



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

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

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**UNISA BOARD OF TRUSTEES ADDRESS**

**15 March 2017**

**INSTITUTIONAL UPDATE**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Managing a higher education institution in South Africa today, or anywhere in the world, for that matter, is a complex and challenging task that requires a delicate balance between day-to-day operational management and strategizing and planning for the future. This rhythm was interrupted by the #MustFall movements of late 2015 and 2016 which entailed dramatic rethinking of our mission, objectives and long-term planning as we tackled insourcing and funding of needy and 'missing middle' students in an already underfunded higher education environment. I am pleased to report that with the support of Council, Management and the whole Unisa community we have weathered the immediate storm. We will, however, have to recalibrate our planning and targets, as well as manage the university's resources extremely carefully in the next few years.

The vision of the university, which has transitioned from being *the African university in the service of humanity* to *the African University shaping futures in the service of humanity*, is still central to Unisa's commitment to life-changing transformation. The new vision presents to the world a university that has broadened its narrower national scope towards becoming a fully African institution that is committed to advancing the South African and African educational agenda and to making its voice heard in the global

arena, as a confident leader in Distance Education that is distinctly African, and not merely an imitation of business models which currently characterise global Open Distance and e-Learning.

Legislative and regulatory requirements have profoundly affected our operations and the additional administrative requirements have placed a considerable burden on many staff. The new reporting framework has changed the shape and content of the Annual Report and administration practices, which now include auditable evidence, accurate monitoring and evaluation, risk awareness and management, compliance and accountability, as well as Annual Performance Compacts with the Minister of Higher Education and Training.

## **2. NATIONAL FOOTPRINT**

I have said on many occasions that Unisa is a national and continental asset because of its size, reach and reputation. National HEMIS data for all South African institutions are used to establish the Unisa footprint. Note that the third and final submission of each institution for 2016 is not yet available, which means the data may vary slightly in the audited statistics.

Of the 985 212 students registered nationally, the 337 944 at Unisa represent 34,3% on headcount. Although down from previous years because of system challenges, Unisa still had 190 878 of the 678 842 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, representing 28% of the total enrolments. Full-time enrolments represent an accurate benchmark of courseload across higher education institutions and allow us to make meaningful comparisons. When these full-time equivalent course enrolments are summarised, based on the CESM category of the modules in which students were enrolled, Unisa had 39% of FTE enrolments in Education, 34% in Business and Commerce, 34% in Other Humanities, and 12,5% of FTE enrolments in Science, Engineering and Technology.

These figures highlight the significant impact Unisa has on the sector and show that relatively small changes in the size and shape of Unisa have large impacts on higher education nationally.

Unisa's overall degree-credit success rate, based was a commendable 66.1% in 2015. This is exceptional for a distance-education university.

In 2016, Unisa hosted 116 graduation ceremonies, during which we awarded a total of 47 777 degrees, diplomas and certificates. This number included 243 doctorates and 1 011 master's degrees, putting us at the forefront of postgraduate success in South Africa.

When it comes to our contribution to graduates in South Africa, the audited figures for 2015 indicate that:

- 21 percent of all South African graduates come from Unisa.
- Unisa also produces a fifth of all doctoral degrees in Education (including 56% of all Foundations of Education qualifications, 23,4% of all Teaching, Leading and Researching in School Contexts [grade R and Foundation Phase] qualifications, and 73,5% of Teaching and Learning Support qualifications).
- We produce nearly 25% of all Business and Commerce degrees (which includes 29,1% of all Accounting and related service degrees, 41,9% of all Business Administration, Management and Operations degrees, 21,5% of hospitality administration/management, and 18% of Business Economics and Management studies).
- We produce 21,5% of Communication, Journalism and related studies graduates; 22,25% of Language, Linguistics and Literature graduates; 27% of Philosophy, Religion and Theology graduates; 18,4% of Public Management and Services graduates, and 26,6% of Social Services students.

