

## MEDIA STATEMENT

### Unisa clocks another global milestone - Signs MoU with Fern Universität of Hagen, Germany

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*HAGEN*, 23 September 2024: As part of the expansion of its global reach and influence, the University of South Africa (Unisa) will today, 23 September 2024, sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Fern Universität of Hagen in Germany that will allow for a stronger collaboration between the two institutions for the benefit of the collective student body. The MoU will develop pathways for the *Practice and Possibilities for Research Methodology in ODL: Using Design-based Research*. Fern Universität of Hagen, established in 1974, is Germany's first and only distance learning university and the institution is currently led by Principal, Dr Ada Pellert.

Unisa's Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Puleng LenkaBula, who leads a Unisa delegation of academics, researchers and executives at the MoU signing, expressed her excitement at the opportunity for further collaboration with another state-owned open and distance e-Learning institution (ODEL). Unisa and Fern Universität of Hagen share a collaborative working relationship that spans over two decades, with both universities demonstrating an unwavering commitment to making higher learning accessible to a diverse student population. Prof LenkaBula said: "I would like to believe that at the core of this partnership lies a shared vision – a vision that seeks to empower our societies and continues to break geographical barriers through the provision of lifelong learning using a groundbreaking model known as ODeL."

The signing of this MoU emphasises the importance placed by both institutions on research and academic rigor in the wide range of academic disciplines and programmes they offer. Both institutions collectively provide the fodder for a rich academic environment and the MoU will create a playing field that fosters the sharing of resource management, research, academic and programmes development, and student and staff mobility programmes, to name but a few areas of collaboration.

This shared vision underscores the institutions' roles as leaders in distance education, where the principles of promoting lifelong learning come to life. This MoU is supported by the technology that bridges the geographic gaps between both institutions and allows for creative interactive platforms to engage students and staff, in order to facilitate communication and the cross-pollination of ideas and research. Prof LenkaBula emphasised the importance of these open lines of communication and engagement, saying: "The signing of this MOU between our universities symbolises a partnership which we believe will lead to many new joint research

initiatives that produce new synergies and add academic value for both universities in the years ahead."

The signing of the MoU between Unisa and Fern Universität of Hagen significantly enhances both academic and sociopolitical relations between the two institutions and their respective countries. By fostering collaborative research initiatives, student exchanges and joint academic programmes, the partnership will undoubtedly promote cross-cultural understanding and knowledge sharing, enriching the educational experiences of students and faculty alike. Furthermore, this collaboration will serve as a geopolitical bridge between South Africa and Germany, strengthening diplomatic ties and promoting global citizenship.

Collectively, Unisa and Fern Universität of Hagen will address shared challenges and leverage their unique strengths and contribute from the front in championing a more interconnected and informed international academic community.

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