



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

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

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**ACADEMIC OPENING ADDRESS**

**8 FEBRUARY 2012**

*Institutional agility and high performance in a dynamic  
higher education milieu - where to Unisa?*

- Madame Programme Director
- Deputy Chairperson of the Unisa Council Dr S Mokone-Matabane and other Unisa Council members present
- Mrs Makhanya
- Recipients of awards
- Members of Unisa's executive and extended management
- Staff, students
- Honoured guests ladies and gentlemen

## INTRODUCTION

It occurred to me while I was preparing this address, that this is the first time that I have seen you as an assembly since the beginning of this year, and so I would like to take the opportunity to wish you and your families a very healthy, blessed and productive 2012. I trust that this will also be a year of productivity for Unisa as we face a number of quite daunting challenges on our journey to a high performance university.

Colleagues, Paul Meyer says quite correctly, and I quote: “Productivity is never an accident. It is always the result of a commitment to excellence, intelligent planning, and focused effort.”<sup>1</sup> Unquote.

At Unisa we understand that. We know that if we are to achieve high-performance and excellence in all that we do, we have to become experts at reading our

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<sup>1</sup> Paul J. Meyer. Founded the Success Motivation Institute in 1960 and dedicated it to "motivating people to their full potential."

environment and responding proactively and perhaps even innovatively – to its changing dynamics, both internally and externally. And that requires *agility*, which is defined as “the ability to move quickly and easily; and the ability to think quickly and in an intelligent way.”

To me, this implies that as an institution, and as individuals, we need to be *intelligently responsive* in the manner in which we lead, manage and operate this institution. We need to adopt and nurture a mindset flexible enough to accommodate the different and embrace innovation, even where it may be seemingly alien to our lived experience or sometimes beyond our understanding! In a world that is in a constant state of flux and in a country similarly afflicted, our relevance and our impact as the biggest educator in the nation and on the continent depends on our ability to adapt – on our agility. Failure to respond to our environment in a proactive and timely manner will ultimately spell our

redundancy and failure as a quality higher education provider.

## **NEW BEGINNINGS**

We began to lay the foundations for that agility last year. We introduced a new leadership style, *Servant Leadership*, which fosters an inclusive style of management and empowerment, and encourages an egalitarian ethos of individual career and personal development. Simultaneously, we restructured the institution to give effect to my vision for a high-performance university. To that end we embedded the notion and practice of an institution that is focused on institutional development, and research and innovation, and equally importantly, we began a dedicated programme of stakeholder engagement, drawing in Government, the public and private sectors, sister institutions, partners and alumni, to work collaboratively in finding the optimal educational

solutions, not only for our students, but also for our country.

We have made encouraging progress, and on behalf of Council and management, I would like to say a very sincere “thank you” for the genuine response from across the institution, to every initiative, every request, every challenge that we have presented to you. It is both humbling and inspiring and in fact, very exciting!

## **STRATEGY AND PLANNING**

But we need to be agile not only in terms of the way in which we respond and adapt to our *internal* transformational and operational agenda, but also in the way in which we respond to higher education trends and dynamics – globally, continentally and nationally. This means that we cannot be insular in our strategy and planning, because as I said, this exposes us to the risk of isolation and irrelevance – of planning for our own reality, which may not be entirely attuned to our

students' needs – or our environment. And so, as we respond internally, we do so within the context of, and informed by, the external environment: not merely the policy environment, but also the socio-economic and political environment if I am to be frank. *All* of these impact on us as higher education providers and influence the way in which we are obliged to operate, whether we like it or not.

Let me provide an example of what I mean. We are all extremely proud of the *Unisa 2015 Revisited* and our cyclical planning regime that has been embedded in this institution. It has provided a superb platform from which we are able to manage and implement our evolving operations. But we realised last year, and appropriately so, that the *Unisa 2015 Revisited* in its current format does not reflect with sufficient clarity and simplicity, our changing institutional priorities; nor is it entirely

cognisant of, and responsive to the environment in which we operate. And so we undertook to remedy that.

We have accordingly reconfigured the *Unisa 2015 Revisited* into 5 simply-stated goals which reflect Unisa's key focus areas for the next three years. All of the existing actions and projects have been reallocated according to these priorities. They now include very clearly for example, our dedicated foci on people; risk, ethics and governance; and stakeholder engagement and partners, which we introduced last year. Of course, all of these underpin our institutional priority and our core business of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. That priority can and will never change.

