



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA
PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
PRESENTATION: WHO AND WHAT IS UNISA?
COUNCIL INDUCTION WORKSHOP
KGORONG BUILDING, CONFERENCE ROOM 5
MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS
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Thanks Programme Director: Mr Kwena Mashamaite, Manager:
Committee Services

- Deputy Chairperson of Council, Mr Busani Ngcaweni, on behalf of the Chairman of Council, Mr Sakhi Simelane and members of Council, and especially our new Council members
- Unisa Registrar, Dr Faroon Goolam and all the members of Unisa's executive here present

- Adv Joel Jele Baloyi, Deputy Registrar, Unisa
- Colleagues

Good morning and thank you Deputy Chairperson for your warm welcome to our new Council members. On behalf of the Management, staff and Unisa stakeholders please allow me to add our voices to Mr Ngcaweni's welcome and to wish you all a happy and productive tenure as Unisa Council members. We look forward to cordial and cooperative working relations in the coming months and years.

Our Council induction workshops are aimed at immersing new council members into the life of this mega institution called Unisa, and to inculcate a sound and informed understanding of the functioning of the higher education legislative and regulatory environment and Unisa's role in that space. As such I hope that you will allow yourselves to be undistracted by the many other responsibilities which I know you have waiting for you, and to open yourselves to the flood of information that is coming your way. I have no doubt that you will benefit in a very real sense, from the information that will be shared today. So let me get straight to it.

1. LOCATING UNISA WITHIN THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION AGENDA

Before democracy in 1994 we had a HE system that was divided along the lines of race, language and location. After extensive consultation, which actually began in 1992, South African higher education entered into a drastic phase of legislative, policy and regulatory revision that paved the way for a totally reconfigured democratic higher education landscape - chiefly through the mergers and incorporations of universities and technikons that were located in similar geographical areas, or, as was the case with Unisa/TSA/Vudec, offered distance education. Where the mergers included a university and a technikon, these became *comprehensive* universities which simply meant that they would continue to offer both academic and vocational qualifications - inheritances from their legacy institutions (there were 6 of these). All of this culminated in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) in 2001 which set out the reconfigured landscape indicating the reduction in tertiary institutions from 36 to 23 (we have subsequently added three new institutions to that number); the virtual elimination of the college sector, and a very deliberate move to, and focus on, enrolments in the

sciences and a shift away from the humanities. This focus has not changed, in fact, it is being driven even more vigorously.

The implementation of the NPHE (2001) would be driven and managed by DHET through the three mechanisms of planning, steering, and funding. While the initial post-merger emphasis in the management and leadership of HEIs was on the achievement of institutional efficiency and effectiveness, it has now moved quite decisively to accountability and compliance – still managed and driven through those same three mechanisms. So our so-called “institutional freedoms” are in large measure circumscribed, measured, monitored and audited by our regulatory environment, and also by the disbursement of various categories of funding. Non-compliance with regulations can, and will, result in the withholding of funds or worse, a reduction in funds. Compliance of course, includes Council’s own performance – measured against its regulated responsibilities. Those have been shared briefly by the Deputy Chairperson of Council and will be enlarged on by Dr Goolam and Advocate Baloyi.

And so, the NPHE 2001 declared that the newly-merged Unisa would be the single dedicated comprehensive distance university in South Africa

and on 14 November 2003, the merger was formalised and the new University of South Africa was gazetted into being (Gazette 25737). As a dedicated distance education university, Unisa must acknowledge two primary, and quite unique benefits. Firstly, that in South Africa, Unisa has always been an integral part of formal quality assured higher education provision and secondly, that as such, Unisa has received government funding for its operations – in fact the lion’s share of national HE spend, given its size. This gives ODeL in South Africa a legitimacy and quality that is virtually impossible to find anywhere else in the world, especially in the ODeL environment. As a member of ICDE, CoL and ACDE, I am exposed - in-depth - to global distance education and I can assure you that Unisa is in a league of its own when it comes to national acknowledgment of, reliance on, and support for quality DE. We are indeed most grateful for that. DHET explains Unisa’s unique status as follows: “The DHET wishes to retain focus on distance education provision as a distinct subset of provision because of the potential of distance provision to:

1. Open access to post-schooling education opportunities for those who cannot or who choose not to attend traditional campus-based provision.
2. Lower costs per student by amortising curriculum design, materials

development and some teaching costs across larger numbers of students and by obviating the need for continuing investment in physical infrastructure.”

