



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA S MAKHANYA: PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

CLOSING OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2018

&

UNISA MANDELA-SISULU CENTENARY TRIBUTE

ZK MATHEWS HALL, MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS

07 DECEMBER 2018

Thanks for this opportunity Programme Director: Prof SR Magano, Acting Deputy Executive Dean: College of Agriculture and environmental Sciences

- Mr Busani Ngcaweni, Deputy Chairperson of the Unisa Council and other members of the Unisa Council present
- Mrs Makhanya

- Mrs Eleanor Sisulu, representative of the esteemed Sisulu family who is joined by Mr Max Sisulu (the former Speaker of Parliament) and Ms Ntsiki Sisulu
- Ms Ndileka Mandela, granddaughter of former President Mandela and representative of the esteemed Dr Nelson Mandela Family
- Our speaker this morning, Mr Mandla Langa: writer, activist, and author amongst others of the book entitled “Dare not Linger: The Presidential Years
- Excellencies the Ambassadors and High Commissioners and leaders of various governments who are with us today: – The Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is represented by Ambassador ST Menbacho, Ambassador of the FDRE to SA; Mr Tefera Derbew Yimam – Head of Ethiopia’s governing EPRDF Party, Head of Rural Politics and Organisational Affairs and also Head of the EPRDF Party’s delegation to the BRICS Political Parties Dialogue in Pretoria, 4-6 December 2018; and Mr Sadat Nesha Areba – EPRDF Party State Minister for Democratic System Building Centre: --- Eritrea is represented by Ambassador Saleh Omar, Ambassador of Eritrea to SA; and Ambassador Mohammed Suleiman – Head of Eritrea’s governing part’s delegation to the BRICS Political Parties Dialogue in Pretoria, 4-6 December 2018
- Members of the Unisa executive and extended management

- Leaders of our NSRC and Organised Labour
- Unisa staff
- Unisa students
- Members of the media
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

A very good morning to you all. This is an important assembly, not only because it marks the traditional formal closure of our academic year at Unisa, but also because this year, it marks the culmination of our year-long institutional programme of celebration of the Mandela - Sisulu Centenary – the centenary of two dynastic families who have shaped our democracy in the most fundamental and influential way. And so ours is a busy programme this morning.

It is my formal responsibility and duty to share with this assembly, aspects of our university's performance and progress for 2018 and it is to this that I now turn. And let me say from the outset that I am pleased to do so because Unisa has enjoyed some very solid successes in the course of this year.

You will recall, in fact, that at our academic closing last year, I deviated from the norm to impress upon staff the importance of transformation at Unisa and to signal our intention to roll out our carefully crafted, Council-approved transformation plan - with vigour and purpose. The transformation plan covers the entire operations of the university - academic and operational - and aims to provide concrete and visible expression of our vision to be *the African university shaping futures in the service of humanity*. From next year the Change Management Unit will be located in my Office and I can assure you that the transformation momentum that has been generated this year, will be accelerated in the coming year.

I was recently asked to address our new SRC members (past, present and incoming), on the role of student leadership in the history of Unisa, and it was somewhat sobering to realise that since democracy in 1994 our institutional stakeholders have all had transformation as their main agenda. Yet, much as we have begun in earnest on this journey, there is still a long way to go. We also need to appreciate that as we transform, the area that is lagging behind is *cultural transformation* which has never received its due. We are working side by side with Council and Senate in ensuring that we register progress in this regard. We are determined to deliver results. And we have. Change is never easy, but it can and will be

done. We have generated an enthusiastic momentum which we will escalate into the New Year and I think that you all deserve to be commended for that.

ACADEMICS

Academically we have noted satisfying progress, not only in the re-curriculation of our courses to ensure greater levels of relevance in terms of content, context and quality, but also in terms of academic debate and engagement, research, community engagement and innovation, transforming the language landscape at Unisa, and most pleasingly, staff achievements (which I will touch on later). I can say without much fear of contradiction that when it comes to aspects such as decoloniality, Multi- inter and-Transdisciplinary (including in research), community engagement, collaborations and innovation, we are at the very cutting edge. In fact, I would suggest that in many instances Unisa is leading the pack.

At our last Senate meeting of the year, on 24 October 2018, I in fact advised Senate that 2019 would mark the commencement of a concerted focus on the academe. It is long overdue colleagues. And although we are not fully where we need to be when it comes to operational matters, we are of the view the progress that we have made

in the co-operative governance, operational and admin environments provides a sound enough platform for us to focus similar energies on our core business: teaching and learning, research and innovation, and community engagement.

