



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**ACADEMIC CLOSING ADDRESS**

**06 DECEMBER 2017**

**ZK MATHEWS HALL**

**MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS**

*Transforming Unisa: Shaping futures in the Service of Humanity*

- **Programme Director:** Mrs Khanya Mahlare, Executive Director:  
Department of Institutional Advancement
- Members of the University Management present
- Professor Billy Gundelfinger, Honorary Professor of the College of Law, and a specialist divorce and criminal law attorney at the Billy Gundelfinger Attorneys
- Professor Qingxin Yang, President of the Tianjin Polytechnic University and other members of the delegations present here today
- Members of the University community present

- Members of the Unisa Choir present
- Ladies and Gentlemen

## **INTRODUCTION**

A very good morning to you all. It's hard to believe that we have, once again, reached the end of another academic year, but one senses that in the midst of the marking and final administrative work around the examinations, there is a general sense of relief at the prospect of a well-earned holiday, and time off to spend with family and friends.

Colleagues, whereas 2016 was characterised by ongoing campus and sectoral disruption, and concomitant efforts by university councils and managements to manage this very dynamic and unpredictable environment, 2017 has given us some breathing space, allowing us to reflect on the root causes of the disruption and to introspect and acknowledge our own culpability, as a sector and as individual institutions, in regard to the deep dissatisfaction and sense of grievance of our students, around an array of aspects and issues: ignored or not realised on our part, but which ultimately erupted and manifested so physically and violently across the country.

Key amongst these issues was, and continues to be - quite predictably - a perceived lack of transformation in the sector; especially in those universities which have been characterised as Historically Advantaged Institutions. This pertains to cultural, pedagogical, systemic and

administrative transformation and echoes the concerns of DHET around the lack of transformation in the sector, and their ensuing request for institutional transformation plans.

Much of 2017 has therefore been focused on transformation across this spectrum and this will continue concertedly into 2018 and beyond until we are satisfied that we are becoming the university that is envisaged in our Vision and our strategy.

## **TRANSFORMATION AND REGULATION**

Nationally, there is a groundswell of opinion and action towards a fundamental rethink of the university and its role and function in our society. This has manifested in demands for radical transformation expressed, for example, in the *decoloniality* debate, the development of African Languages, and recognition of indigenous epistemologies. These are high on the agenda of the University both in terms of its transformation directives and the implementation of its transformation plans.

In fact, 2017 was a watershed year for transformation at Unisa. Council held Workshop on Transformation where all *stakeholder* voices on institutional transformation were represented. This workshop filled an important gap in Unisa's institutional transformation initiatives. It is thus welcomed by the university community.

All of the key outcomes of the Council Transformation Workshop are being addressed across all portfolios in line with identified responsibilities, and we are including them in the APP. The actions and targets are going to be reported on regularly to Council and this will include other submissions from the academic and administrative divisions in subcommittees of Council. (Key issues, such as the language policy, Employment Equity, and ICT provision, had all already been identified and incorporated in the APP.)

It is very heartening to note the work already being done by the Change Management Unit, which will be expanded and embedded more deeply into 2018, in line with our strategy and institutional transformation plan, which is currently under construction. I would in fact, like to take this opportunity to share with you an initiative that has been launched under the Vice-Chancellor's *Leading Change* project. When I launched the Leading Change project I said:

*“Leading Change aims to ensure institution-wide convergence and coherence among all of our change and transformation initiatives, be they academic, operational or systemic in nature, so that they all form part of, and contribute to, Unisa’s DNA.*

*In that process, I believe that we will all begin to understand and appreciate, through our active participation, that Unisa is a university that is the sum of its parts, and that our capacity to*

*achieve excellence in all spheres, is limited only by the bounds of our collective imagination and our will to pull together.”*

Based on the above, the Audit and Enterprise Risk Management Committee of Council resolved that Unisa migrate from the outdated ‘Annual Report’ towards an ‘Integrated Report’, in line with the 2014 iteration of the Institutional reporting regulations. Mancom subsequently approved the establishment of a task team to lead Unisa on this path. The integrated report is expected to improve the quality of information available to our stakeholders; promote integrated thinking, decision-making and actions that focus on the creation of value over the short, medium and long term. It will also promote a more cohesive and efficient approach to reporting that draws on different reporting standards and communicates the full range of factors that materially affect the ability of an organization to create value over time. It aims to enhance accountability and stewardship for the broad base of capitals (financial, manufactured, intellectual, human, social and relationship, and natural) and promote the understanding of their interdependencies.