### **3. INTERNATIONAL REACH**

The 2015 cohort of students represented 29 172 students from 136 countries outside South Africa. In line with Unisa's vision, 27 964 (96%) of the international students were from Africa. The majority, 83,4%, of these were from other SADC countries and a further 12,5% from other African countries.

### **4. REGISTRATIONS 2016**

The 2016 cohort of students was faced with a number of challenges during the application and registration process. The combined implementation of enrolment management, a new student system, revised entrance requirements and a changed PQM resulted in a decline in the expected number of students in the first registration period. The slightly higher than expected number of registrations occurred between the official first and second periods, which redeemed the situation to some degree, but meant that some students were faced with a shortened tuition period. This may have a negative impact on the progression results.

The second period also recorded a below-than-expected result and to date the total of 306 164 (provisional). This number is about 81% of the planned provisional target – a target re-stated from the DHET targets to account for student activity. An increase in the student load in 2016 is evident and means that the enrolment of modules is proportionally higher than expected. Undergraduate module enrolments are 94% of those expected, indicating the increase in workload. This also impacts on the

calculation of full-time equivalents (FTEs) which are in total, 90% of those expected for 2016. The increased load will ensure that the funded credits submitted to the DHET for funding are closer to the agreed target than the actual headcount.

A marked area of concern in 2016 was the intake of new students. The issues mentioned above have realised a significant drop in intake and currently the ratio is about 47% of the target. This aspect needs to be closely monitored as it means that enrolments into 2017 will be from a reduced base and the selection pool of students needs to be larger than in the past to fully realise the advantages of enrolment management. I am, however, relieved that provisional registrations for the first intake of 2017 shows a dramatic rise, probably in the wake of the disruptions on the campuses of contact universities during 2016. I will report on these trends in the update to Trustees towards the end of this year.

In terms of the college contributions, CEDU has exceeded their 2016 target (104%), while CLAW is closest to the target (91%). The other colleges vary between 71% and 77% of the 2016 provisional targets.

Numbers of returning students are higher than expected and currently are 104% of the plan. This means that slightly fewer students exited the system than expected. This could be an improvement in retention or a reduction in the graduation rate. Given the recent positive trends in throughput it is more likely that there was an improvement in the retention rate.

The 2016 shape of the student body is 82% undergraduate – which is as planned, but the distribution into the areas of study have deviated from the plan. The area of Business/Management is 27% where the target of 35% has been set for 2019. The proportion of students in Education is 26% against the planned 25% by 2019, and the SET proportion is currently 9% against the 14% set for 2019. The gyrations of 2016 may account for some of this deviation. Other eccentric trends may be a feature of 2017 as higher education adjusts to the seismic shifts that have accompanied the protests. It may take some time before normal patterns return.

## **5. INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE**

The recently released official data of the institution (audited HEMIS for 2015) reveal some interesting patterns. The total headcount of Unisa grew by 2,9% from 328 492 (2014) to 337 944 (2015). This growth was off the back of a significant decline from 2013 to 2014 of 7,5%. The 2015 increase takes the institution a little closer to the planned (2019) total headcount of 361 643.

The institution continues to transform in terms of the shape of the student body, the growth in headcount has had the effect of increasing the proportion of female students from 63,3% (2014) to 63,9% (2015).

Similarly a growth in African students is recorded from 71,1% (2014) to 71,9% (2015). A corresponding decline in white students is noted from 16,2% (2014) to 15,3% (2015).

Unisa has traditionally targeted a more mature student body, a large proportion of students being employed and seeking to progress further in the workplace or to strive for other opportunities. The 18 to 20 age group has declined from 5,5% (2011) to the current 4,7% (2015). The 21 to 22 age group has also declined marginally from 8,9% (2011) to 8,4% (2015). The 23 to 24 age group has remained constant at 11%, as has the 25 to 29 age group at 25,4%. This latter group makes up the majority of the student body, followed by the 30 to 34 age group. It is also interesting to note that this group (30 to 34) is the only one which changed over the period 2011 to 2015, increasing from 17,5% (2011) to 19,8% (2015). This shows that the student body is getting slightly older over time and it means that 67,7% of the student body is between the ages of 25 and 45 years and only 24,5% are 24 years or younger. This younger constituencies does however have different expectations of Unisa, as they acclimatise to the ODeL environment after the school experience.