Let me impress upon us all that we will be running an increasingly tight ship operationally, towards our goal of the optimum transactional and operational environment – so for those colleagues in this space – don't even think of relaxing! It's onwards and upwards next year.

But what this means for our academics is that we want to see Unisa flourishing and realising its full potential academically. I have consistently impressed upon us all how unique this university really is and the massive advantage that we have nationally, continentally and globally when it comes to our brand, our course offerings and our reach. Sometimes I think that we don't really appreciate that or - perhaps – even believe that. That attitude must change. Now is the time for us to believe in Unisa and believe in ourselves. We must capitalise on our uniqueness and demonstrate for all to see, that this university is a global and continental academic force to be reckoned with.

During a recent address in Malaysia, I made it very clear where this University stood in terms of our decoloniality agenda, our articulation of our vision and our intention to be a key role player in the global HE space. The response was quite electrifying. The global South is very interested in what we are doing, as are the Nordic countries and I am yet to respond to all of the overtures that have been made. We have signalled our intentions. Let us now prove that we mean what we have said. What I wish to see is meaty, "hard-core" scholarship - not superficial rhetoric and waffle that achieves nothing of consequence. The time for serious intellectual endeavour is upon us – in all earnest.

Just last weekend, I was in Ethiopia where we recognized and acknowledged 59 doctoral candidates who received their doctorates this year. Colleagues, that is quite a staggering number – and it is set to increase. Think of the impact on Ethiopia. Now appreciate the impact of Unisa and by extension, South Africa, on our sister country. Unisa's role and impact extend way beyond the supervision of doctoral students – it is helping to shape *countries* and indeed our continent, broadly speaking. You are Unisa! In that context you need to appreciate the importance of your contribution – and feel so proud! This is what I mean when I speak of our potential. And we have just begun.

Since we last met, I am pleased to say that Unisa has made some important strides and maintained its performance under ongoing global, national and sectoral disruption.

OUR HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

Globally, higher education remains in transition, with political and socio-economic dynamics clearly driving a move to right wing sentiments and governments and with that, increasing nationalism. In addition, the rampant technology advances continue, driving the so called 4th Industrial revolution, and contributing to an ever increasing number of those who will be equipped to plug into the technology revolution and benefit from its potential.

The impact on higher education and in ODeL in particular, is realising in growing fragmentation and a regrouping along self- or shared-interest lines. Together with the emerging issues for 2018, these pose some serious challenges for higher education institutions. The top global concerns in higher education include: the rising cost of education; declining completion rates; increasing privatisation; new methods and curricula; the role of the university and the loss of civility; academic plagiarism and increasingly intrusive institutional analytics. When it

comes to ICTS, in higher education the top 10 issues for 2018 include: ¹ information security; contributing to student success; effective institution-wide IT strategy; data-enabled institutional culture; A student-centred institution; higher education affordability; IT staffing and organizational models; data management and governance; digital integrations; and change leadership.

One also discerns the very interesting rise and focus on lifelong learning, likely as a result of the changing world of work, which is compelling an increasing number of adults and graduates to go back to HEIs to reskill or upskill in order to remain relevant and employable. Without a doubt, future graduates will also need to have the ability to learn and relearn on an ongoing basis, and to ensure that they are able to be flexible and adaptable in line with the demands of the workplace. There will be very, very few jobs for life in future.

BROADER NATIONAL ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN 2018

I'm sure you will immediately see how many of these concerns are also uppermost in our continental and national environments – especially the

¹ Susan Grajek and the 2017–2018 EDUCAUSE IT Issues Panel. Top 10 IT Issues, 2018: The Remaking of Higher Education. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2018/1/top-10-it-issues-2018-the-remaking-of-higher-education>

issue of student funding, which is an ongoing challenge that we are all grappling with.

However, despite this I am very pleased with the professional management of our institution's finances and to be able to report that we recently had news of a second unqualified audit in a row. We intend ensuring that this continues into the future. We all need to be proud of this achievement. Other issues that have come to the fore nationally include: increasing privatisation; new methods and curricula; the need for sophisticated analytics and cybersecurity and a growing reprioritisation on sustainability and the SDGs.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

In this complex environment, Unisa continues to be the major pillar of South Africa's higher education sector, making by far the largest contribution to our national pool of graduates. Unisa is also the *alma mater* of the bulk of South Africa's neediest students, which means that challenges around fees and sustainability are particularly relevant and deserving of innovative and pragmatic attention and solutions. This enjoys ongoing attention at Unisa.