I also said during the launch of this project last year that: *“Leading change is about us at Unisa. It is our change that matters in the workplace; it is our academic plans that will shape our institution up to 2030; it is the nature of who we are and how we do things here that are very important. I am convinced that leading change in the big and the smaller spaces is what all of us need to be doing...”*

The fifth pillar of Leading Change focuses on consultation and communication and developing a change discourse. Communication has to happen with a much wider audience than the university. It must span various sectors and stakeholders, including government, corporate interests, partners and collaborators, to build our reputation. You will therefore see a planned drive to ensure that there is an institution-wide understanding and appreciation of integrated planning and what each of us is expected to do to ensure its implementation and efficiency.

Our efforts should be coordinated and integrated for maximum benefit and impact, to ensure that ***genuine*** change remains at the centre of our transformation as a 21st Century African University. Transformation is our collective journey, and we all have to lead it.

The migration from an Annual Reporting format to an Integrated Reporting format is guided by the (DHET) reporting regulations; the International Integrated Reporting Framework (IIRF); The King Code on Corporate Governance (King IV); The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI); the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), and; Recommendations by the Audit and Enterprise Risk Management Committee of Council (AERMCoC).

Quite evidently, the Integrated Report is much more than just a mere reporting tool. I will lead the team responsible for guiding this process,

and we will be requesting and collating data from different departments across the University. Your cooperation will be critical, and it will make your life easier because you will only have to provide the information you have collected throughout the year - once. Together we can achieve this goal.

Colleagues, if we are to achieve the institutional efficiencies that will ensure quality service, agility and responsiveness, and ultimately the required transformation, then we must all embrace and respond to this new way of doing things. Given the current environment and our stakeholders' expectations of us, we have a genuine duty of care, not to mention a responsibility, to demonstrate materially that we have heard their voices and their concerns and that insofar as these are within our remit and our capacities, we are responding to them.

Colleagues it would be remiss of me not to mention the change and progress that is already underway in the university, and so, as is my duty, responsibility and practice during this assembly, I will be sharing with you this morning how our university has fared since last we met. I will also be updating you on some of the recent developments in the higher education sector, how they will be impacting on us as universities, how we are addressing them, and how in this environment, the University of South Africa is assuming an even more critical role in South African and African higher education. This means,

of course that your commitment, support and contributions as our staff, students and stakeholders, is becoming more important than ever.

A key part of Unisa's preparedness and ability to adapt with agility to changing circumstances, is the ongoing identification and analysis of higher education trends at both global and national levels, to ensure their appropriate consideration, evaluation, uptake or mitigation, in the best interests of the University. Some of the more pertinent trends are set out below, and these are followed by some discussion on their implications for Unisa, and possible actions that might be strategic.

## **THE GLOBAL CONTEXT**

Globally, the ODeL environment is undergoing a number of transitions in line with various socio-economic and political dynamics in various national contexts. This has manifested in an acknowledged disintegration of the traditional Distance Education environment, which had grown exponentially, to include commercial and private providers who came on board on the back of ICTs and the internet, and leveraged off the established reputation and quality of traditional Distance Education.

This huge influx of all manner of distance-education provision and providers resulted in conflation, confusion and a resultant



“devaluation” of traditional distance and open education provision; to the extent that one or two Middle Eastern countries decided that they would no longer acknowledge the qualifications some well-established of institutions. Sadly, India too, decided that it would no longer recognise its own key university’s qualifications, which has caused serious consternation in that country and disarray in the sector.