This is something with which we wrestle on an ongoing basis in terms of costs and the changing higher education environment. *Theoretically* at least, ODeL *does* imply minimal infrastructure and economies of scale - and be warned DHET see’s Unisa’s role and responsibilities in very literal terms - but in the South African context we have a changing reality and it is our responsibility first and foremost, to ensure that we produce quality, relevant and employable graduates, so we have to find an acceptable and workable balance between the two. Also, access is not meaningful unless it offers a reasonable chance of success and therefore the *quality assurance* of distance education provision, and attention to improving retention, pass rates and throughput remain critical. In fact, the ODL policy asserts these challenges as: *greater access in terms of numbers and diversity; reasonable expectations of success; and quality, affordable programmes.*

Members of Council, this is nothing new – it is in fact something that the entire PSET sector has been tasked with. The challenge I believe,

lies in ensuring that we demonstrate observable and measurable improvement in these areas, which is why you will see that this is a key focus area in our strategy and in our 2019 APP.

Statistically, Unisa is the core pillar of South African higher education. Given that we enroll over one-third of all students in South Africa and a sizeable number on the Continent, Unisa is critical and fundamental to the success and sustainability of the South African higher education sector as a whole.

However, despite our changing environment Unisa needs to understand its legislated typology and mandate, and its role and responsibility as an ODeL institution. For example, any attempts to secure funding for strategic initiatives or projects which are not aligned to our typology or our business model, will not likely be entertained by DHET who are severely cash-strapped themselves. Ever since the merger in fact, there has been little sympathy at all, in entertaining requests for funding for anything that resides outside of DHET's own interpretation of what Unisa should be doing as an ODeL institution. On that note, let me focus on numbers that we have as an ODeL institution. For example, most recent statistics indicate that the student cohort under the age of 25 years,

comprises approximately 24,5 % percent of the student body. The rest, 75.5% are over the age of 25. However, we need to note that the advent of free education might change that trajectory but it is logical to assume that it is not only school leavers who will seek out Unisa for fee free education. It is equally likely that many more mature citizens will also want to take advantage of that benefit, including to improve existing qualifications, particularly in light of the high unemployment rates. So it needs to be understood that any deviations from that will have to be self-funded - making the need for third stream income even more urgent.

Also, while we are actively growing research at Unisa, we cannot run away from our role of being a teaching university in practice and designation. The teaching to research split at Unisa is currently about 73:17.

Something that we need to be aware of and that we need to monitor very carefully as a dedicated ODeL university, is the steady growth of private higher education providers, many of whom are in the process of designing business models that include quality assured and accredited ODeL components. Much has been said about possible threats to Unisa's

sustainability from such providers, but my own sense is that Unisa is unlikely to be impacted by these developments to any great extent. A simple comparison of the current fee structures will indicate that students who are able to afford the very expensive fees charged by private institutions, are in any event unlikely to consider Unisa as their university of choice. Those who cannot afford face-to-face tuition or who cannot get into our public institutions are unlikely to be able to afford expensive private education, and so Unisa will remain their university of choice. Unless private institutions begin offering fee free education of competitive fee structures, they are unlikely to pose a significant threat to universities such as Unisa. Furthermore, now that all universities in South Africa may offer distance education I suspect that DHET will be even more reluctant to allow us to deviate from our typology. We are an ODeL University and we should embrace and develop that to become the best African ODeL University, shaping futures in the service of humanity. That is our role in the current HE agenda.