The shape of the institution is determined by the choice of studies taken by students and affects the type of tuition offered. The proportion of undergraduate students remains constant at 83,7%, varying between 82,7% and 83,7% over the period 2011 to 2015. Changes at postgraduate level are however observed. Doctoral students have doubled from 0,3% (2012) to the current 0,6%, while Masters students remain constant over time at around 1,8%, although a slight drop to 1,7% is observed for 2015. The major change at PG level is the decline over time of Honours students, declining from 6,8% (2011) to 3,9% (2015). This decline is compensated for by a corresponding increase in other PG programmes below Masters level (PG Diplomas and Certificates). These students have increased from 3,1% (2011) to 5,8% (2015). This means that overall the PG component remains stable at around 11,6%.

The Unisa enrolment plan aims to decrease the proportion of occasional students but the trend to date (2015) is a constant ratio between 6,5% and 6,8% of the total headcount over the period 2011 to 2015.

## **6. ACADEMIC MATTERS**

The academic matters consider reports on various aspects of the core business and service to students.

### *a. Undergraduate*

Undergraduate (NQF levels 5, 6 and 7) examination results are routinely analysed and disseminated to various decision-making bodies of the university and the DHET for consideration. These results are

important indicators of the progress and success of the institution when considered in relation to the various targets set both at institution and college level, as well as agreed in the compact with the Minister.

The report for the May/June 2015 exam sitting<sup>1</sup> reported an increase in the UG pass rate from 66,6% (2014) to 67,1% (2015). That report highlighted the trend over time of a steady year-on-year improvement in the June pass rate for the institution, apart from 2013 which recorded a slight decline over the 2012 figure. The May/June pass rate has increased from 63,5% (2011) to the high of 67,1% (2015) and the 2015 result has exceeded the target set for that period of 67,0%.

The October/November results<sup>2</sup> recorded a marginal decline in the overall pass rate relative to the previous year. In that report, the recorded UG pass rate declined from 72,2% (2014) to 71,9% (2015). But even this lower rate (71,9%) far exceeded the target (66,9%) that had been set for the period, indicating that Unisa's UG pass rates continue to improve over time.

The results from the two sittings are combined to get an aggregate picture of UG exam success and to relate this to the overall targets set for Unisa in 2015. The combined UG pass rate has increased from a low of 63,9% (2011) to a high of 70,1% (2015). It must also be noted that as an institution we had set a 67% pass rate for all UG students in 2015, exceeding the target by 3,1%.

The overall growth in the 2015 UG exam pass rate was 0,5% over the previous year (2014). This was made possible by the various contributions of the colleges, most notably the positive changes in CAS and CSET. CAS recorded the highest change with an improvement in pass rate of 6,3% from 46,2% (2014) to 52,5% (2015).

The largest drop was recorded in CEDU which declined from 86,2% (2014) to 83,9% (2015) a drop of 2,3%. Despite the drop this college still holds the highest combined UG pass rate (83,9%) of all the colleges.

The number of students admitted and that wrote the two exam sittings changed markedly among the colleges, from a negative growth of 5,4% (CSET) to a positive growth of 14,7% (CEDU). The change in CEDU is noteworthy and needs to be contextualised. The detailed reports of exam results have indicated a possible change in the academic structure in 2015, where a significant increase in the UG admission to the exam was offset by a corresponding decline in the admission to the PG examinations below Masters level. It appears that modules were re-classified on the basis of NQF levels which resulted in this change.