These perceptions were reinforced when I attended the recent International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) Conference in Canada, substantiating the trends which I identified as early as 2015, and which I have raised on all international and university platforms since then. These are set out below, followed by a brief update on what we as an institution are doing in mitigation, and how we can use this moment as an opportunity to strengthen and position Unisa as the leading force in quality ODeL nationally and globally. Current analyses of the global ODeL environment indicate some key trends including:

- a) A focus on so-called ‘brain science’, which includes understanding how ‘deep learning’ takes place, and to what extent, using technology; as well as growing research on the human and artificial intelligence interface in education. This is important for Unisa in the longer term. *Since these are emerging trends in education, Unisa*

*should monitor research, carefully looking for ways in which viable outcomes may be applied in its own pedagogy; perhaps identifying suitable courses to pilot using more advanced technologies, to test their uptake, implementation and success, before embarking on broader roll-out. Technologies and technological instruments are hugely expensive and the University cannot afford failed mass experimentation. Any projects of such a nature should be supported by empirical research and a cost analysis in support of their adoption and implementation.*

- b) Mature research on learning in traditional ways versus teaching using technology, or both. *The OECD and HORIZON Reports offer some compelling insights into technology-facilitated or enhanced primary and secondary school-level teaching, and there is a growing body of research on the success and failures of technology in university teaching and learning. It is therefore imperative that Unisa drives research on ODeL. It is pleasing to note that the APP reflects an increased number of research outputs in this niche area. The findings from such research must inform our thinking about learning and teaching models, as we move increasingly online.*
- c) The escalating cost of higher education, which is resulting in exclusion and large debt; the growing impetus towards 'for-profit' provision, and the exponential growth of private providers.
- d) The growth and employment of data analytics as a key component of higher education and ODeL, in particular, as a predictive

forecasting and measurement tool for cross-cutting institutional functions that will facilitate more accurate student profiling, optimal targeting, channelling and disbursement of financial resources, which will assist in strategic planning and ensure the stability of the institution. *Unisa Council and Executive might consider making this a strategic objective, going forward, including the establishment of a dedicated analytics unit that represents a single, authoritative source of all University data and institutional analyses.*

- e) The growing prominence of institutional leadership and governance in a period of global higher education transition. *This is a growing field, developing at a time when Unisa is well-positioned to build on gains already made and steadily to grow its global and national profile. Leadership and governance must be made key objectives in future strategy and planning.*
- f) An increasingly observable, regionally focused approach to online collaboration in terms of which clusters of regionally based universities agree on quality criteria and mutual acceptance and accreditation of students, with state approval. This is a very workable form of ODeL, which is suited to the technology and infrastructure-rich environment in which they operate. It does not apply to Unisa, except perhaps as a future option for collaboration with our sister institutions who are on-boarding DE into their universities.

g) Ongoing struggles with quality and, interestingly, a growing gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' in the developed world, reinforced by disparate digital access and technology acquisition, which are mirroring the same inequalities in the developing world. *Unisa is in the very powerful and unique position of being a state-funded and sanctioned DE institution that offers a very broad array of quality-assured and accredited offerings. This must be leveraged as a marketing and branding tool.*

## **THE NATIONAL CONTEXT**

Nationally, the higher education sector in South Africa, and Unisa in particular, is faced with many challenges. The Fees Commission Report has now been released, but there is still little clarity on the way forward for HEIs at this very late stage in the year, when budgeting cycles must conclude and be approved. It would appear that there are four funding models under consideration, with no information available as to which of them may be selected – if at all. It therefore continues to be a time of volatility and anxiety, and as a sector we have to endure that we are prepared for such eventualities, so that examinations, registrations and operations and most importantly, teaching and learning, are not interrupted.

Key trends that should be borne in mind, as we move into 2018, include the following:

a) Government is unlikely to find any more funding for universities.

Furthermore, additional monies will be channeled into NSFAS, and not universities. We will see no increase in our allocations. In fact, there is growing talk of universities themselves having to increase financial support to students, which will require third-stream Income. *Unisa has already set in motion the creation of its own business entity, Unisa Enterprise, whose role is to generate a healthy income for the university, in line with an approved business model. Mr Letsoela CEO for the entity, has been appointed.*

b) Publicly funded contact universities have already begun offering distance-education courses on an increasing scale, and are advertising these aggressively, with the assurance of quality and accreditation. While these are currently niche courses, Unisa runs the risk of losing students to these providers.

c) We are seeing a burgeoning of private providers, who will be encroaching on Unisa's traditional turf in Open, Distance and e-Learning.

d) The new DHET funding formula will reduce Unisa's per capita student funding to 40% of FTE students, resulting in a 10 % reduction in our teaching and learning subsidy allocation, putting more burden on postgraduate and published research to

compensate for such losses. These steps have yet to be realised and their impacts measured.