And so the newly formulated goals centre around :

1. Academic – this includes all activities in the academic domain

2. Governance – This covers all governance, sustainability and compliance matters
3. People – this includes all HR and people-focused matters
4. Service – this includes systems, processes and actions that impact on our various levels of service
5. Partners and stakeholder engagement – this covers broad partner stakeholder engagement

The intention is that this simple exposition of our priorities will draw planning more closely into the mainstream of our daily operations, through a deepening our collective understanding and appreciation of its fundamental role in our quest for high-performance. I hope that if, in future, I were to ask any staff member: “So where do you see yourself fitting into our IOP?” you would immediately respond “People” because that speaks to what we as an institution are doing in pursuit of your personal growth and development. But you would also



say “People” if you work in HR, or “Academic” if you are an academic, or “Service” if you work in ICT, or “Governance” if you work in legal risk or audit, and so on. It really is that simple.

## **GOVERNANCE**

Colleagues, speaking of governance, Unisa prides itself on its commitment to and agility in responding to the transforming global framework on corporate governance and the reinvigorated reporting frameworks. We cannot claim to have achieved the pinnacle of best practices and, as most experts will tell you, many of the areas remain a learning journey. But if we wish to sustain our track record in this area, then we have to be proactive when it comes to implementing updated compliance instruments and practices. And so as an institution, Council has approved the new Compliance Office as part of the institutional structure and we are moving into a risk based planning paradigm aimed ultimately at identifying

and ameliorating, in good time, risks that might impact on Unisa's sustainability. At our annual extended management lekgotla to be held from 4 - 6 March we will begin the formal process of identifying institutional risk and embedding the remedial and mitigating actions into our planning.

But this is not just an extended management issue. As an institution we need to participate in these processes by sharing our views and concerns about risk, ethics, governance and so on, so that all of our voices are heard and reflected in our planning. For example, shortly Prof Singh will be sending out an ethics survey from Ethics SA to solicit your opinions on this matter and your perception of practices at Unisa. You will note that the survey is anonymous and will be returned directly to Ethics SA. No-one needs to feel that they will be prejudiced by anything said in the survey so please take it seriously. I know that surveys may sometimes be an

irritant, but we need to bear in mind that they are funded by public money and they are designed with the intention not just of complying with King III – which is important – but also of ensuring our institution’s sustainability and providing a better service to our students. In fact, I don’t think it would be remiss of me as Principal and Vice Chancellor to remind you that this kind of participation in the life of our institution is part of your corporate and academic citizenship responsibility. We all have a role to play and we need to fulfil that obligation.

## **STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENTS**

Bearing in mind the need to be agile and responsive to emerging institutional challenges and priorities in a targeted, proactive and timely manner, at a special meeting of Council of 27 January this year, some further adjustments to our structure and reporting lines were approved. I would like to address these briefly and provide our rationale for the changes. A full rationale,

with a template showing the adjusted structure will go out on Intcom shortly and will also be provided in the next issue of Focus. I would urge all staff members to familiarise themselves with it and adjust their administration responses accordingly.

### *1. OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR*

Firstly, it has been decided that in future, all portfolio managers, including the academic portfolios, will report directly to me. The academic portfolios will retain a dotted reporting line to the PVC to ensure synergy between all university functions. All executive Deans will have a dotted reporting line to me as well, and I will be meeting with them from time to time so that I retain insight into this core academic sector. This will allow me to fulfil my statutory obligations and responsibility as chief accounting *and* chief academic officer of the University.

As you know, the academic sector comprises the core functions of the university and to date I have been unable to devote my attention to them satisfactorily, because of the dilution of my time, more specifically around matters of technology and infrastructure.

But while it became more pressing for me to attend to the academic project of the institution, it was simultaneously evident that there is an urgent need for a more concerted and dedicated focus on ICTs and the role that they play, not only in efficient and effective ODeL delivery, but also in our quest for high performance. It is a challenge that deserves our concerted commitment, input and support at the highest possible level. This need has also been identified and reinforced by Council who expect to see increasing and sustained progress in the implementation of our ICT project. I think our members of Council here present will back me up on this!

## *2. OFFICE OF THE PRO VICE CHANCELLOR*

It was therefore decided that from now onwards, the ICT Department will report directly to the PVC, Prof Narend Baijnath. This was deemed the correct decision because it will consolidate and create a synergy in the PVC's portfolio, which drives critical projects on my behalf, namely, OA, ODeL, and OERs - all of which are technology based and systems dependent. It is anticipated that the changes that will occur in these areas will require project management over a protracted period in order to ensure that Unisa becomes the leading ODeL institution we envision.

