



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

## **SENATE ADDRESS**

**24 August 2011**

There is a legendary mythical bird called the Phoenix. Over the centuries, this bird, and what it represents, has featured in innumerable stories and films. Centuries ago, the Roman poet Ovid wrote the following about the Phoenix:

Most beings spring from other individuals; but there is a certain kind which reproduces itself. The Assyrians call it the Phoenix. It does not live on fruit or flowers, but on frankincense and odoriferous gums. When it has lived five hundred years, it builds itself a nest in the branches of an oak, or on the top of a palm tree. In this it collects cinnamon, and spikenard, and myrrh, and of these materials builds a pile on which it deposits itself, and dying, breathes out its last breath amidst odors. From the body of the parent bird, a young Phoenix issues forth, destined to live as long a life as its predecessor. When this has grown up and gained sufficient strength, it lifts its nest from the tree (its own cradle and its parent's sepulchre), and carries it to the city of Heliopolis in Egypt, and deposits it in the temple of the Sun.

One cannot but wonder why, after so many centuries, the myth of the Phoenix continues to capture our hearts and our imaginations - a gloriously coloured bird that dies in a burst of flames, and is reborn anew out of the ashes. I would like to believe, like many others, that the Phoenix is a symbol of renewal and above all - hope. Its re-birth from the ashes signifies simultaneously, the end of the old, and the unlimited potential that is vested in the new. And it is *what one does* with that potential that will determine the value and worth of the new – and therein resides the hope.

And so it is with the University of South Africa. There have been numerous cycles – beginnings and endings – throughout its long history. Some will be remembered with pride while others might best be left uncelebrated. 2011 Colleagues, marks the beginning of a new cycle for Unisa. And it is what we do with the inherent potential that resides in this cycle that will determine its value and worth not only for ourselves, but for future generations. Our contribution will determine how kind or unkind history is to us, and that is a sobering responsibility. So we need to know precisely what it is that we want to achieve with our university, and how we intend getting there. But to do that we must know what we have to work with. We need a baseline from which to progress.

So let me provide very briefly, a summarised snapshot of our institutional health, which is derived from data provided by DISA and presented to Council on 15 April 2011, and an update on those data which demonstrates just how dynamic Unisa, and the higher education sector are in our current environment.

- Controversially “improved” NSC results will undoubtedly result in increased applications in 2nd period and beyond
- *Update: This was the case. Our second registration period registrations reached almost 700,000 course counts – considerably up on previous years. Apart from the increased pool of NSC-eligible candidates, this growth was driven by students who did not make the application deadline for the first registration period.*
- Around 32% of 2011 applications converted into registrations; around 68 000 new registrations in 2011.
- *Update: Total applications for 2011 were approximately 172,000 which includes applications made in 2010. The uptake is estimated to be around one-third.*
- 2011 provisional registrations (now above 284 000) up on previous years
- *Update: 2011 provisional registrations stand at just under 350,000 – a considerable increase of 13, 1% over 2010*
- 2009 course success rate (59,7%) exceeds the 2010 ministerial target of 56%
- *Update: the 2010 course success rate is 62.4 – close 2013 target of 63%*
- Between 2008 and 2009, a significant increase of around 4 500 in Unisa's overall graduations was evident from 17 923 to 22 675 – mainly among African females in Education diplomas
- *Update: In 2010, Unisa graduated over 26,000 graduates. This means that since the merger we have produced around 123,000 graduates – a major contribution to human resource development and the labour market.*