- e) Funding group adjustments of the CESM will dramatically reduce subsidy for certain qualifications.
- f) There was a dramatic decrease in FTE students in 2016, whose impact in terms of reduced subsidy is already affecting budget allocations. The reasons for the decrease in enrolments, which was a sector- wide phenomenon in 2016, can in large part be ascribed to the impact of the #MustFall disruptions on potential and re-enrolling students, as well as on university registration and administration processes. In the case of Unisa, systemic failures also contributed to the problem, but these have subsequently been rectified. The University is already seeing a correction of that aberration in current enrolment patterns. The loss of income subsidy is therefore likely to be a once-off and should be accommodated as such for budgeting purposes.
- g) An increasingly bureaucratic and stringent reporting environment that is audited rigorously and which holds management and Council increasingly accountable. *This is being addressed urgently and systematically (I have already mentioned our move to the integrated reporting framework), and in a pragmatic fashion ensuring a common understanding and practice of institutional planning and reporting rhythms and requirements.*

## **UNISA'S RESPONSE**

How as a university, have we and are we responding?

First, I have spent the better part of three years alerting, informing and conscientising the international and our university communities and stakeholders, including Council, to these trends and their implications for ODeL and Unisa. I have done so in person, in speeches, addresses and reports, in our extended management lekgotla, and in Senate and Council meetings, to name but a few. I have consistently asserted Unisa's uniqueness, the power of its brand, its competitive advantage and the necessity of seizing this unique window of opportunity not only to entrench Unisa as the global, continental and national ODeL leader, but also as the pre-eminent provider of quality-assured and accredited ODeL in the world.

In response, some of our Unisa academics have redoubled their re-circulation efforts, focused more on innovative and cutting edge ODeL delivery in some of our courses, embarked on deliberate professional development, training and advancement in ODeL (we recently reported on a number of graduates in this regard), and currently, we are systematically revisiting the entire institutional quality regime to ensure that Unisa moves into the desired mode and standards of pedagogical excellence, student service and institutional administrative efficiency. All of these efforts are outlined in the *Report on Quality Assurance and Transformation of College Offerings*, which

provides an impressive comprehensive, holistic picture of academic efforts to advance quality, transformed recirculation across Unisa.

*Concerns around the quality of our courses, more especially Unisa's LLB have now been addressed and it is pleasing to note that the university has now received its accreditation for the LLB. Unisa needs to advertise this fact widely and to market its LLB aggressively to regain its status among its peers, some of whom, you will be aware, are working through the same process as Unisa. It should simultaneously be advertised and widely communicated that Unisa is undergoing an in-depth and thorough quality-assurance exercise across all its programmes, to ensure both quality and relevance and that, to demonstrate its confidence in the quality of its offerings, the Commonwealth of Learning will be conducting a trial audit at Unisa next year, prior to and in preparation for the CHE institutional audit. This is a very exciting development that provides a unique and powerful benchmarking and marketing opportunity for Unisa, to re-establish its pre-eminence as the quality DE provider globally and nationally. Unisa must commit itself fully and concertedly to this initiative to derive the maximum benefit. I trust that the academe and our colleagues in DIA will really come to the party in ensuring that this communication and engagement has the desired success and impact.*

Then colleagues, challenges relating to private education providers and the competition that they present, are eloquently addressed in an article by Professor Goolam Mohamedbhai, former secretary-general



of the Association of African Universities, former president of the International Association of Universities and the former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius, who offers an insight into how private education has gathered importance globally since the late 1990s: *‘Currently there is a repositioning of private education in the higher education landscape. The boundaries between private and public providers are becoming even more blurred, the questions regarding the definition of a private higher education institution have become more pertinent and the public versus private higher education debate with regard to funding, quality and governance continues unabated.’*

He further indicates that growth in private education is greatest in the developing world, in the absence of state/public infrastructure and funding for its development, and growing and continued demands for access, suggesting that *‘soon private enrolment will surpass public enrolment and this has already happened in several countries’*.<sup>1</sup>

This is unlikely to happen in the short- to medium term in South Africa, given our comparatively robust university sector, our government’s unique acceptance and funding of ODeL as an equivalent, quality part

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<sup>1</sup> The full article can be accessed at:

<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=2017103110332862>

The changing landscape of private higher education. Goolam Mohamedbhai 03 November 2017 Issue No:481

of the higher-education sector and our very stringent national quality regime. Furthermore, ODeL has the potential to accommodate growing demands for access from students of all ages and circumstances, and with the entry of a number of our sister institutions into the ODeL field, the access capacity has increased.