Similarly, in order to strengthen the direct oversight over procurements, and to align procurement priorities with organisational priorities, the PVC will also assume responsibility for the procurement function in its entirety.

The organisational architecture must be synchronized with UNISA's approved strategy, which has as its core element the academic strategy that guides academic

planning in order to do justice to our role as a comprehensive institution by developing relevant and revitalized programmes. The PVC, supported by the Organisational Architecture Steering Committee, will ensure that our objectives with regard to academic teaching and learning, community engagement and research and innovation find practical expression in the organisational architecture. It is therefore also beneficial to place the Academic Planner and the directorates reporting to him, in the Office of the PVC to support him with the alignment of the academic strategy of Unisa. This will facilitate the work of the Academic Planner who is delivering a transversal service in the academic portfolio of the university.

So the changed reporting line of the current direct reports of the PVC has two effects. While it removes the direct authority of the PVC in the academic sector, it does retain the link that is critical between the PVC and this

sector to achieve the goals set out for the enterprise architecture and the organizational architecture, ODeL and OERs.

The immediate advantage of the changed management structure is that it assists the PVC to focus primarily on getting the organizational architecture right, as well as to provide focused leadership in critical areas of sound procurement decisions focused on our key projects and priorities, OERs and ODeL, as we are poised to make vast investments in these areas over the next few years in order to take Unisa into the next generation as an ODeL institution. It also promotes a necessary focus on academic planning and community engagement in a manner that supports the mission of academic transformation and assists us to do justice to our role as a comprehensive institution by developing relevant and revitalized programmes.

### *3. VICE PRINCIPAL : ASSURANCE AND ADVISORY SERVICES*



I turn now to another slight change in the structure, which pertains more directly to my Office. The current title of the Assistant Principal will be changed to *Vice-Principal: Assurance and Advisory Services*, to reflect more accurately the role that the incumbent performs in the institution. The reporting line of Internal Audit has been amended to correctly reflect the independence of the department and its direct reporting line to the Audit and Enterprise Risk Management Committee of Council as prescribed by King III and as reflected in the Charter of the Committee. The VP: Advisory and Assurance Services will remain responsible for the administrative activities of the Department, as well as taking accountability for the Legal Services Office and the Department Enterprise Risk Management and Compliance.

Finally, on structural matters, I would also like to mention that the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute will

now resort in the structure of the Portfolio of the Vice-Principal: Academic, Teaching and Learning.

Furthermore, it was felt that the Archie Mafeje Institute for Applied Social Policy has developed to the extent that it could serve as an African knowledge production hub as well as a strategic access point for our colleges and the broader community and stakeholders. We are of the opinion that the potential and promise of the unit would be best utilised in the College of Graduate studies.

As mentioned colleagues, these adjustments have been made in line with our intention to respond proactively, intelligently and timeously to emerging institutional challenges and needs.

## **INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES**

Chief amongst the additional challenges that we face right now, are our admissions policy, our enrolment plan and our registrations – obviously these are synergistic. Our Deputy Registrar, Prof Maluleke advises me that as at

2 February 2012, the total registrations numbered 230 617 and the temporary registrations numbered 60 499. We are well on course to exceeding the 350 000 student mark. The majority of the registrations were done online (mostly at our self-help facilities across the country), indicating an increasing degree of comfort amongst our students with this type of communication.

To give you some idea of the scope of our registrations this semester, just our temporary registrations exceed significantly, the total of Tuks and Rhodes registrations combined. Unisa has huge capacity and our registration process is demonstrably efficient – so much so in fact, that the DoHE&T officials have visit our registration centre and expressed their excitement at the efficiency of our systems. Obviously, while that is very complimentary, it speaks directly to the challenges we face. How do we manage effectively, our admissions and how do we arrive at a workable enrolment plan? This has

to be resolved within the context of a higher education and a socio economic environment that is in crisis. If the UJ tragedy demonstrated one thing to us, it is the fact that all universities are under pressure and that this is a national problem and not merely a Unisa problem. Our HE system as a whole faces the challenge of addressing the many and complex factors, that have resulted in this situation over a significant period of time.

This in my view, confirms the appropriateness of the approach that we embarked on last year. Unisa cannot operate in isolation. We are part of a system that needs mending and we need to play our part in mending it.

As far as our enrolment planning is concerned, it has transpired that our approved proposal to DOHE&T required further refinement, and in the light of our mutual concerns and needs, we have been tasked to come up with a refined proposal for further discussion. Some hard decisions need to be made and they will be,

but we need to understand that we will have to broaden our thinking and our understanding as we seek the best possible outcomes for Unisa and higher education in South Africa.