2. DEFINING UNISA WITH REFERENCE TO UNISA'S VISION, MISSION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND GOALS 2019 – 2030

Exactly who Unisa is, and where we want to go, is encapsulated in our *Unisa 2016 – 2030 strategy*. The three strategic focus areas are:

- SFA 1: To be a leading ODeL, comprehensive university in teaching and learning, research, innovation and community engagement based on scholarship.
- SFA 2: To craft and embed an agile, innovative, sustainable and efficient operational environment.
- SFA 3: To harness ICTs to support the transformation of the core business, to enable high performance, service and quality to all its communities.

As you can see, these cover the key competencies in the institution.

Our mission statement affirms the unique character of the institution and the role that it plays in society, namely:

- I. Lifelong higher education for all and knowledge creation that is nationally responsive and globally relevant. (And you will note that this ties in with our typology and our age cohorts at Unisa)
- II. A leading student-centred ODeL comprehensive university producing quality graduates.

III. Provision of cutting-edge ICT applications and platforms.

Unisa espouses the values of our Constitution, supported by our own institutional values of:

- Ethical and collective responsibility.
- Integrity.
- Innovation and excellence.
- Responsive student-centredness.
- Dignity in diversity.

In the interest of efficacy and acknowledging that the future is often uncertain, Council approved that 15-year plan be implemented over discrete 5-year planning cycles, which constitute its Compact with the University. Phase 1 of the Compact covers the planning cycle 2016-2020. Whilst it is anticipated that the strategic focus areas will remain constant over the period of the 2030 Strategic Plan, there will always be an annual (light touch) review of the Compact with Council to ensure that the approved objectives and actions continue to be relevant and of material and strategic importance and that targets have been appropriately set.

There are three critical imperatives that continue to undergird the objectives and annual performance targets, namely:

- *Fitness for purpose*: They must support Unisa to achieve its vision, mission and agreed role, function and purpose;
- *Internal and external coherence*: They must be responsive to the internal and external *strategic agenda*; and,
- *Implementability*: The committed Objectives and Strategic Targets must be achievable.

Whilst recognising the medium term planning cycle, the Minister requires all Universities to submit Annual Performance Plans (APPs) that will ensure that cumulatively, the Council-committed medium term plan is achieved. Unisa's 2019 Annual Performance Plan (i) builds on the 2018 Annual Performance Plan towards the achievement of the 2030 Unisa Strategic Plan and (ii) is aligned to the institutional indicators which will measure Unisa's performance and sustainability.

Aligned to that the 2019 Strategic Risk Register gives expression to the key strategic risks associated with the strategic intent of the University and supports the delivery of all the Council's approved objectives together with sound risk management arrangements so as to ensure

that resources and activities are concentrated on those areas of greatest risk and the priority areas of Council.

The 2019 APP must be read in conjunction with the Council's approved Institutional *Charter on Transformation*, which is an ongoing multi-layered and multi-dimensional commitment aimed at “*find(ing) ever better and innovative ways of enriching the student experience, elaborating and building upon African epistemologies and philosophies, developing alternative knowledge canons, and advancing indigenous knowledge systems that ground us on the African continent, without averting our gaze from the global horizon*”. Based on this understanding of transformation, and in pursuit of its commitment to transformation as a cross-cutting strategic imperative, Unisa has developed five pillars to drive the execution of transformation, namely:

- Transforming Epistemology, Knowledge and Scholarship
- Transforming Institutional Culture Change
- Rethinking Systems and Policies
- Rethinking Governance, Leadership and Management in Higher Education
- Promoting Discourse for Change.

In addition, Unisa's elaboration of transformation is expressed in by the *eight* dimensions, adopted by Council in 2018:

- Staff equity, development and work experience
- Student equity, development and achievement
- Students' living and learning experience, including their socialisation in the ODeL context
- Knowledge, epistemology and language
- Governance, leadership and management
- Institutional culture and social inclusion
- Funding and resource allocation, including transforming Supply Chain Management (procurement)
- Infrastructure, including facilities, buildings and ICTs

These five pillars and eight transformation dimensions constitute the Unisa 'Transformation Implementation Matrix' and the transformation barometer. An approved transformation implementation plan is currently being rolled out across the institution.