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<sup>1</sup> An overview of Unisa's October/November 2015 Exam Sitting Results, Dion van Zyl and Nikki Singh, DIA Briefing Report, 19 January 2016

<sup>2</sup> An overview of Unisa's May/June 2015 Exam Sitting Results, Dion van Zyl and Nikki Singh, DIA Briefing Report, 17 July 2015

*b. Postgraduate below Masters*

This section provides a brief summary of the normal pass rates (NPR<sup>3</sup>) achieved by postgraduate (PG) students on NQF 7 and 8 levels (below Masters) during the exam sittings of October/November 2015 and January/February 2016. These results are taken from the report submitted to the Senate Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Degrees Committee (SRIPDC)<sup>4</sup>.

Of the 54 162 postgraduate students (NQF 7-8) that were admitted to the exam in these two sittings, 51 584 wrote the exam (proportionally 73,4% of students in the first sitting and 26,6% in the second). The Postgraduate below Masters cohorts have been identified as a focus area and as a result their performance needs to be closely monitored.

In summary:

- The average NPR for the combined sittings of Oct/Nov and Jan/Feb have increased from **67,1%** in 2013/14 to **69,8%** in 2014/15;
- **CEMS** reported the highest aggregated NPR of **83,6%**, followed by **CAES (81,7%)**;
- NQF 7 and 8 students reported pass rates of 72,0% and 60,6% respectively;
- The major field of study area SET reported the highest aggregated pass rate for the 2015/16 exam sitting cycle (79,6%).

The PG results (NQF 7-8) show a steady improvement over time, in particular in colleges such as CAS, CEMS and CHS. While CAS remains the college with the lowest NPR in PG studies, the college reported an increase of 3,3 percentage points from the previous examination sitting cycle. These PG figures stand in comparison to an UG (NQF 5-7) rate of 71,9% that was reported for the October/November 2015 sitting.

Examination success remains a key point of reference for the University in tracking student progress for the purposes of monitoring of institutional performance. Note that in contrast to UG modules, no PG below Masters modules have specific pass rate targets set for 2016 and beyond. This aspect is being taken up with the colleges in order to have these targets in place.

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<sup>3</sup> NPR is calculated as the number of students that pass the exam relative to the number that wrote

<sup>4</sup> An overview of Unisa's PG NQF 7-8 Exam Sitting Results, DIA Briefing Report, Dion van Zyl and Glen Barnes, 22 Mar 2016

### *c. The autumn graduation ceremonies 2016*

Graduates are typically reported from three different 'views' (1) the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) view<sup>5</sup>, (2) the Academic Completion view, and (3) the Ceremony view. These views have very different objectives and present different results.

These views have limitations for real-time decision making and thus typically have different target audiences. The Ceremony view is more suited for marketing and event management audiences and decision making. The HEMIS view is more appropriate for any national audience or external decision making body, while the Academic view is more suited to internal decision making and performance monitoring.

For the purposes of this report, the results in 2016 are of interest and thus the ceremony view will be used, noting that the majority students making up these ceremonies completed (academically) their studies in 2015.

Unisa has recorded significant growth in the number of both spring and autumn graduates in recent years, increasing in total (both ceremonies) from 33 379 graduates in 2013 to 40 317 in 2015. The increase in 2016 (autumn only) is also significant from 27 409 (2015) to 32 480 (2016). These figures suggest the positive impact of the many efforts to increase student retention and throughput at Unisa. It is also noted that the autumn ceremonies constitute the bulk (about 72%) of all graduates in the ceremony view.

While initially recording a negative growth (-4,2%) in 2013, the growth in graduates since then has increased markedly year-on-year to 1,6% (2014), 10,9% (2015) and 18,5% for 2016. These are significant changes for Unisa and represent the fruits of numerous college and other interventions to address the issues of student retention and throughput. An analysis of throughput is not included in this report, but will form part of a later report once the various events and cycles are complete and the HEMIS data is audited.