There has been a notable increase in aggressive marketing of commercially driven online and distance education from a number of for-profit providers, but since these qualifications are generally at certificate level and not quality-assured, and since Unisa targets (for funding purposes) students for diploma and degree courses, we are unlikely to suffer any significant loss of students. We have, however, noted a steep increase in enrolments for certificate courses and care should be taken to ensure that our PQM is not diluted to the extent that our viability as a University is jeopardised.

Colleagues, students will always choose reputation, quality and service excellence, meaning that Unisa will need to pay particular attention to these. In the national context sketched above, it is critical that we know who our students are, what their needs are, and how best we can allocate our resources to ensure our responsiveness to them, in alignment with our institutional strategy. Our Department of Institutional Research and Business Intelligence would be well placed to conduct national trend analyses and intelligence-gathering to

determine risk, impact and mitigation strategies for private and peer ODeL competition.

Having identified these trends, and as a widely acknowledged role player, Unisa must position itself as the dominant provider of ODeL on the African continent. This is a niche that we must claim as a matter of urgency. In order for Unisa to do so, it must define and develop its brand, based on quality offerings, service excellence, fearless innovation, academic and social justice, and acknowledged ethical leadership and governance. Unisa must become a sought-after partner. It has the opportunity and capacity to do so, but its success will stand or fall on its ability to reach stability, agility and credible governance, thus guaranteeing sustainability through strong foundations, upon which any lasting transformation must rest.

### **A SNAPSHOT OF UNISA**

Within the very dynamic environment that I have just sketched, I am pleased to be able to report that Unisa is holding her own. Of course we would have liked to have seen vastly improved performance but it is also true to say that there are some genuine mitigating factors which have impacted on our performance and which will take time and serious effort to address fully.

The final quarter of the university calendar year is always characterised by a hive of activity around the final examinations, assessment process, spring graduations and the release of reports on the overall performance of Unisa. Much of this is set down by DHET in the reporting regulations, including the auditing, finalisation and sign-off arrangements. This is a thorough and painstaking process, but provides formal, audited data and outcomes, which form the bedrock of our institutional analyses. While provisional data may indicate current trends, the credible results provided by the two-year retrospective auditing process offer more reliable and verifiable analytics.

The following data and analyses offer both. ‘Hot off the press’, we have the audited and finalised HEMIS data for 2016, as well as the provisional data for 2017, across a number of pertinent fields. Also included in the analyses are the high-level outcomes of a number of institutional surveys, and their relevance to our operations.

- **Headcount enrolments**

The 2017 *provisional qualification counts* QC is currently at more than 354 000, so it can be expected that the percentages will again increase in 2017 compared to 2016 where our unduplicated headcount (UHC) declined to 313 099. In order to keep enrolments within a reasonable margin in relation to the agreed targets it will be important to stabilise

the systems and operational environment. Another remaining concern is the lack of proper enrolment management to keep these figures close to the agreed upon targets.

- **Full-Time Equivalent Enrolments (FTEs)**

The decrease in enrolment explained above is mirrored by a decrease in FTE enrolments. Unweighted FTEs decreased by 12,2% to 167 625 in 2016 from a high of 197 102 in 2013; 187 043 in 2014; and 190 878 in 2015. Apart from the College of Education and College of Law which did not decrease as much as the other Colleges, almost all Colleges experienced significant declines.

The Teaching Input Units (TIU) decreased by 10,9% to 140 974. However, as mentioned in the National context above, a significant decrease in TIUs can be expected in future as a result of the lower distance education subsidy contribution to Unisa and in particular the proposed transfer of some CESMs with large enrolments such as CESM 02 Business, Economics and Management Studies (biggest part of CEMS and CAS).

In order to counter the negative impact of the proposed changes, it will be important to increase the number of FTE enrolments. However, it will also be important to increase the contribution from third stream income.