It is my belief that if we tackle issues around our ICTS and infrastructure, admissions, registrations and enrolments in concert and with the elected drivers of the processes at the helm, we will arrive at an acceptable resolution within the shortest possible time.

## **ACADEMIC ISSUES**

Now perhaps you were wondering why I haven't really touched on academic issues yet, but to that let me respond that in terms of protocol the most important is generally addressed at the end of the programme – so I am most definitely not neglecting you!

On 7 December last year, at our closing assembly, I spoke of the progress that we made in 2011, and I made mention of many highlights and achievements during the course of the year. At that stage the list was incomplete and since then we have had even more good news of exciting initiatives achievements and accolades, which I will mention briefly here.

Towards the end of last year we enjoyed the launch of the Portfolio: Research and Innovation and this year – very shortly in fact, we will be witnessing the launch of our College of Education. We look forward to the contribution that these portfolios will make to the transformation and growth of Unisa as a truly African University, and to our society as a whole.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2011, Prof Odora Hoppers incumbent of the SARCHI Chair in Development Education, held her 4<sup>th</sup> Retreat entitled “Transformation by Enlargement: from Africa to Humanity”, Our Minister

of Science and Technology, the Honourable Naledi Pandor, delivered the keynote address. The retreat brings Emeritus Professors and senior academics from all over the world, committed to the transformation of the academy to this end. Prof Hoppers also has a large and vibrant cohort of post grad students who are being exposed to and mentored by top academic minds through her IKS elders, emeritus professors and other luminaries from the globe and her international network, including her Pascal initiative. Ultimately, the SARCHI Chair challenges us to re-imagine what it means to link epistemology and democracy, and to bring communities we have shunned, closer to us so that we will not be just an ivory tower but embrace humanity they are, and build on what they have. Her standing and status in our academic community has been acknowledged amongst others, by the conferring of an honorary doctorate upon her 2008 by Orebro University in Sweden, and more recently by NMMU. She has also been appointed by

Makerere University Council as a Goodwill Ambassador to the University for a period of 6 years, and as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Makerere University Female Scholarship Fund (located in the Vice Chancellor's Office) -- whose objective it is to see girls from disadvantaged backgrounds access Makerere in Science and Technology. We share her pride and honour in these achievements and accolades and we support her initiatives with commitment and enthusiasm.

I also want to mention that Prof Baijnath, our PVC, has been appointed by the CHE for a second term, to the Higher Education Quality Committee, and most encouragingly, Prof Rocky Ralebipi-Simela, Regional Director: Limpopo Region has also been appointed to the HEQC for her first term. This is a significant accolade for Prof Baijnath, Prof Ralebipi-Simela and our institution, as we continue to embed an ethos of continuous quality improvement at Unisa. Prof Baijnath has also been



appointed to the editorial board of the East Asian Journal for Distance Education.

Prof Divya Singh our Vice Principal : Assurance and Advisory Services, has been made a Ministerial appointee on both the HESA Admissions Committee and the Umalusi Board, and she Chairs the Ministerial Task Team reviewing the National Certificate (Vocational) qualification.

And more good news, we recently learned that the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) gender in research approved an application for funding by Professor Phasha and her team, in the amount of \$21 000 to support their research.

Colleagues these kinds of commitments provide a fine demonstration of the contribution that we can make to the betterment of our education system in its entirety, and they are to be applauded. I am aware that there might be other similar appointments or accolades that

may have escaped my attention, and if that is the case, I invite you to communicate them to my Office so that they may be acknowledged appropriately.

Mention must also be made of the efforts that we are making to put into action our intention to encourage, grow and develop our staff. This year will also mark a dedicated focus on Talent Management and there are a number of policies currently at the Unisa Bargaining Forum, which will also make a direct impact on staff conditions and development once they have been approved.

I can tell you for example, that Research and Development Leave for Admin and Professional Staff members was approved by Council at its November meeting in 2011. This is a significant development in the life of this University, because, for the first time, research and development of staff members is also expected from this cohort of staff who have always felt that they are

viewed as step-children of Unisa. This will double or even triple our research output, while also doing justice to reflexive research, because I expect a lot of collaboration between academics and support staff members in doing reflexive research!

Our apex awards delivered a bumper crop this year. APEX (Accelerated Professional Excellence) is a strategic initiative linked to the Integrated Performance Management System (IPMS) and is aimed at promoting and rewarding sustained performance excellence in Unisa.

