52,5% (2015).

The largest drop was recorded in CEDU which declined from 86, 2% (2014) to 83, 9% (2015) a drop of 2, 3%. Despite the drop this college still holds the highest combined UG pass rate (83, 9%) of all the colleges.

a. Postgraduate below Masters

Of the 54 162 postgraduate students (NQF 7-8) that were admitted to the exam in these two sittings, 51 584 wrote the exam (proportionally 73, 4% of students in the first sitting and 26, 6% in the second). The Postgraduate below Masters cohorts have been identified as a focus area and as a result their performance needs to be closely monitored. In summary:

- The average NPR for the combined sittings of Oct/Nov and Jan/Feb have increased from **67,1%** in 2013/14 to **69,8%** in 2014/15;
- **CEMS** reported the highest aggregated NPR of **83, 6%**, followed by **CAES (81,7%)**;
- NQF 7 and 8 students reported pass rates of 72,0% and 60,6% respectively;
- The major field of study area SET reported the highest aggregated pass rate for the 2015/16 exam sitting cycle (79, 6%).

Unisa has recorded significant growth in the number of both spring and autumn graduates in recent years, increasing in total (both ceremonies) from 33 379 graduates in 2013 to 40 317 in 2015. The increase in 2016 (autumn only) is also significant from 27 409 (2015) to 32 480 (2016). These figures suggest the positive impact of the many efforts to increase student retention and throughput at Unisa. It is also noted that the autumn ceremonies constitute the bulk (about 72%) of all graduates in the ceremony view.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Bearing in mind that verified research publication data is always at least two-years behind current production because of the elaborate national research information system and the rigorous process of accreditation and subsidy allocation, I can share with you that:

- The total publication output shows marked increases (68% growth) from 798 units (2011) to 1 343 units (2015). The preliminary 2015 figure (1 343 units) represents a 14, 5% growth on 2014.
- The publication output per capita has continued to increase over time and reached the 0, 78 mark in 2015. This represents a 47% increase since 2011 and 14, 7% increase over 2014.
- Significant increases in Research Masters and Doctoral graduate output are evident in recent years.

Unisa also has in place a comprehensive programme of staff development, talent management and succession planning to ensure that staff are incentivised, acknowledge and nurtured into professional excellence and leadership role. Some of these include: Extended Management Training;

the Young Academics development programme; and the Building Tomorrow's Leaders programme which has been expanded to include members of Labour; and Talent Management and Development programmes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion ladies and gentlemen I think you will agree that this amazing university is living up to its reputation of being a national and continental asset. Our role is extremely important for the sector and we are indeed a high performing, comprehensive university. We are all too aware of the many challenges that we currently face and which we are likely to face in the future, and we are making every effort to prepare for those and to mitigate any negative impacts in good time. These are prioritised in the university's strategy and plans for the near and long-term future. Executive Management and Council are collaborating to address the questions of access and success which speak to our student-centred approach at Unisa. Our deepest concern at the present time is the impact of the #MustFall movements on Unisa's capacity to improve its performance and to realise its vision and fulfil its social mandate. However, Unisa's 143 year history has taught us that this is a university that endures, and we are confident that it will continue to do so into the future.

Already there are signs that the measures Unisa Council and Management took to address the various protests in 2016 have translated into a quieter start to the 2017 academic year, especially once the strike around salary increases ended. The symbolism of appointing President Thabo Mbeki as the new Chancellor of Unisa has heralded a new sense of optimism among staff and students, especially in light of the very positive speeches by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, at the installation ceremony. There is acknowledgement of Unisa's contribution to human capacity development across many fields, its leading role in transforming the cultures, pedagogies and curricula of university education through the 'Leading Change' campaign led from the Vice-Chancellor's portfolio. I was pleased to launch the theme of 'Transforming Unisa: Academic and Social Justice for Development' at the opening of 2017 academic year on 27 February, and believe that the performance of the university is measured by the achievements we make in changing the idea of the university in the context of our democratic ideals as much as by the metrics of graduation and certification. Statistics and analytics matter when they reflect academic and social justice in the interests of developing our country and continent.

As former staff and current ambassadors of this university I am pleased to have been able to share with you a comprehensive report on Unisa's status and progress. I believe that you will share my optimism, when I say that despite the uncertainty in the higher education sector, Unisa has its metaphorical "feet" very firmly on the ground, and I trust that you will leave Unisa today, assured of our commitment to its continued growth into excellence

I thank you.