



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

CONVOCATION ADDRESS

24 NOVEMBER 2012

2012: Taking stock and looking to the future

- Programme Director
- Pro Vice Chancellor Prof N Baijnath
- Unisa's newly appointed Registrar, Professor M Mosemege
- Mr P Vundla (on behalf of Dr Claudelle von Eck: President of Convocation)
- Members of Unisa Council here present
- Members of Unisa's Executive and Extended Management here present
- Unisa alumni
- Unisa staff and students

- Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen

Good morning to you all

This time of year is always marked by a frenetic pace and an energy that is quite hard to describe. Our students are busy with their examinations, our staff are marking exams and at the same time, we are engaged in assessing the performance of every single staff member, and evaluating their contribution to this wonderful institution and the stakeholders that we serve.

But when it comes to leading and managing an institution, one can never only look *back* on achievements; one must always have an eye to the future as well - to what still needs to be done to ensure the successful completion of this phase of our strategy and planning, but perhaps more importantly, to the conceptualisation and concretization of the vision of what Unisa is capable of and to which we aspire within the next five, ten, fifteen, or even twenty years.

I can assure you that that process is as daunting as it is inspiring. It is my view that those who do not dare to dream and who do not ensure that those dreams can be translated into reality are doomed to an existence of mediocrity, and in my book, “Unisa” and “mediocrity” simply do not feature side-by-side in any of my plans for this fantastic institution.

So I thought that this morning I would reflect back briefly on 2012 and then turn our collective gaze to what we aspire to as an institution in 2013, so that as a convocation you will know where we are headed and an institution and what goals have we can begin the year well informed and well prepared.

Our first extended management lekgotla took place from 4 – 6 March this year, at Kievits Kroon Estates. The main aim of the lekgotla was to embed risk-based planning into our operations in line with the governance and compliance practices contained in the King III. The lekgotla also provided an opportunity for me to take stock, evaluate our status, identify key challenges and suggest actions to drive our institution forward. And so I located my presentation within the very sobering context of South African higher education, and highlighted the tension that exists for Unisa to increase access on the one hand – let us call it the “social imperative” – but to do so with limited income, failing infrastructure, overburdened and insufficiently capacitated staff, and an inadequately prepared student corps on the other.

I asserted our intention to re-establish Unisa nationally and internationally as a high-quality academic institution and highlighted many of the initiatives that the institution has implemented to provide a more conducive and affirming environment for staff. I also spoke at length about the

organisation architecture and the process that is unfolding institution-wide to ensure its efficient and effective implementation. That process of course included adjustment to our structure to ensure a dedicated focus on and management of the project.

Of course along with that is the need for staff to adjust to new ways of working and doing, to ensure that the technology is used to its best effect. That too is a process that has been unfolding incrementally, and it is pleasing to see how enthusiastically a growing number of our staff have embraced the challenges and are now ICT “evangelists” – to the extent that they want to do *everything* on ICTs! It is both exciting and rewarding and I must Unisa’s staff for having the courage and loyalty to change. Change is never easy, but I believe that many Unisa staff now realise that it can be very empowering once it has been tackled.

Four key areas of concern were identified for immediate attention, and these were confirmed by members of management and Council. These were: SERVICE; ICT; LEARNER SUPPORT; and PEOPLE – especially staff development. We undertook to address these through the thorough embedding of the reworked strategic goals and our strategic activities for the next three years. The five (5) reworked strategic goals reflected the changed focus of the University, and the Unisa 2013 – 2015: *towards a high*

performance university (with aligned institutional risks), was approved by Council at our last Council meeting. The goals comprise *Academic, Corporate Governance and Sustainability, Service, People,* and *Co-operate Governance and Stakeholder Relations*. The aligned IOP for this final phase of our 2015 Revisited strategic plan has also been approved, allowing us to start the year with clearly defined and approved focus areas.

When it comes to our regions much work remains to be done, but this too is work in progress. I am excited by the calibre of our regional directors and the enthusiasm that they have displayed in ensuring that our regions become centres of excellence, especially around service delivery. Regional facilities are not where we would like them to be, neither are we happy with the way in which some staff continues to treat our students, but interventions have been identified to deal with this and I look forward to seeing a lot of good things emanating from regions in 2013.