- Unisa's 2009 "proxy" graduation rate of 9,1% exceeds the ministerial target of 8,4%
- Update: *Here, there are two graduation rates: one which includes occasional students and the other which excludes them. The figures including and excluding occasional students respectively are as follows: 8,6% and 9,1% for 2009 and 8,9% and 9,4% for 2010. The 2013 ministerial target is 10,9% (including occasional students).*
- Unisa's rank in terms of research outputs in 2009 slipped to 8th; its strength still lies in publications (6th place)
- Update: *This is correct.*
- Since 2007, Unisa's total (permanent & temporary) workforce stabilised at around 9 700 headcounts: approximately 45% permanent and 55% temporary
- Update: *With the appointment of temporary staff, including tutors each year, there is quite a wide variation in our total headcounts each year. In 2010, this reached 13,079 with the appointment of many new tutors. This raised the proportion of temporary staff to 66% – well above previous years.*
- African males formed the single largest race/gender group (59,6%), followed by White females (47,8%) and African females (44,5%)
- Update: *African males did form the largest single race/gender group but constituted 28,1% of the total, followed by African females at 25,3% and white females at 24,9%, with white males constituting only 13,1% of total headcounts (including temporary)*
- The proportion of academics above 60 decreased, while that of those below 39 increased, indicating the challenge of replacing older departing academics with this potential pool of young academics
- Update: *This is correct.*
- The disaggregation of Unisa's professoriate by race and gender shows severe and persistent inequalities, with White males overwhelmingly dominating among professors and other males also dominating
- Update: *White females are prominent among associate professors.*
- Number of unfunded students in 2009 are less than the original projection, but still constitutes a serious financial burden
- Update: *In 2010, the number of unfunded FTEs reached over 20,000. Unless some form of effective enrolment management is implemented, this is expected to double by 2013. The subsidy shortfall is budgeted for.*
- Student satisfaction showed a marginal increase in 2010 but remains well below acceptable levels and targets
- Update: *This is correct.*

The following conclusions may be drawn.

- Strong and sustained upward application and enrolment trends have significant implications for enrolment management, particularly regarding the new ministerial enrolment and output targets, including unfunded students
- Key strategic decision: maintain open access and current social mandate and negotiate with DHET
- Recent improvements in success and graduation rates must be sustained, based on actionable intelligence
- Retaining and advancing Unisa's pool of young academics is vital to ensure capacity and to rectify EE inequalities
- *Coordinated improvement in all services required to improve student satisfaction*
- M&D graduates and per capita research outputs must be targeted for improvement with reduced research development funding

Now on the face of the data, one might conclude that while we undoubtedly face challenges, especially in regard to growing student numbers, we are actually doing OK, especially in those areas that many might regard as core business. We are generally meeting or beating ministerial targets. Graduations are up, and we are evidencing growth in our pool of young academics. So our teaching and learning seem to be producing results and while research is slight below par, well, we are still faring respectably in the bigger picture. And we have many community engagement initiatives underway. In response to this I would say I have a simple question. Does this data in any way indicate that Unisa is moving towards becoming a high performance university? I have to say a very firm and unequivocal "NO." It seems that we are content to tootle along doing just enough not to embarrass ourselves.

Now, having come from the academic environment I am deeply aware and appreciative of the many academics who are performing beyond the call of duty and doing themselves and our institution proud. I can also tell you that my experience in the support environment these past months has indicated equally, there are also many colleagues who perform way beyond that which is expected of them. But I find it ironic that everyone at Unisa claims to be working themselves into the ground. The simple fact of the matter colleagues, is that that simply cannot be true. If it were, we would be a high performance institution. It's as simple as that.

What we know, and we have the data to support it, is that our research outputs are declining even as colleagues are claiming to spend large portions of their time on research. Why is it for example, that aligned to the drop in research outputs we have seen an increase in income generated from Short Learning Programmes? Does that not present the possibility that colleagues might be spending a disproportionate amount of time on SLPs as opposed to their research responsibilities? Distressingly, our data indicates that this might have some credence. And if that is the case, then any fair minded person should ask – who is doing picking up the slack? Is that perhaps why so many colleagues are feeling overburdened with work? And one of our ongoing concerns remains the fact that so many staff are simply not available to our students whenever they need to consult them. We all know that that is true.