The final aspect is the pedagogical aspect of curriculum transformation which speaks to how knowledge is produced, disseminated and assessed. The aim in this domain, is for the co-production of

knowledge, cascading from the recognition of diverse knowledges brought by learners to the learning environment. All of these aspects of curriculum transformation should be underpinned by the institution's overall mode of delivery, namely Open Distance E-Learning (ODeL) in which ICTs play a crucial role.

Currently, and for the foreseeable future Transformation will be the foundation upon which everything at Unisa, is premised. Therefore, Unisa's efforts towards curriculum transformation encompass what is being taught, the relevance thereof, and the method used to teach. Curriculum transformation aims to address the interrelated challenges of access with success, the relevance of education and cognitive justice, all aimed at delivering an education that is relevant in regard to its knowledge content, the calibre of the graduate and the usefulness of the qualification itself.

Unisa is committed to a student-centred approach that gives students flexibility and choice over what, when, where, and how they learn, and we are striving to provide them with extensive student support. More recently UNISA has incorporated the "e" aspect of ODeL in line with technological and digital affordances, and this has prompted a selective

transition into UNISA's "bespoke" model of blended learning that has been designed and developed to accommodate its unique quality and contextual challenges and realities, cognizant of its pivotal role in national, continental and global higher education, as a provider of state subsidized, quality assured and accredited qualifications to a wide array of students. UNISA offers both vocational and academic programmes in line with its comprehensive typology, a number of which have received international accreditation. The institution has an extensive geographical footprint that has resulted in a globally recognizable and acknowledged brand and a calibre of students who may be found in all echelons of society nationally, continentally and across the globe.

Unisa's business model aims to embed and practice the necessary agility to respond appropriately and in a responsible manner to its environment. This means that the entire institutional transactional environment with external and internal stakeholders is being transformed, so that all aspects of that environment are fully digitized and underpinned by robust, effective, and integrated ICT applications. Unisa is offering support to undergraduate and postgraduate students through a menu of high quality, technology-enhanced services (including

tutorial and e-learning support services), the aim being to improve continuously, student success and throughput.

For students, the Business Model ultimately implies that they need access to a digital device as well as the internet, to enable them to apply, register and pay the university digitally, and to conduct all administrative interactions and transactions.

Having said that the new business model means that as we move into the future study material will all be available digitally (except for prescribed books that have to be bought by the students). Students will submit assignments digitally and receive feedback digitally (continuous assessment enabled). Students will be able to interact with their lecturers, e-tutors and peers digitally (either in asynchronous discussion forums or synchronous virtual seminars) or face-to-face in laboratories and they will have access to a 24/7 ICT Helpdesk for all Unisa systems.

3. THE UNISA MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT'S ROLE IN FACILITATING THE GOVERNANCE OBJECTIVES OF UNISA.

Governance refers to the specification and clarification of the distribution of rights and responsibilities among different stakeholders in an entity, such as a university or a business. Governance is about instilling a culture of checks and balances between different stakeholders, and managing and regulating relationships between the stakeholders and role player constituencies in a manner that is responsible, fair, and transparent and ensures appropriate accountability for actions. The pillars of governance are *transparency, accountability, cooperation and strategic leadership*.

The formal governance structures and operations at Unisa are derived from, and compliant with, the Higher Education Act 1997, and set out in its Institutional Statute. While these have traditionally been aligned in spirit and composition to the principles in the King IV Report on Corporate Governance (also known as the “King Code”), the Minister of Higher Education recently released ***“Guidelines for Good Governance Practice and Governance Indicators for Councils of South African Public Higher Education Institutions”***, which I am pleased to note is being implemented by Council, and according to which Unisa’s regulatory compliance will be assessed.