As an institution committed to quality higher education, and with the support of the Department of Higher Education and Training, UNISA has prioritised the deliberate enhancement of teaching and learning, research and innovation and community engagement. The success of this prioritised enhancement

depends on ensuring that our facilities are equally able to accommodate and facilitate the planned activities. To this end we have for example, done renovations, upgrades and/or additions to the existing facilities at our campuses in Polokwane, Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria (Sunnyside) to make provision for additional tutor facilities, learning space and computer laboratories. We have also purchased and equipped mobile units to provide mobile tutorial and library facilities to our students in very remote areas such as the Northern Cape.

The University is also investing in the redevelopment of the libraries at the two main campuses as well as the regional centres. The project will improve the delivery, scope and availability of library services and resources at the Regional Centres.

UNISA has also had strong historical relationships with three FET Colleges in the Western Cape; namely Boland College, College of Cape Town and Northlink College. The University recently signed new collaborative agreements with these Colleges following discussions with the Department of Higher Education and Training. UNISA believes that strong collaborations between FET Colleges and Universities are necessary for the realisation of the goals set out in the Green Paper on Post School Education and

Training. On 12 December, we will be celebrating the official opening of the renovated UNISA Cape Town Campus in Parow and the opening of the Campus will thus also include a ceremonial signing of these agreements.

When I do my regular visits to the regions next year, it will be with the intention of hearing what the regions feel we need to do when it comes to the next iteration of our institutional strategy. Where do they see Unisa after 2015? This is a process that I will be repeating throughout the institution to ensure that we hear the institutional “voice” on the way forward, for inclusion in our planning and our deliberations at a future stage.

It was also my pleasure to announce our new SRC members at our first Senate held in March this year. Our SRC have made great strides, as they have had an opportunity of being trained. The training of student leaders was introduced by the VC this year and I want to extend my gratitude to a cross-section of our staff members who volunteered to participate in training our student leaders. In addition to our own staff members who are part of the training team are: Ethics SA, Prof Brian Figaji (retired VC of the Cape University of Technology) and Dr Mathews Phosa (Chairperson of Council). It is my sincere hope that the training that we have provided to our SRC will translate into a professional

and dynamic cohort of students who will not only service Unisa and its students with pride and efficiency, but who will take their newly acquired skills and knowledge into their future careers to the benefit of our country and its people. We certainly look forward to that.

During the course of the year I have challenged staff at our institutional assemblies and at our Senate meetings to introspect on the progress that we have made in achieving a transformed institution and the desired institutional ethos. At a staff assembly address in June this year entitled “ From Apathy to Action: *Collaborating towards high performance,*” I reminded staff that Unisa’s Charter on Transformation defines each of the 11 C’s plus 1 on which our nascent institutional ethos is premised. We agree that at Unisa we are striving for a truly African ethos of warmth, caring and inclusivity and pleasingly, it is a striving that is beginning to bear fruit. But of course, it is one that needs ongoing effort and attention.

However, the ethos in itself can never be the end goal. It is a key strand of the new DNA that we are forging for Unisa - a DNA that characterises Unisa as a high-performance institution. Our ethos, in fact, must underpin *everything* that we do: not only our attitude towards our work, but also the way we treat one another, our students and our stakeholders. It is an ethos that is

completely consonant with Unisa's vision, mission and values. Our values of *Social Justice and Fairness* and *Excellence with Integrity* say it all.

Of course, the way in which we conduct ourselves not only reflects our *own* attitudes and behaviours, but it also creates in the minds of others – more especially our colleagues, students and stakeholders - very clear impressions of us as individuals, as employees, as members of departments, as managers and leaders, and of course as an institution. Our actions colleagues, determine the way people perceive us, how they respond to us, and the levels of respect and appreciation they will accord us. And so as staff, we need to do a *reality check* from time to time to do an honest assessment and to identify areas in which we are lacking. If we want to be valued, respected, appreciated and included, then we need to work and behave in ways that enable others to value us, respect us, appreciate us and include us. It is a process of mutual reinforcement that can only happen through collaboration - through teamwork.