APEX was launched in 2008 as a mechanism to reward full professors who have been performing at a consistently meritorious level for a period of five years. The rationale was that full professors form the core of subject matter expertise in the University and as such serve as role models and mentors for other academic employees. It is therefore important that they be

acknowledged and motivated to fulfil these roles with excellence and dedication.

As full professors are at the top of their career paths and do not have possibilities for career progression like academics at other levels, the APEX awards also serve to discourage Unisa's full professors from looking for greener pastures elsewhere, or to try to move into managerial positions to improve their income. Another objective of the APEX awards is to motivate academics at other levels to aspire to full professor status.

For the 2011 round of APEX awards, 37 applications were received. Twenty seven (27) candidates met the criteria for consistent meritorious performance for 2011 and I am pleased to announce these successful colleagues to you this morning. They are:

<i>NO</i>	<i>NAME</i>	<i>COLLEGE</i>
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1	Prof EM Lemmer	CE
2	Prof AC Lessing	CE
3	Prof SG Pretorius	CE
4	Prof S Schultze	CE
5	Prof GM Steyn	CE
6	Prof WL Fouché	CEMS
7	Prof N Martins	CEMS
8	Prof JS Wessels	CEMS
9	Prof SE Bosch	CHS
10	Prof PJJ Botha	CHS
11	Prof PF Craffert	CHS
12	Prof CW du Toit	CHS
13	Prof PAH Labuschagne	CHS
14	Prof MJ Mafela	CHS
15	Prof EH Scheffler	CHS
16	Prof MA Seedat	CHS
17	Prof GF Snyman	CHS
18	Prof IJJ Spangenberg	CHS
19	Prof JN Vorster	CHS
20	Prof WJ Wessels	CHS
21	Prof T Pistorius	CLAW
22	Prof JH Prinsloo	CLAW
23	Prof SJ Scott	CLAW
24	Prof H van den Bergh	CLAW
25	Prof GJ van	CLAW

	Niekerk	
26	Prof AMA van Wyk	CLAW
27	Prof MR de Villiers	CSET

I think that they all deserve a warm round of congratulatory applause.

Finally colleagues, in acknowledgement of the very important role that our student leadership plays in our institution we have decided this year, in the interest of effective and ethical governance, and the cultivation of ethical student leadership, to hold a Student Executive Leadership Framework Programme (SELF) which is aimed at training our student leadership in the various aspects of institutional management and operations. The programme will be offered in Pretoria and there will be an interactive video streaming facility to all the regions so that all SRC members can participate.

The programme will be offered in three phases and will commence in March this year. It is scheduled to run through to September. In Phase 1 themes that will be covered include:

1. Ethical servant leadership and some best practice models of engagement for student structures at higher education institutions, including the role of the SRC in terms of the HE Act;
2. Deconstructing the Africa vision for African Leadership in the achievement of “leadership for African renewal”;
3. Understanding higher education: contemporary trends in higher education nationally and globally; the meaning of ODL; and challenges and transformation in higher education on the African Continent and in South Africa specifically;
4. Developing a strategic plan and budget; Financial management and understanding risk; risk

- management; preparing a budget; project management;
5. Understanding corporate governance in the context of ethics, ethical leadership and diversity;
  6. Rational and reasoned decision making: what does it mean and what does it entail; conflict resolution including some principles and best practice.
  7. Informal, business, and report writing skills; formal meeting procedures and protocols for formal meetings and engagements; and
  8. Reflections on being a good leader.

It is proposed that in Phase 2 of the programme NSRC members (and possibly regional chairpersons) will participate in an international student exchange and partnership programme (depending on the availability of funds) and that Phase 3 will comprise a three-day training workshop *cum* conference to coincide with the Thabo Mbeki lecture on best practice in student



leadership – but please bear in mind, that Phase 3 is still in the pipeline and needs to be fleshed out.

We are really excited about this initiative and we look forward to a time when we will see our SRC putting to productive and effective use, the skills and knowledge that they acquire from this programme.

Colleagues it remains for me to thank you for the huge amount of work that is happening at this institution. More and more often I see large numbers of cars arriving early and leaving late. That is such a positive development. We face serious and complex challenges. But I am thankful for the increasingly collegial, open and supportive ethos that I am experiencing and which I see emerging in our institution, because I have no doubt that it is this goodwill, collegiality and hard work that will carry us through the challenges that we will be addressing this year. Let us continue in that spirit.

I thank you.