STAFFING

I am very pleased to be able to report to you that we now have the entire full-time complement of top management in place. This has brought with it some much needed stability and continuity and we are excited about starting 2019 with shared understanding and goals. I trust that when I report to you on the performance of the university next year, I will be able to share some pleasing progress.

Our new executive management now comprises:

- Vice-Principal: Information & Communication Technology/Chief Information Officer: **Ms PH Tshabalala**
- Vice-Principal: Operations and Facilities, **Dr M Socikwa**
- Vice-Principal: Research, Postgraduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialisation: **Prof T Meyiwa**
- Vice-Principal: Teaching, Learning, Community Engagement and Student Support: **Prof IOG Moche**
- Registrar: **Dr F Goolam**
- Vice-Principal: Institutional Development and Transformation: **Dr P Mokgobu**
- Vice Principal: Strategy, Risk and Advisory Services: **Prof SK Ndlovu**
- Vice-Principal: Finance and Business Enterprises/Chief Financial Officer: **Mr PZR Zwane CA(SA)**

It is pleasing that despite the complex challenges in both the global and national higher education environments, Unisa continues to ensure academic stability, and to a significant extent, meet the graduate outputs that it has set for itself. Provisional data indicates satisfactory academic performance under continued, disruptive circumstances. I expect improvements across all indicators in the future.

A SNAPSHOT OF UNISA

The unduplicated headcount enrolments (UHC) recovered to 344 015 in 2017 from the low of 299 324 in 2016. *Based on historic trends, the preliminary figure for 2018 of 374 531 is expected to change to around **372 750, which will be approximately 4,0% over the 2019 target of 358 474.***

We have noticed some discernible shifts in enrolments post the announcement of fee free education with universities such as UP, WITS, North West and UNISA seeing increases in applications while others such as UCT appear to have a decline. However this is merely a preliminary “peek” into the 2018 data and we will only have greater clarity once the auditing process is completed next year.

Entering students also recovered from the decline in 2016, which was mainly the result of issues with the application system. Overall first-time entering students (undergraduate, postgraduate and occasional) increased to 71 596 (20,8%) in 2017, up from the low of 34 047 (11,4%) in 2016. *Preliminary overall first-time entering students for 2018 is 82 102 (21,9%).* Similarly, overall transfer students recovered from the low of 3 125 (1,0%) in 2016 to 29 453 (8,6%) in 2017 but decreased to a preliminary 25 776 (6,9%) for 2018. Although higher than the 2015 absolute figures, it is proportionally slightly down.

Undergraduate first-time entering students recovered from the low of 19 785 (8,1%) in 2016 to 55 005(19,7%) in 2017 and increased further to a preliminary 67 985 (22,0%) in 2018. This is mainly because of the impact of fee-free higher education on Unisa. Undergraduate transfer students also recovered from the 579 (0,2%) in 2016 to 16 634 (6,0%) in 2017 but decreased slightly to 14 713 (4,8%) although this is still marginally higher than the 13 480 in 2015.

It therefore seems evident that the 2019 target of 54 434 first-time entering undergraduate students will most likely be exceeded and the target of 80 468 first-time entering students is also likely to be exceeded

as the majority of first-time entering students are undergraduate students.

Similar to Unduplicated headcount enrolments, the Qualification enrolments (QC) recovered from the low of 313 099 in 2016 to 356 115 in 2017. *The preliminary figure for 2018 (still subject to change, based on the 1st submission) is 382 259. Based on historic trends, a final figure of around 381 700 can be expected.*

In line with the headcount enrolments (Qualification enrolments and Unduplicated headcount enrolments), Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolments recovered to 200 546 in 2017 from the low of 167 625 in 2016. However, in contrast to the headcount enrolments, the FTE enrolments already exceeded the 2013 figure of 197 102 because of a higher FTE : HC ratio in recent years. This improved ratio is mainly as a result of the phasing out initiatives which results in student enrolling for higher course loads and the higher load on average of NSFAS students. *The preliminary 2018 FTE enrolments is 227 136 and based on historic trends the expected final figure can be estimated to be around 225 629. This will exceed the 2019 target of 203 528 by 10,9%.*

The increase in FTE enrolments also had a positive impact on Weighted FTE (WFTE) enrolments with 229 503 in 2017 compared to 193 712 in 2016. However, this impact was slightly lower than for FTE enrolments because of the lower weighting of undergraduate course. The preliminary figure for 2018 of 256 557 and based on historic trends can be expected to change to around 252 632 for the final submission.