I spoke too, about poor attendance of staff assemblies at which critical institutional issues are raised and I emphasised the need for all staff to attend these meetings. This remains a challenge that will continue to be addressed very firmly.

If I have emphasised one thing above all else this year in fact, it is what I deem to be Unisa's greatest challenge and its greatest risk, and that is *service delivery* - a concern that is shared by Council and even DoHET. We are all aware of the amount of work and expenditure that is going into the implementation of the organisation architecture and so we have assurance that this is a work in progress that is proceeding according to plan. However, there is concern around key systems such as the semester system and the student system, which I am pleased to inform you, are currently receiving focussed attention.

This year also saw the deeper embedding and inculcation of the Servant Leadership ethos, during which time we emphasised that servant leadership is antithetical to autocratic leadership and other unsavoury behaviours such as bullying, as well as silo mentalities which militate against effective teamwork. As an institution we are gradually changing the way that we approach our interactions and our projects, understanding that what we are doing should be in the best interest of Unisa. There is in the institution, a growing awareness of the debilitating effect that a lack of collaboration and teamwork has on the successful implementation of critical institutional projects. I feel very hopeful that the absolute necessity for collaboration and consultation on all institutional projects seems to have taken root,

and I look forward to seeing improved efficiencies as we begin with the implementation of the *2013 – 2015 : towards a high performance institution*.

This year we have also had to deal with the changed demands being made on higher education institutions when it comes to institutional reporting. From this year, in our annual reporting, where we claim progress on the implementation of our various IOP actions, these claims must be supported with *auditable* proof. The Auditor General has made it clear that HEIs will be audited on their performance (amongst others) in future. The draft reporting regulations for higher education institutions appear to marry the recommendations of KING III with our more traditional regulatory reporting requirements, but the changes that this has brought about are very significant – not only in regard to the way we report, but the way in which we plan. This means that as an institution we will have to adjust as the process unfolds. I feel confident that we are well placed to do that.

This year marked a strong emphasis on ethics, risk and sustainability at Unisa. Once again the issue of service came to the fore, when, in compiling our institutional risk register at the beginning of the year, it became crystal clear that *service* posed a significant risk to the institution and not merely from the

perspective of ICTs. There is also a significant measure of risk around the issue of *People*.

It is always important to acknowledge and celebrate our progress and success as an institution, and I believe that we have done that. There are many colleagues whose contributions are simply superb and who are clearly dedicated to this institution and our students and I would like to publicly acknowledge them for their efforts. Over and above general staff who fit into that category, I think here of our research function at which we celebrated the excellent improvements and accomplishments in research at Unisa, as well as the appointment to external boards and committees of a number of our top management including Prof Narend Baijnath (Pro Vice Chancellor) appointed to the Board of the Commonwealth of Learning, Prof Divya Singh (Vice Principal: Advisory and Assurance Services) appointed to the Audit and Risk Management Committee, as well as the Legal Services Committee of Higher Education South Africa, Dr Molapo Qhobela (Vice-Principal: Institutional Development) appointed to the Board of the Council on Higher Education, Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng (formerly Setati – Vice Principal: Research and Innovation) appointed to the Research Committee of Higher Education South Africa and Prof Rita Maré Vice Principal: Academic, Teaching and learning appointed to the Teaching and Learning Committee of

Higher Education South Africa. This list is by no means exhaustive – there are other colleagues in the institution who have also received similar accolades. However, the fact these colleagues have been appointed to serve on these Boards and committees is not only a testament to their own professional abilities and expertise, but also to the calibre of management that we have at our institution, and the esteem in which they are held in the broader education environment – and we are justifiably proud of that fact. I can also mention other important institutional milestones such as the launch of our College of Education, as well as the launch of a number of institutes, which have poised the institution for some exciting and innovative projects in line with our vision to be the African Institution in the service of Humanity.

But equally, on occasion, I have had the unpleasant task of speaking very plainly about those who have shirked their duties and their responsibilities, particularly around our response to, and treatment of our students, as well as other important aspects such as absenteeism, which also impacts on service delivery and which is receiving ongoing attention, and while that is never a pleasant thing to do, it is necessary.