### *d. Proxy graduate rates 2013 to 2016*

While the Proxy Graduate Rate (PGR) is a relatively 'weak' measure of student throughput, it remains an important measure for real-time decision making if seen in the context of actual registrations and actual graduate numbers. Unisa has embarked on many initiatives in the recent past to markedly improve the

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<sup>5</sup> The HEMIS data used are from the third and final audited submission.

retention and throughput of students and many of these are clearly having a positive impact on the graduate output.

While Unisa recorded a drop in registrations from 387 415 (2013) to 350 778 (2014) and an increase to 354 835 in 2015, the PGR has increased from 8,7% (2013) to 11,7% (2015). While it is acknowledged that the graduates are from the previous years with high numbers, the fact remains that Unisa is growing the number of students completing their studies.

The PGRs in postgraduate programmes are typically higher and the undergraduate results over the same period have increased from 6,9% (2013) to 10,3% (2015). Noting that some qualifications do not contribute to the graduate pool (NDP and alternate pathways) these results can be re-stated excluding these programmes. On that basis Unisa has recorded a PGR increase from 7,6% (2013) to 10,8% (2015) for undergraduate programmes and from 9,8% (2013) to 12,6% (2015) over all degree levels. This means that the stated objectives in the APP for 2016 in terms of throughput are likely to be met.

#### *e. Service delivery to students*

One aspect of service delivery to students that is captured in the APP and that receives attention from Unisa's performance monitoring is the turnaround time of the assessment of assignments. The objective is to reduce the overall turnaround time to less than 25 days. The results are different among colleges and between semesters. It must be noted that the results are as at mid-June 2016 and will change markedly as the semester and year unfolds.

The averages per college indicate the shortest turnaround time for year courses is in CEMS (12 to 13 days) and the longest is in CHS (30 to 33 days). The average over all colleges and semesters is 27 and 30 days using the due date and submitted date respectively. These results show a positive movement from previous years to reduce the turnaround time and improve service delivery to students and is but one aspect being monitored across the institution.

## **7. RESEARCH AND INNOVATION**

This section will consider the most recent information available on the 2015 research outputs taken from the report tabled at the recent Senate Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Degrees Committee (2 June

2016)<sup>6</sup>. It must be stressed that the data may be subject to change, but give valuable insights into the results that can be expected to be finalised soon. Verified research publication data is always at least two-years behind current production because of the elaborate national research information system and the rigorous process of accreditation and subsidy allocation.

In summary:

- The total publication output shows marked increases (68% growth) from 798 units (2011) to 1 343 units (2015). The preliminary 2015 figure (1 343 units) represents a 14,5% growth on 2014.
- In terms of journal article outputs, a similar trend is observed where a growth of 59% is recorded from 2011 to 2015. The estimate for 2015 journal outputs is 1 166 units, a 13,4% growth over 2014.
- The contributions to books (authored books and chapters) have increased substantially (**Error! Reference source not found.**) since 2011 (304% growth). The increase was primarily from 2013 to 2014 (38,2 to 66,6 units) but significant growth remains from 2014 (66,56 units) to 2015 (78,28 units) a growth of 17,6%.
- Conference proceedings have also increased markedly since 2011 but not at the same rate as the books and chapters above. Conference proceedings have increased from 45,6 (2011) to 98,7 (2015) and more recently from 78,6 (2014) to 98,7 (2015) a growth of 25,6%.
- While journal articles by far make the up the bulk of all research outputs, the proportional contribution is declining over time and has dropped almost 10 percentage points from 96,6% (2005) to 86,8% (2015). Given the increases in the number of books, chapters and conference proceedings referred to above, it is not surprising that the proportional contribution of books and chapters has increased from 1,3% (2005) to 5,8% (2015) and similarly conference proceedings from 2,1% (2005) to 7,4% (2015).
- The increases in numbers recorded above need to be contextualised in terms of the number of academic staff contributing to the pool of research. The measure of outputs per capita gives an indication of productivity.
- The publication output per capita continues to increase over time and has reached the 0,78 mark in 2015. This represents a 47% increase since 2011 and 14,7% increase over 2014.
- Significant increases in Research Masters and Doctoral graduate output are evident in recent years. The 2015 data are subject to significant change given that these data were extracted while

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<sup>6</sup> Disaggregation of 2014 Publication Output and University-level trend analysis including preliminary 2015 publication output (reporting year 2016) - Directorate Institutional Research, Research Administration Department, June 2016

these degrees were being conferred. While the 2015 data show a slight drop in both Masters and Doctoral graduates, it is highly likely that these values will increase with time and surpass the 2014 figures.