- **Success rates**

Although marginal, a decline of 1 or 2 percentage points was reported for the Degree-Credit Success Rate (DCSR). An overall DGSR of 64, 9% was reported - down from 66, 1% in 2015 and 66, 3% in 2014 but better than the 57,4% in 2013. This is below our target of 71,9%. The biggest decline was in Postgraduate below Master's where some challenges were experienced with the Postgraduate Diploma in CAS. However, the significant increases in Master's and Doctoral success rates was heartening. The DCSR for Master's improved from 78,8% in 2014 to 80, 4% in 2015 and 97, 6% in 2016. The Doctoral DCSR recovered to 46, 8% in 2016 after a low 32, 0% in 2015 but is still below the historic trend of around 60%. However, the DCSR of research offerings needs to be interpreted with care as the enrolments are split over the average period it takes to graduate for these offerings.

A reported 737 543 UG students (NQF 5 to 7) were admitted to the May/June 2017 exam, of whom 720 466 actually wrote. This represents an exam absence rate of only 2, 3%, which represents a continuation of the positive downward trend in exam absence.

The 2017 sitting shows a significant increase of about 19, 4% in the number of UG students that wrote in comparison to that in 2016. A normal pass rate of 69, 6% is reported for the 2017 May/June sitting.

This is the same in 2016. This pass rate should also be viewed in relation to an overall Unisa NPR target of 71, 0% set for 2017 and is therefore slightly below the target. Across colleges, CEDU reported the highest NPR (82, 7%), followed by CHS (74, 1%), CLAW (64, 4%), CEMS (64, 2%), CAES (63, 0%) and CSET (60, 8%). The lowest NPR is reported for CAS (54, 3%).

- **Proxy Graduation Rates**

The Proxy Graduation Rate (PGR), which is based on the graduates in a specific year divided by the enrolments in that year, continued to improve. For Unisa overall, this measure improved from 8,15% in 2012 to 12,45% in 2015 with a further improvement to 15,1% in 2016. The main improvements are in the undergraduate qualifications. The PGR for undergraduate certificates/diplomas improved from 9,0% in 2012 to 13,9% in 2015 and a further improvement to 19,2% in 2016. Similarly, the PGR for undergraduate degrees improved from 5,0% in 2012 to 11,1% in 2016. The slight decline in the PGR for Honours, which is the foundation for research qualifications from 24,7% in 2015 to 24,4% in 2016 is of some concern. However, the medium-term improvement of the DGR for Honours from 19,4% in 2012 to the current 24,4% is still positive. The improvement of the DGR of Master's and Doctoral qualifications from 15,8% and 13,0% respectively in 2012 to the 18,8% and 24,4% in 2016 was not as dramatic as the

improvements at undergraduate level, but nevertheless represents a positive trend.

Although graduation ceremonies do not provide a good indication of the graduates per academic year, they do serve as an early, rough indication. The Autumn graduations included 31 967 graduates and this provides an early indication that the upward trend in graduations will continue in the short-term. However, it can be expected that the decline in enrolments in recent years will negatively impact on the number of graduates over the short term. Since enrolments are picking up again, this will probably not impact negatively on graduations in the long run.

## **AUTUMN GRADUATION CEREMONIES COMPARATIVELY FROM 2016, PLUS 2017 TRENDS.**

### **Graduation ceremonies 2016**

#### **Autumn**

A record total of 32 552 qualifications were awarded.

#### **Spring**

A record total of 15 225 qualifications were awarded.

Thus, a total of 47 777 formal qualifications were issued in 2016 as compared to 40 336 in 2015, an improvement of 18.4%. This is a very significant achievement because it shows Unisa's capacity to grow in the postgraduate sector and to focus attention on the most highly



subsidised qualifications for future sustainability and also to increase our reputation for research and innovation. In a country hugely in need of advanced skills, masters and doctoral graduates represent a considerable asset.

## **Graduation Ceremonies 2017**

### **Autumn**

Between 6 March and 23 June 2016, a total of 89 graduation ceremonies were presented successfully. A total of 31 967 qualifications (a decrease of 585 (1.8%) compared to Autumn 2016), were issued, of which 3 420 were Undergraduate Diplomas (3 years), 5 457 Undergraduate Diplomas/Certificates (1 & 2 years), 1 752 Postgraduate Diplomas (1 & 2 years), 3 763 Postgraduate Certificates (1 & 2 years), 5 962 Bachelors' degrees (3 years), 7 394 Bachelors' degrees (4 years), 3 243 Honours Bachelors' degrees, 792 Masters' degrees and 184 Doctoral degrees.

