



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

ADDRESS: ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION OF UNISA

RETIREES

PROTEA RESTAURANT

16 May 2019

- Mr Johan Muller: Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Unisa Association of Retirees
- Ms Annelize Hartzenberg: Vice Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the same Association
- All the other Executive members of the Unisa Association of Retirees i.e. Mr Alfred Mokobedi, Ms Irene Chadibe, Mr Daan Coetzee and Mr Roelof van den Bergh
- Representatives of Moso Consulting Services who are the spokespersons for our Medical Aids Schemes
- 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 you all to this annual meeting. Let me say how happy I am to see so many familiar faces; happy and smiling faces! It is really good to see one another again!

Well ladies and gentlemen, the election is done and we are now in the process of setting up our National Assembly and Provincial Legislatures. Everything else will settle down soon and we have to focus on the future where rebuilding of our country is a priority.

It seems that this is a year of elections as almost 25% of our continent will be holding their elections. We seem to be in the same boat as we will be having the election of the Executive Committee of the Association of Unisa Retirees. As you go about this business, I would urge you to ensure that you elect into office an executive that is of impeccable character, ethical, financially astute and knowledgeable in regard to retirement matters, and above all, fundamentally committed to the appropriate management of the investment that you have made for the purposes of your retirement.

No doubt you will have heard of suggestions around the compulsory investment of a portion of retirement funds in dedicated

government projects. There is much work to be done before that begins to take shape – if at all – but it will be the responsibility of this executive to ensure that the best interests of the retirees will be ensured in any investments or shifting of funds should this suggestion become a reality. Furthermore, the executive will also have to ensure that all retirees are fully informed each and every step of the way.

Given the precariousness of the national and global socio-economic situation, it is critical that we act with the utmost caution and probity in this very challenging time. There can be nothing worse than suddenly facing one's "golden years" with the spectre of poverty hanging over one's head. Unisa has always, and will always, do everything in its power to protect the investments of its staff, both current and retired, so you may rest assured that from our side at least, we will continue to have your best interests at heart.

As we did last year, I will be sharing with you just a bit of what is happening in the academic environment, in the sector and more particularly at Unisa, and so let me get right to it.

The world has entered into a period of transformation that is changing societies in fundamental ways and rewriting history. Global

financial insecurity is giving rise to nationalist tendencies, driving up the divide between rich and poor and increasing global unemployment rates. South Africa of course is experiencing its worst ever unemployment rates at around 27%, so we can see that we can't escape what is happening in the rest of the world. Furthermore, it is increasingly acknowledged that the so-called 4th Industrial Revolution will affect us all to a great or lesser degree, depending on our geopolitical location and contexts, but the message is clear: our world is going to look very different a decade from now, and those who have prepared and are prepared for this new world, will be better positioned to leverage and capitalise on its benefits for the common good.

All of these factors have impacted on global higher education and they are influencing ability and means to prepare our students and produce graduates for an uncertain future. Finances are extremely tight and everyone has to do more with less. So it is crucial that as a university we understand the environments in which we operate so that that we can strategise and plan appropriately and in good time, for our sustainability and continued growth and development.

When it comes to ODeL, what we are seeing globally is a drive to increase the use of Open Education Resources, especially in the form

of Zero Textbook Costs and in courseware development. This is something that is gaining momentum but its widespread uptake and successful application and implementation have yet to be fully accepted, tested and measured, given the challenges around for example, imposing certain cultural knowledge bases on different cultures.

One also notes a move into online education, which is defined differently depending on the location and context, but it is fragmented, with little research on its general implementation and success. In line with this DHET has developed a draft Open Learning Policy Framework for Post-School Education and Training which is pending finalisation. Unisa has noted that Government's definition of online education differs from our own, and we will be looking into this if need be.

Globally there is also a growing focus on lifelong learning particularly via ODeL whose business models lend themselves to the upskilling of more mature students. This is largely because of the ageing populations in much of the North, with fewer and fewer young people going into higher education. Coupled with the need for technical and digital upskilling of the existing workforce, educators must look at strategies and business models that will ensure their

sustainability. Clearly an understanding of population demographics is important in strategy and planning.

It might interest you to know for example, that the age of people under 25 (let us say the student age group) in the USA is 32%; in Europe 33%; in India 50%; in China 12.78 % (clearly the one-child policy is having an impact on youth demographics); and in Africa 60%!

The average age in the USA now, is 37.8; In Europe 41,8; in India 27; in China 37.3; and in Africa 19.4. By 2050, the average age in the USA will be 50; in Europe 46,6; in India 37.5; in China 48; and in Africa 24.8. Can you see where this is heading?