At our first Senate meeting I observed that given Unisa's size, infrastructure and capacity, this institution has the potential to transform itself *and* the face of higher education in South Africa,

and to provide desperately needed impetus for our socio-economic development. I am still of that view - in fact it is one that I reiterated at our Service Training Roundtable in October this year. But we need to be agile and responsive as an institution if we intend staying ahead of the pack and adapting successfully to changing higher education dynamics, and that is something that needs to be worked on continuously.

At our last Senate meeting I spoke of the need to open up spaces for reflection and deeper engagement, to the extent that we begin to “rewire” our thinking patterns and our engagement with our colleagues across the institution. I asserted that we need to “claim our space.” I am pleased to say that I believe that we have begun a genuine process of doing just that. As part of this process my office has embarked on dedicated institution-wide roundtables and discussion fora with the aim of opening up more and varied spaces for engagement on important initiatives and issues. This will be accelerated next year. We have also held a number of public lectures including our Annual Founder’s lecture which this year, was delivered by Dr Mamphele Ramphele, the founder of the Citizens’ Movement on the topic: Educating and Training the 21st Century South African Citizen. By all accounts this was a most enjoyable and successful evening.

At the Roundtable on Service Delivery which I mentioned earlier, I summed up the progress that we have made as an institution as follows:

“...we have provided the strategic, cultural and ethical framework for service delivery, and to a large extent these are quite ably supported and facilitated by the ongoing implementation of custom designed systems and processes. What we need to do now, is to turn inward and to reflect on why it is that we have not yet achieved the levels of success that I am quite certain we all aspire to. “That too is a process that will be tackled with vigour next year and I am confident that we will be able to record measurable progress.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have had a really busy year. I am very pleased with our progress in Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation and Community Engagement. Over the period 2007 to 2011 the number of academic qualifications offered has increased by an average of 7,2% year-on-year. While the majority of courses currently offered at Unisa are year courses, this number continues to decrease (down from 4 822 in 2007 to 1 934 in 2011). In contrast, the number of semester courses has increased from 731 in 2007 to 1 212 in 2011. However, the year-on-year percentage change is declining for both newly introduced year and semester courses. This suggests a stabilization of the curriculum as the

implementation of the semester system for undergraduate qualifications comes to completion.

Provisional registration statistics reveal a moderate growth of 2,7% from 2011 to 2012. This in comparison to a growth of 12,6% recorded for 2010 to 2011. Given the growth in provisional registrations, HEMIS HC enrolments for 2012 are projected at 338 577 (compared to a 2011 figure of 328 864).

Drawing from the 2011 HEMIS submission, Unisa's student profile continues to increase its proportion of:

- Part-time students (up from 82,3% in 2007 to 88,7% in 2011).
Average year-on-year from 2007 was 12,0%.
- Female students (up from 57,1% in 2007 to 61,4% in 2011).
Average year-on-year from 2007 was 11,9%).
- African students (up from 61,0% in 2007 to 69,4% in 2011).
Average year-on-year from 2007 was 14,0%.

The number of graduates increased marginally by 2,8% from 26 073 in 2010 to 26 808 in 2011.

In 2007 to 2008, UG degrees have been the main contributor of graduates. The contribution of UG certificates and diplomas, however, surpassed UG degrees in 2009 and 2010. In 2011 the contribution of these two types was nearly equal.

In absolute terms, The College of education was the main contributor with 10 767 graduates in 2011, followed by the College of economic and Management Sciences, with 9 525 graduates.

Graduates in UG Degrees and post graduates degrees below masters have continued to increase steadily over the period. Currently, the rate for UG level is 67,3% and for PG below Masters 58,9%. Small increases in Masters and Doctoral graduates are evident. The Degree Credit Success Rate has shown an upward trend since 2008 on both UG and PG below Masters level.

Government and the people of South Africa and this continent have very high expectations of Unisa as the key player in the upliftment of our people, our country and our continent. I sincerely believe that we can deliver *whatever* is required of us if we are committed to do so and prepared to make the effort and yes, even sacrifices sometimes, to see it through. Like most countries in the world we are going through a very tough time. Unisa cannot fail this country and our children, in their hour of need. We will continue to face our service delivery challenges with honesty, courage and determination and in a spirit of collaboration. I have every confidence that we will succeed.