### **Candidates who graduated with distinction**

A total of 2 120 graduates/diplomates obtained their qualification with distinction (*cum laude*), within the various colleges as indicated below:

CAES : 74

CAS : 93

CEDU : 1 308

CEMS : 187

CHS : 330

CLAW : 44

CSET : 84

**Graduation gender distribution:**

Total men graduates/diplomates : 9 851 (30.8%)

Total women graduates/diplomates : 22 116 (69.2%)

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion colleagues, let me remind us all that Unisa is a major pillar of South Africa's higher education sector, making by far the largest contribution to our national pool of graduates. Despite a number of complex challenges in both the global and national higher education environments, Unisa has managed to ensure stability, and even to a significant extent, meet the graduate outputs that it set for itself at the commencement of the 2016–2020 planning cycle. Despite the challenge in regard to our LLB, I am pleased with the way that the university responded which has resulted in accreditation of the qualification. Data provided indicates very reasonable academic performance under the extremely volatile conditions of the past three years and I expect improvements across all indicators in the future. Performance in postgraduate studies where we are carving out a niche for ourselves, is generally pleasing, but we will have to be vigilant, given the competition from new Distance Education providers in the sector.

Serious challenges remain, however, especially around enrolment management, ICT infrastructure provision and optimal operations, responsiveness to growing student demands, and managing our resources in the light of the serious funding constraints that we face in the foreseeable future. These financial factors will affect our budgeting. The solutions are: a) increasing our FTEs in the next two years; b) generating third-stream income; c) increasing our research and postgraduate performance; d) working on our reputation and promoting our achievements; e) and improving student success and increasing our pass rates.

In this environment, integrated management is more important than ever in ensuring that portfolios articulate effectively and seamlessly to reduce silos, which have sometimes led to competitiveness and inefficiency rather than collaboration and delivery. It is therefore imperative that the issue of interdependencies is addressed properly and effectively.

Additional opportunities exist to improve our brand, reputation, quality and service excellence, including:

- Making social media more positive by improving administrative efficiency and being responsive to the needs of our students
- Focusing on the first-year experience to attract more FTEs

- More sophisticated financial forecasting to avert a crisis in the next few years
- Transformation of curricula and university culture to create a more positive academic and social environment at Unisa
- Position the Department of Institutional Advancement (old DCM) to disseminate and embed the change strategy of the university
- Promote the Unisa brand and its unique identity nationally and globally, and target potential funders to become both donors to and ambassadors of Unisa.

While Unisa is well ahead of its peers in understanding its context and identifying nascent opportunities for positioning as an African Distance Education university, much more needs to be done to exploit such opportunities for the benefit of our brand, our institution and most importantly, our students. The University is held in very high esteem as the leader in formal ODeL and we are determined not to lose that traction.

Unisa currently has a unique window of opportunity in which to do this, but this will require bold and decisive leadership and the commendation of outside accreditation, such as that accruing from the proposed Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) quality audit, which will confirm our claim to be the leading ODeL University when it comes to quality-assured and accredited qualifications. Rather than feel

apprehensive about such opportunities, they should be embraced for the value that they add, the team spirit that they engender, the international reputation that they promote and the implicit stakeholder cache. Already acknowledged as an innovative university, Unisa should build on that by embracing innovation and challenges and marshalling them for the benefit of everyone and to live up to our values and social mandate.

Finally, most of the seminal transformation initiatives that are scaffolding our institutional commitment to change, in line with our strategic vision and plan, expect concrete results and outcomes that will shape our future. We face many challenges on a number of fronts, but I am confident that we have the capacity and the will to overcome them and to grow in 2018 and beyond.

I would like to thank you all, staff, students, labour and other stakeholders for your respective contribution to our university in 2017. Let us build on them going forward, in the best interests of our beloved Unisa.

It remains for me to wish you and your loved ones a restful and blessed festive season. Enjoy your holiday, drive safely and arrive back in 2018 ready to face the year with renewed optimism and diligence.

I thank you.