- Applying the weightings used by the DHET on the data presented above gives a good estimate of the expected weighted research outputs for 2015.
- The total weighted output is expected to be in the order of 2 633 units, and given that the graduates are still to be finalised, this figure should be exceeded.
- The weighted output per capita is a good indicator of the performance of the institution. Similar to the data presented above, the weighted outputs per capita have increased markedly over time and the figure is estimated to be in the region of 1,54 for 2015. Given that the graduates may change, this figure may even increase above this estimate.

## **8. INSTRUCTION AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF**

Unisa also has in place a comprehensive programme of staff development, talent management and succession planning to ensure that staff are incentivised, acknowledge and nurtured into professional excellence and leadership role. Some of these include: Extended Management Training; the Young Academics development programme; and the Building Tomorrow's Leaders programme which has been expanded to include members of Labour; and Talent Management and Development programmes.

The recent submission of the staff HEMIS to the DHET forms the basis of the data discussed here. The following changes can be noted for the year 2015 under review:

- A 4,1% increase in the overall headcount of establishment staff from 5 975 to 6 218;
- A reduction in the proportion of permanent establishment staff from 82,8% to 80,0%;
- A 34,2% increase in the number of academic staff from 8 377 to 11 241 – this includes temporary staff, the permanent component of academic staff declined marginally from 1 718 to 1 715;
- An increase in the proportion of temporary academic staff from 79,5% to 84,7% which is due to the increase in tutors and academic co-ordinators;
- A marginal increase in the proportion of female academic staff from 52,0% to 52,2%;
- A constant ratio of African academic staff at 54,0%;
- A 23,4% increase in the academic staff FTEs (includes temporary staff) from 3 346 to 4 129;
- A year-on-year reduction in the studentstaff ratio (FTE) from 77,6 (2013) to 55,9 (2014) and 46,2 (2015).

## 9. CONCLUSION

The successes of Unisa's performance should be noted, especially its considerable contribution to higher education in South Africa and on the continent. Its role is extremely important for the sector and it is a high-performing comprehensive university. That there are, of course, challenges around enrolment management and throughput rates as is fully acknowledged in the analytics presented in this report. They are prioritised in the university's strategy and plans for the near and long-term future. Executive Management and Council are collaborating to address the questions of access and success which speak to our student-centred approach at Unisa. Our deepest concern at the present time is the impact of the #MustFall movements on Unisa's capacity to improve its performance and to realise its vision and fulfil its social mandate. These external factors are likely to disrupt the statistical symmetry of the past five years, so it is crucial that the Unisa Foundation is creative in supporting institutional sustainability.

There are, however, signs that the measures Unisa Council and Management took to address the various protests in 2016 have translated into a quieter start to the 2017 academic year, especially once the strike around salary increases ended. The symbolism of appointing President Thabo Mbeki as the new Chancellor of Unisa has heralded a new sense of optimism among staff and students, especially in light of the very positive speeches by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, at the installation ceremony. There is acknowledgement of Unisa's contribution to human capacity development across many fields, its leading role in transforming the cultures, pedagogies and curricula of university education through the 'Leading Change' campaign led from the Vice-Chancellor's portfolio. I was pleased to launch the theme of 'Transforming Unisa: Academic and Social Justice for Development' at the opening of 2017 academic year on 27 February, and believe that the performance of the university is measured by the achievements we make in changing the idea of the university in the context of our democratic ideals as much as by the metrics of graduation and certification. Statistics and analytics matter when they reflect academic and social justice in the interests of developing our country and continent.