DHET asserts:

*“We acknowledge other distinctive codes that are available to advise and guide on the path to better governance such as the King Reports on Corporate Governance for South Africa which contain very good principles of good governance. However, these may not be entirely applicable to the higher education environment. Hence the need for the Guidelines for Good Governance Practice accompanied by a set of indicators specific to councils of public higher education institutions.....Councils are the highest decision-making bodies of public higher education institutions. They are responsible for the good order and governance of institutions and for their mission, financial policy, performance, quality of education and reputation. The Guidelines for Good Governance Practice sets out the principles and key elements of good governance practices, which can serve as a valuable and practical resource to university councils in their governance role. The indicators are purposefully designed for self-assessment by university councils to measure their practices in primary areas of governance. The indicators are by no means designed with a view to create a form of a ranking system for comparing institutions**One of the reasons I am putting emphasis on improving governance of universities, is the need to ensure that our universities do not become hubs for***

corrupt practices. The success of a public higher education institution rests, to a large extent, on accountable and effective governance and sound management practices.”

Unsurprisingly then, the HE Act 1997 asserts: “Within the values of academic freedom and freedom of speech, higher education is *regulated territory*, focussed on *co-operative governance* underpinned by the principles of *autonomy* and *public accountability*.”

Transparency and Accountability: To fulfill its duties on behalf of the people that it leads, leadership needs to be vigilant and decisions should always be in the interest of the institution. In our case as management we are accountable to Council. Being unaccountable will create an unnecessary crisis. Unaccountable power presents a problem and it is deleterious to the institution. Leaders must therefore design and implement effective systems of accountability.

Cooperation: Leadership should at all times perpetuate excellence in organizations that they lead. It is understood and accepted that leadership is drawn from the variety of backgrounds, and so for the perpetuation of excellence to be possible, leadership must *co-operate*

and work together effectively as a team. Leadership should embrace *diversity of opinion* as this is necessary and valuable. While embracing such diversity of opinions, leaders must have the ability to think and learn together, to come to a decision and support that decision, in the best interest of the institution. At Unisa we call that collective leadership.

Our executive management structure speaks directly to the role of facilitating Unisa's governance objectives.

Principal and Vice Chancellor

Powers and functions

- The principal and vice chancellor is the chief executive and accounting officer of the University.
- The principal and vice chancellor performs all statutory duties as required by legislation.
- The principal and vice chancellor is responsible for the day-to-day management, administration and leadership of the University in respect of:
 - the overall institutional leadership and policy development in respect of -
 - resource management;
 - performance management;

- strategic planning and development;
 - change and transformation management;
 - finance and resource development;
 - internal audit and risk management; and,
 - corporate systems.
- The principal and vice chancellor reports to Council.
 - The principal and vice chancellor is a member of all committees of council and senate, unless Council decides otherwise.

Council may grant additional duties and powers to the principal and vice chancellor to enable him or her to perform his or her functions.

As you can see, my responsibilities are clearly delineated in law and state unequivocally that I must comply with those responsibilities. Equally you will find in all of the job descriptions for our Vice-Principals, Executive Deans and Executive Directors, the phrase: *“In accordance with relevant legislation and in line with the Institution’s Open Distance and e-learning model and UNISA 2016 – 2030 strategy”*.

Management is therefore obligated in terms of their appointments and the requirements of their KPAs to practice *and* facilitate ethical and transparent governance. And the entire institution has been structured

in terms of its various committees and roles and functions to be compliant with governance policy and regulations - so we really have no excuse. We need to live and promote ethical and transparent governance – and to do that we must lead by example, in our own conduct and practice. We cannot have a situation where leaders expect staff to be compliant but where they themselves are *ducking and diving* and circumventing compliance with governance prescripts because they don't like them or because they are bringing home the realisation that what we are trying to do is in fact, *contra* our very own regulations, policies and processes. When it comes to governance, Council must set the tone and management must lead from the front, by example.

Unisa is a very complex institution, and as with any complex institution it is difficult to keep a finger on the pulse and to ensure that everything is operating as it should be. Management of a complex institution such as ours requires managers who are not only responsible but also accountable. Management has to work as a team, but with the understanding that they must do so knowing fully well that they are being watched and used as an example for the behaviours of those whom they lead and manage. We cannot afford to fail.

Thank you.