Similarly, the 166 667 teaching input units in 2017, up from 140 974 in 2016, a slightly lower increase than for FTEs and WFTEs because of the fact that distance education only receive 50% of the funding of contact education for courses below Master's. The preliminary 2018 TIUs of 183 306 can be expected to change to around 181 783, which will be 14,0% over the 2019 target of 159 399. *This will result in a substantial proportion of unfunded students going forward.* Although student fees will be received for these students, this presents a risk if caps are placed on student fees.

The Degree-credit success rate (DCSR) remained the same in 2017 with a reported 64,9% , the same as in 2016. This percentage seems to have remained fairly constant over the past few years. The largest reason for this is that the improvement initiatives were hampered by the increase in Higher Certificate students, with a lower success rate. The extension

of May/June exams also resulted in some results only received after the reporting cut-off date, in spite of significant efforts to include as many results as possible. The first submission of 2018 doesn't include exam results, as this will only be reported in the second submission, due at the end of April 2019. *Based on the historic trend and the impact of fee-free higher education and the exam sitting results of May/June 2018, it is evident that it is highly unlikely that the 2019 target of 74,0% will be achieved.* It is in fact very likely that this target percentage may have been a little optimistic given both the historical trends and the current realities and we will possibly need to revisit it with this in mind.

Graduations continued to increase steadily. In 2017, 44 842 graduates were reported, up from 43 287 in 2016. The first submission for 2018 does not include graduates, but based on the total of 218 graduation ceremonies, it is likely that the 2019 target of 49 627 will be achieved. This is will have a positive impact on Teaching Output subsidy and Research Output subsidy.

In regard to graduates by qualification levels, the following is provisionally noted:

Qualification level	Graduates	%
Doctoral	310	0,6%
Master's	975	2,0%
Postgraduate below Master's	12 413	24,9%
Undergraduate	36 075	72,5%
Total	49 773	100,0%

African students enrolled at Unisa comprised 255 393 (74,2%) in 2017, and increased to a preliminary 289 107 in 2018. (We won't know that number as a percentage until we have the final enrolment figures.) The other groups remained static or evidenced a decline in enrolments. Of all female students comprised 65% in 2017 and the numbers continued to increase to a preliminary figure of 66.3% in 2018. We are increasingly concerned about the decline in male enrolments.

Overall, 26,8% of students are aged between 25 and 29 followed by 24,5% between 20 and 24; 18,4% between 30 and 34; 12,5% between 35 and 39; 12,1% between 40 and 49; 2,9% 50 or older and 2,9% younger than 20. There are significant differences between colleges. As can be expected, CGS and the GSBL students are slightly older as they only have postgraduate students.

The relative share of the Broad fields of study changed as follows:

- Business/Management is down from 30,3% in 2017 to a preliminary 28,6% in 2018.
- Education's is up from 28,4% in 2017 to a preliminary 31,2% in 2018.
- Other Humanities' share remained fairly stable with 30,0% in 2017 and preliminary 29,5% in 2018.
- Science, Engineering and Technology's share decreased slightly from 11,3% in 2017 and preliminary 10,7% in 2018.

In terms of qualification enrolments, the College of Education had 115 720 (30,6%) of all enrolments, followed by the College of Economic and Management Sciences (69 977), College of Law (55 963), College of Human Sciences (48 829), College of Accounting Sciences (38 456), College of Science, Engineering and Technology (19 776), Occasional students (14 517), College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (11 121), Graduate School of Business Leadership (1 289) and the College of Graduate Studies (103). The largest increases between 2017 and 2018 were in College of Education (20,2%), College of Agriculture & Environmental Sciences (13,9%) and College of Law (12,2%). The Graduate School for Business Leadership (23,5%) and Occasional students (7,3%) declined. The other colleges increased less than the overall (from highest to lowest increase) College of Economic &

Management Sciences, College of Accounting Sciences, College of Human Sciences and College of Science, Engineering & Technology. The Graduate School of Business Leadership and Occasional students declined.

At college level Undergraduate students also dominated most colleges except for CGS and GSBL. CEDU is responsible for 30,4% of all undergraduate qualification enrolments followed by CEMS (20,1%), CLAW (17,4%), CHS (13,6%), CAS (9,8%), CSET (5,8%) and CAES (2,9%). Mainly as a result of their Postgraduate diplomas, CAS is responsible for 18,1% of postgraduate course enrolments below Master's. At Master's level, CLAW dominated with 33,0%, followed by GSBL (17,9%), CEMS (10,7%), CEDU (10,2%), CAES (5,8%) and CSET (4,6%). Doctoral degrees were dominated by CHS (28,1%) followed by CEMS (18,2%), CEDU (15,5%), CAES (8,3%), CSET (8,2%), CLAW (7,9%), GSBL (6,6%), CGS (5,0%) and CAS (2,3%).

