



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

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WORDS OF APPRECIATION ON MY APPOINTMENT AS THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE ICDE

Dear fellow ICDE members

It is with great humility and appreciation and an abiding commitment to higher education, that I accept the position of Presidency of the ICDE.

I accepted the position fully aware of the challenges and expectations around the work that needs to be done by the ICDE, but equally aware that in this august body of global peers resides the scholarship, knowledge, capacity and wealth of experience and commitment that is needed to achieve our aims. I therefore look forward with much anticipation to ensuring our growing visibility, presence and impact across the globe.

As an organisation we are confronting a number of competing dynamics which cannot be ignored or downplayed if we aim to roll out our strategy proactively and, I would be so bold as to add, shape the global discourse and practice of ODeL. Key amongst these is the ever-present danger of being so overwhelmed or sidetracked by the various transformation imperatives globally, that we lose sight of our core business, of our *raison d'être*, that is, education and its fundamental embeddedness and impact in and on our societies and our development.

Education can never be insulated from the societies it serves. To assume that “*all is ok because it has always been done that way,*” will inevitably result in decay and ultimately, redundancy. At a time of quite fundamental global transformation we would do well to remember that universities have survived almost 1000 years of similar and worse transformation and we will continue to do so into the future. But this will require a “*reformatting of our hard drives.*”

Open Distance and Flexible higher Education has claimed its space and its operations in the higher education domain as a distinct entity that has not impacted negatively on the higher education sector in general. Rather we have seen the emergence of a growing synergy and convergence between the two sectors that alludes to what we view as the future of higher education.

Fundamental to that transition and synergy is of course the ever-growing and changing role of technology and its vast potential to grow and develop higher education for the greater good. Access with success must surely guide our thinking, undergirded and supported of course, by carefully considered and directed investment. Governments alone are in no position to fund higher education at the levels which are required to ensure increased access with success. This means that a far broader spectrum of funders will need to be involved from the public and private sectors, possibly requiring of us as the ICDE to revisit our perceptions on funding, influence and participation, not to mention our relationships with an ever-growing variety of stakeholders. As beneficiaries of our graduate cohorts, multi-stakeholder involvement and engagement seems both appropriate and apposite.

Further attention will also need to be paid to the kinds of graduates that we produce. What kinds of competencies do they need and what role should the ICDE be playing in determining societal and business needs, and in crafting an agenda and strategy that will offer guidance, support and consonance towards this end? We all want graduates who are able to move seamlessly and productively into society. We therefore need to raise the question: “What does it mean to have *competencies*? “ What *are* those competencies and to what extent are they useful and beneficial to both the graduate and the society in which he or she functions? I don’t think that we in the higher education environment have ever taken the time to reflect on

this very fundamental aspect of our business. As the ICDE we should be leading that conversation.

We can no longer simply assume that because we as educators have monopolized higher education for centuries we have some kind of unassailable and exclusive right to its practice. The fundamental changes that we are seeing globally tell another story. New “external” role players and stakeholders are changing the shape of higher education and, now, more than ever before we need to claim our space with certainty, innovation and confidence, or lose our voice and our influence. In short, business in particular is pushing us out of our comfort zones and we need to take appropriate action. This needs to be tackled sooner, rather than later. It cannot be *business-as-usual*.

We also need to have the courage to face up to our own failures in our sector and to acknowledge that we have made mistakes along the way. Failure to do so might encourage assertions of arrogance and complacency, which will undoubtedly be to our detriment. Our success in this important global arena will depend on how we mobilize our holistic capacities and competencies in a manner that will guarantee success.

We need to work together from the margins to ensure a viable alternative for the *chalk-and-talk* educational model which is becoming increasingly unsustainable in many countries. To date there has been too much fragmentation and dissonance in our ODeL sector, and this has militated against confidence in, and uptake of, ODeL as a model that has *gravitas* and that produces viable results.

In this context, the multi-stakeholder, collaborative approach that I mentioned earlier comes to the fore enabling us to leverage available resources in a declining resource pool. At a time where there is evidence that growing numbers of students are exhibiting an interest in pursuing the so-called “hard sciences” we will need to grow our capacities to the necessary levels of quality and sophistication, particularly in regard to technology. This will enable us to have a presence in virtually all disciplines while accommodating various types of skills acquisition. We need to learn to share instead of looking for our own resources outside of what is currently

available. Contact and distance education institutions alike will need to partner to this end and to ensure that we liberate all available opportunities in higher education.

This means that the ICDE will need to increase its membership to exploit the advantages inherent in such collaborative relationships. We need to bring our peers to a better understanding of who we are and what we do, and persuade them of the benefits of becoming a member of the ICDE family. Implicit in that assertion is a very clear understanding of who we are, what we have achieved thus far, and where we are headed. Our vision must be sufficiently inspiring as to be contagious, inducing a desire to be a part of this wonderful organisation. Please be assured of my commitment to the ICDE and its aims.