In fact, the ten youngest countries in the world, are all in Africa, with an average age of around 16 years. 41% of the African Population is under the age of 15. Predictions place Africa's population at 2.4 billion by 2050. By 2100, more than half of the world's growth is expected to come from Africa, reaching 4.1 billion people by 2100 - that is, over 1/3 of the world's population!

These data have very serious implications for the provision of a quality education and higher education on the continent.

Undoubtedly, ODeL, together with a dedicated programme of collaboration that includes the sharing and leveraging of facilities and capacities, will be the most viable means of managing what is likely to be a crisis of education provision within the next decade.

I am pleased to say that Unisa has already begun a vigorous programme of local, continental and international collaborations to advance our own, and the continental higher education agenda. Included in this strategy are regional and continental projects aimed at harmonising quality assurance regimes towards a free flow of African students across borders and the maintenance and development of quality assurance criteria and accreditation models that are globally benchmarked and acknowledged.

The same applies to research. The continent faces significant challenges around food security, climate change, infrastructure development, poverty, energy, water sanitation, life expectancy, communicable/non-communicable disease management, and HIV/AIDS. These are niche research areas that could catapult Africa to the forefront of global research, but there are limited funding mechanisms and a lack of viable ways to disseminate research in the global community. There is clearly much work to do, with limited resources and capacity. Properly envisioned and strategized, Africa

could become a global giant in research on virtually all academic disciplines. This is something that Unisa is considering as we shape our strategy in line with our vision and our changing context.

In South Africa, our demographics indicate that the citizens in the 0-14 year category comprise 28.27% of the population; 15-24 years: 17.61%; 25-54 years; 41.78%; 55-64 years: 6.66%; and 65 years and over: 5.68%. That means that 45.88, nearly *half* of our population is under the age of 25! *This cohort represents our future.* Together with the working population (aged 25 to 54) we find almost nearly 88% of the population represented. Both nationally and continentally, we find ourselves in a situation where we have some very senior leaders, making decisions about the future of the overwhelming majority of our citizens. This is something that needs to be engaged vigorously. It is clear from the fact that so many of our youth chose not to vote that they do not feel that their interests are being represented and that their futures are being decided by a bunch of “oldies” who may not fully appreciate the “new” world which they are going to inherit.

We can deduce two certainties from these statistics. Firstly, at present, the only viable means of accommodating the millions of students nationally and on the continent, who will want university

education in the next few decades, is ODeL – and it is going to have to be hugely innovative and efficient ODeL if it is to produce graduates who will be taking over the reins of government and business, as well as a responsible and critical citizenry who will be ensuring progress and development rather than decline and decay. For Unisa, this has definite implications in regard to our technological and digital capacitation and efficiency. We are already lagging behind on some areas, for example, analytics, which can be used across the entire spectrum of operations to improve efficiencies, allocate resources maximally, optimise pedagogical excellence and identify specific student needs and areas of support (through nuanced student profiling, for example).

Secondly, individual institutions will not be able to service such huge student numbers on their own. It is increasingly acknowledged that online education is not less expensive than face to face and that it faces very significant challenges in its effective implementation. And we have even less of a chance of producing the kinds of research that we need so as to realise the flourishing of our country and our continent. This means collaboration, collaboration and more collaboration, and the leveraging of our collective resources on the one hand, as well as the harnessing of our collective knowledges and

research capabilities and capacities across the continent on the other.

South Africa's higher education sector has its own crises which need to be dealt with; including continued demands for access and support, severe financial constraints, political shenanigans, leadership and management deficits and urgent transformation imperatives (including around issues of decoloniality). These challenges are exacerbated by the fact that to a considerable extent, universities have become "proxies" for government social services, where students demand levels of support which reside outside the remit and responsibility of universities, but students have no choice but to place their struggles at the doors of universities because they do not have direct access to the centres of government's social services.

The challenge for financial managers of universities is to manage these dynamics and challenges in such a way that they are nevertheless able to ensure financial sustainability. This might mean having to make unpopular choices over the short-term to ensure sustainability over the longer term. So it is the responsibility of the leadership of the university to rank the needs and the risks and to make sober decisions accordingly.

Unisa has responded proactively to all of these trends and realities. This year marks a concerted drive for academic and research excellence in the context of our transformation, and this is being supplemented by equally concerted attention to Unisa's quality regime, which will be tested during the upcoming Commonwealth of Learning audit. One notes a general excitement across the institution to come to the table and display Unisa's excellence and quality.