Similarly, we have some support/professional staff for whom the notion of integratedness and interdependence remain elusive. They find difficulty in breaking out of ingrained silos and ways of doing things. They are fiercely protective of their territory and are often quite rude to anyone who might be perceived to encroach on it. Their interactions with colleagues and clients (both students and other stakeholders) is sometimes marked by an attitude that is less than desirable and not at all helpful. Again I am sure that these colleagues would strongly refute what I am saying but again I must assert that our institutional performance does not support that refutation.

Colleagues I know that it is very hard to hear these things and those who are committed and hardworking should not feel included. But there comes a time when we need to be honest with one another, when in the best interest of our institution and our students, we must face, and deal with the prevailing institutional climate.

I would be the first to acknowledge that Unisa faces many challenges, including growing student numbers, systems that do not yet speak to one another and a large amount of red tape, which are correctly perceived to affect our workloads. But equally, I want to say quite clearly that management is actively addressing these issues and at the highest level. When it comes to more personal issues such unhappiness around academic salaries, and inherited disparities and anomalies around service conditions - these too are being addressed. Much has been done to ensure fair promotion

opportunities – if I am not mistaken the call for applications for ad hominem promotions is currently out on Intcom, for example. Where issues are serving on our Unisa Bargaining Forum (UBF) information is available from your respective unions. You should feel free to seek it out.

What I would like to suggest is that just as we are working purposefully, together with our stakeholders, towards the kind of environment that is espoused in our Charter on Transformation – an environment that is inclusive and caring in all of its facets – so as an institution, *we need to apply the same sense of purpose when it comes to our performance*. Since I am unshakeably resolved to guide Unisa into becoming a high performance institution, I can put it no more bluntly than that.

As an institution we have declared publicly that we are committed to the 11 Cs plus one as a means of interacting at an individual and institutional level, towards a new institutional culture and ethos. As an institution we crafted together our statement on transformation, and in so doing we have placed in the institutional and public domains our joint commitment to a transformed institution – a high performance institution. Well colleagues, that will not happen all by itself. It will take hard work and perhaps more challenging, it will require of us to *change*, to *move deliberately* out of our comfort zones, our silos, our territory, and embrace the notion of the vibrant university that is envisaged in our charter and reflected very clearly in our new institutional structure. We need to become comfortable with *business unusual* and with putting in a full day's work and yes, even putting in more than a full day's work on occasion. *All* of us need to be jogged out of our complacency.

The data that I have shared with you speaks to serious challenges that need to be overcome in future to provide a quality education to our students. As a University we are looking at how, as part of the entire higher education system, we can contribute to the resolution of those challenges. That will take time, dedication and sheer hard work. At the same time, at the beginning of next week we will be holding our extended management lekgotla during which we will be taking a fresh look at our institutional planning with a view to reassessing its currency and impact in a changing higher education environment and a changing institution. The aim is to simplify and focus - and

I have no doubt that we will achieve that. I am very excited about the commitment and enthusiasm that has been shown in this regard, by both management and Council because it speaks to a receptiveness to change and a deep loyalty to Unisa. It is that receptiveness and loyalty that needs to be engendered across the entire institution.

But equally, this is what we as members of staff should be providing to our students to ensure their success. Colleagues, in the context of what we have all agreed to, and that is espoused in our Charter on Transformation amongst others, the only way in which we will achieve the desired results, is to take leadership in these matters. It is for our own benefit. We cannot compete against other institutions when we have not begun to realise our true potential. The truth is that the responsibility for transformation lies with you here today. As the leaders of the Unisa and the academe in particular, it is in fact your responsibility and a matter – at the most fundamental level - of personal and moral ethics.

Earlier on I likened Unisa to the legendary Phoenix that reproduced itself and rose from the ashes to a new and glorious cycle of life. Unisa, like the Phoenix, has begun a process of reinventing itself; it has embarked on a new cycle that will drive us to becoming a high performance institution. We have crafted and committed to our vision, we have crafted and committed to our transformation statement and we crafted and committed to the roadmap in the form of the 11 Cs plus one. All that remains is for all of us to change, for all of us to focus and - just do it!