It is important to remember that Unisa's qualifications are quality assured and accredited in like manner to our residential institutions, which places us in a very unique and important position in the global and continental distance education environment. Enrolling more than one third of our countries students, and assuming a growing importance on

the continent, the success of our university is fundamental to the stability of our higher education sector and higher education on the Continent. You will therefore understand the absolute criticality of ensuring our success and our sustainability – especially our financial sustainability.

STAFF ACHIEVEMENTS

Colleagues, if there is one area in which we have really *clothed ourselves in glory* this year, it is in the area of staff achievements. So many of our staff have been appointed to very senior positions on boards and other related institutions in the sector – and externally. Many have made great innovative strides in pedagogy and practice. Many have improved their research ratings by increasing their research performance and outputs. A number have delivered their inaugural professorial addresses. Our community engagement initiatives have garnered a lot of very positive attention and are bringing honour to Unisa's name and reputation, while enriching and bettering the lives of those whom we are serving. Still other colleagues have been commended for cutting edge research and research projects. We have achieved so much in the field of collaborations, where we have entered into an array of very useful and productive partnerships that are innovative in their conception and yet entirely pragmatic in their intention, execution and outcomes.

Colleagues, we have done so much and yet, I know that we can do so much more!

We do not have the time to go into each and every one this morning but, these have been reported on in Intcom, Focus and other institutional publications. However, in line with my earlier comment regarding the 2109 focus on the academe I can tell you that I will be producing a quarterly report aimed at showcasing our academic progress, achievements, innovations and accomplishments. I would invite all staff to send any information which they might want to share with the university community and with Mrs Mahlare as this is how it will reach my office. We would like to arrive at a place where we appreciate the work that is being done *across* the university, that also enable us to identify opportunities for collaboration with colleagues or other stakeholders, and where we break down silos that separate and isolate, rather than cohere towards shared celebration of our achievements and our vision as a university.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion colleagues, despite a number of complex challenges in both the global and national higher education environments, Unisa has managed to ensure that it continues with its operations, albeit within some unenviable realities. To date, given the upheavals in the sector since mid-2015, our academic performance has been sustained and reasonable, especially in postgraduate studies where we are carving out a niche for ourselves. Challenges around quality are not only being resolved, they are being improved upon. Unisa is subjecting itself to a Commonwealth of Learning audit as part of that improvement process and we trust that as our university prepares for this exciting process, they will be reinvigorated and re-enthused both professionally and operationally. We have much that we can show the world. When we did this previously, our university enjoyed very significant benefits in terms of improved quality, national and international acknowledgment and gains in our university's reputation and most importantly staff morale and reinvigoration in terms of their disciplines and courses.

We are seeing some material improvement in the state of ICTs at Unisa, thanks to the inspiring and visionary leadership of our Vice Principal who is responsible for ICT. She has been with us but a few months, and we look forward to great improvements going forward. We are also proud of the fact that Unisa has won an award for green building. The Facilities

Management from the Department of University Estates went for gold when it won the Higher Education Facilities Management Association (HEFMA) renewable energy award at the 2018 conference held at the end of October at University of Namibia. Thanks to the Vice Principal of Operations and Facilities and her team as once again this is a result of the good work of our staff.

While Unisa is well ahead of its peers in understanding its context and identifying nascent opportunities for branding and positioning, much more needs to be done to exploit such opportunities for the benefit of our brand, our institution and most importantly, our students. The University is held in very high esteem among its global peers, as the leader in formal ODeL and we need to build on that. I can also advise you that our Branding and Communications Committee of Council (BCCoC) is hard at work, ensuring that we take up our rightful position in the sector, as well as continentally and globally.

Unisa is undergoing deliberate and planned institutional transformation. Our transformation strategy covers every aspect of our institutional functioning and we have a detailed transformation plan in place which is being monitored and measured as it unfolds. We are very excited about that, because we are of the view that all of these initiatives and projects

will ensure that Unisa is not only able to live up to its vision but that it also positions itself as the cutting edge distance education university - in the world! We face many challenges across a number of fronts, but I am confident that we have the capacity and the will to overcome them and to grow in 2019 and beyond.

It remains for me to wish you and your loved ones a safe, blessed and joyful festive season. Drive safely and return invigorated in 2019.

I thank you.