I have made it clear that excellence and quality also apply to our operations, and already there have been notable upgrades and improvements to both staff and student systems, to ensure our relevance and to equip us to move with agility into the future, transactionally. I am keen on ICT as a result of its power to catapult us into the future. I am therefore clear that our VP: ICT/CIO has a mammoth task on her hands as we are uncompromising about our transition into a new digital space. Our VP: ICT/CIO has fortunately brought with her a breath of fresh air and injected much needed professionalism and excitement into ICT's operations in a very short period of time. This is a critical accomplishment and achievement for Unisa and its ODeL typology.

The remaining NSFAS hiccups are being resolved and it is anticipated that once the beneficiary data has been finalised, our rhythm on the latest differentiated system where our students now make choices on either S-Bux or laptops, allocations will become routine, and effected in line with DHET guidelines.

Unisa finds itself in the interesting position where its overwhelmingly mature student body, of the past is changing at an alarming rate. Our student body currently stands at approximately 75% over 25 and 24% under 25yrs. It is important to note that the proportion of students younger than 25 has shown a year-on-year increase in the period 2016 to 2018 (up from 24,2% to 27,3%).

Given the demographics that I have just shared with you, this ratio will change quite significantly in the coming years as more young people, nationally *and* continentally, enrol at Unisa precisely because of its quality assured and accredited status. We have to be prepared. This means that Unisa will need to revisit its strategy going into the future to ensure that it is equipped and prepared to implement a business model that will continue to accommodate our mature learners, but which will nevertheless meet the different needs of young students who have had no previous university education and who will have to live in a very different society. This will require in

depth analyses and forecasting, careful financial management and a carefully planned project of collaboration with other entities that will ensure the necessary capacities and infrastructure to advance our agenda and meet our needs. We have much work to do.

Real challenges remain, however, especially around enrolment management, ICT infrastructure provision and optimal operations, responsiveness to growing student demands, and managing our finances and resources in the light of the serious funding constraints that we face in the coming years.

Finally ladies and gentlemen, I thought I would share some Unisa statistics with you – I know you are always interested in these. Please remember that figures are audited and finalised retrospectively.

Unisa continues to contribute greatly in terms of both enrolments and graduate outputs. From the latest available data, Unisa enrolls just under 30% of all HE enrolments. Furthermore it produces over 20% of all graduates. In terms of graduates, Unisa, by its sheer size, contributes substantially to the national total at the various levels of study as well as field of study. Out of 210 931 graduates nationally, Unisa contributed the highest total number of graduates at 44 842 in 2017 which translates to 21% of the sector. The second highest

contribution of graduates is Northwest University at 17 510, followed by University of Pretoria (13 499) and Tshwane University of Technology (13 137) in fourth place.

At Unisa the 2018 registration numbers (374 531) surpassed the enrolment targets set of 358 474. This outcome was a result of higher than normal first-time entering students, following the announcement of the fee free education in December 2017. In summary, ladies and gentlemen:

- In contrast to the fluctuations in enrolments, graduates continued to increase steadily, largely due to decreased dropouts and improvements in the course success rates over the last number of years;
- Throughput is the key measure of the success of the academic endeavour. The good news is that the positive trend of graduates continued. Building on the success of 2016 where Unisa has recorded over 40 000 graduates in a single academic year as part of the HEMIS submission to DHET, the graduates increased to 43 842 in 2017 and a record 44 842 graduates were reported for 2018, an increase of 3, 5% between 2016 and 2017;
- Based on the total graduates of 44 842 in 2017 and the continued increase in enrolments in 2018 it seems possible that the Ministerial target of 49 627 graduates for 2019 will be achieved. It

can be expected that as a result of the decline in enrolments in 2016, the graduate enrolment will also drop significantly. This is to some extent evident at certain levels;

- Although Undergraduate graduates remained flat with 32 870, compared to 32 752 in 2016, the relative proportion of total graduates went down from 75,7% in 2016 to 73,1% in 2017. Postgraduate below Master's graduates increased the most from 9 206 (21,3%) in 2016 to 10 842 (24,2%) in 2017;
- On the other hand, Master's graduates decreased from 1 033 in 2016 to 931 in 2017 while Doctoral graduates remained fairly flat with 296 in 2016 and 289 in 2017. The undergraduate, postgraduate below and course work component of Master's contribute to the teaching output units which is positive as this will reflect in the teaching output subsidy. The research component of Master's and doctoral degrees count towards research output units.

Leading and managing a university nowadays is a daunting task. I am pleased that Unisa continues to ensure its sustainability and growth at a time when so many other institutions are faltering and succumbing to the pressure. I look forward to being able to share positive news about this magnificent university, in years to come.

I thank you.