

HIGHER EDUCATION FACULTY ADMINISTRATORS FORUM (HEFAF)  
Keynote Opening Address - 12 May 2011

The Chairperson of Higher Education Faculty Administrators Forum, Mr. Peter Franck,  
Members of the Management Committee

Distinguished Guests, including international visitors and participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of Higher Education South Africa – the overarching body of executive leaders of the 23 public universities - I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the invitation to the 10<sup>th</sup> HEFAF conference. I am also honoured to extend my warm congratulations to you and wish you a successful conference on behalf of the Board and the Executive Committee of HESA. At the same time, I would like to extend a warm and personal wish for your conference over the next two days to be a success.

Higher Education South Africa has undergone significant changes since it came into being in 2005. At that time it was focussed primarily on the typical in-house issues that confronted Vice-Chancellors on a day-to-day basis. Over the past five years it has increasingly understood its role as one of advising and of working closely with state departments and institutions in order to protect and foster the sustained quality and excellence of teaching, learning and research, and of access, transformation, resourcing, and the growth and development of the sector. As a consequence we have drawn upon and mobilized relevant expertise within and outside the higher education sector for dealing with this range of diverse issues.

As a consequence, HESA is now more of a body for the universities rather than for Vice-Chancellors. Members of the higher education community participate in HESA activities through: its three Strategy Groups for Funding & Infrastructure, Research & Innovation and Teaching & Learning, each chaired by a Vice-Chancellor; its standing Task Team on the Post School System; and its various Communities of Practice which are structures that bring together professionals within a particular area of practice in order to share best practice and foster capacity development.

Within this context, we can regard HEFAF as a Community of Practice of Faculty Administrators that is aligned to HESA. This alignment makes it possible for HEFAF to seek partnership and collaboration with the HESA Office in order to advance some of its projects.

Our Faculties are important contributors to the gains South African *higher education has made since 1994 and will be central in a* meaningful response to the many challenges that still face the higher education system in responding to the challenges of transformation. The gains have been achieved in the following areas:

- An increase in the overall student enrolment in terms of both headcount and FTE enrolments; the trend is also positive for all racial group categories as well as for both genders.
- An increase in the student participation rate from 14% to 18%. The participation rate is defined as the total number of enrolled students as a fraction of the total population in the 18-24 age cohort.
- A shift in the ratio of enrolments in the humanities and social sciences: business and commerce: science engineering and technology towards the target set in the NPHE document with the desired increases in the science, engineering and technology areas.
- An overall increase in postgraduate enrolment accompanied by a small increase of postgraduate enrolment as a proportion of the total enrolment.
- Student support arrangements are in place at most institutions to support students. These are in the form of foundation programmes either as stand-alone pre-university year or integrated into the main extended curricula. This has resulted in a rise in student graduate output.
- A radical increase in the amount of international students presently studying in South Africa. What was a negligible number in 1994 now accounts for some 53,000 students, mostly from the SADC region. This means, in effect, that South Africa ranks fifth in the world as far as internationalisation is concerned.

However, despite these important gains, the sector still faces significant challenges, especially in the following areas.

- Even though the sector has committed itself to realise participation rate to the 20% benchmark by 2016 through the DHET-driven enrolment planning exercise, there are several constraints that need to be addressed, including the poor feeder pipeline from schools and the increasing demand that would be placed on the current infrastructure as the demand for remedial teaching at university level and investment in academic development programmes.
- We are concerned at the increasing level of financial burden that is carried by students, especially those from lower socio-economic background who largely depend on their

meagre family incomes to pay for their fees and living expenses. This burden, which has been worsened by the low level of public support for higher education which has translated into higher fees, is one of the major factors in the high drop rate in the sector.

- The sector still faces serious challenges with regard to academic performance levels which are still below the NPHE benchmarks. DHET analysis indicate that: excluding distance education institutions, well under one-third of intake complete in regulation time and one in three graduates within four years; only 7 out of 23 institutions meet the success rate norm of 80% in terms of students who pass their courses; and there are huge disparities between Black and White student performance, with Black students making under 25% of all graduates in regulation time.
- Poor performance of students is also linked to the insufficiently differentiated funding mechanism – more incentives for institutions to strengthen research performance at the expense of teaching. Wealthy institutions are to do more in support of teaching, especially for the needy students.
- The targets set through the enrolment planning demand that the average sector success rate for all undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the system has to improve from the 2005 average of 71% to at least 77% by 2010, and that the total graduates produced by the system must increase from 2005 total of 120000 to 150000 by 2010, implying that dropout rates must fall and graduation rates must improve substantially.
- The achievement of equity in terms of outcomes still very much eludes the sector. As on one the PWGHE projects, the sector is considering the introduction of a four-year basic which will systematically incorporate academic support into the curriculum and enhance the prospects of more students completing their studies and more progressing to postgraduate studies. Though the implementation of the basic 4-year degree is likely to generate significant additional cost, it would also save on the current high costs associate with the high dropout rate.
- The transformation of institutional cultures is a major challenge. We still have institutional cultures that are alienating to the majority of students, with detrimental effect of student retention and performance. The sector still faces challenges of racism and other forms of discrimination and acts of intolerance. Appropriately this is prompting a deep and necessary self examination by the higher education sector. Through HESA, the higher education sector has committed itself to work tirelessly to protect human rights and promote respect and an appreciation of diversity and pluralism in higher education and eradicating all forms of intolerance and discriminatory behaviour at our campuses. HESA has now a standing Strategy Group to assist the sector in terms of strategies and monitoring arrangements.

There are also significant and important opportunities facing the university sector in the context of a developmental state. These opportunities are perfectly suited to the core business of universities of technology and comprehensive universities. Specifically, the inclusion of FET Colleges and SETAs into the new Department of Higher Education and Training inevitably influences the mandate of these institutions.

Unemployment and the skills profile of our nation, and the facts that some 3 million young people are without work, and neither are they in a college or training institutions, and that there is hunger for access to higher education with tens of thousands of young people turned away from our universities this year, it is thus fair to say that the future success of higher education, and of our country will depend to a lesser or greater extent on how our universities manage the interface and alignment with FET Colleges and SETAs.

To position our universities to respond to the challenges and opportunities in the operating environment, calls for efficiency and effectiveness. HESA's HELM programme, established to respond to the need to build and strengthen leadership and management capacity for middle and senior managers, offers fellowship programmes to facilitate staff exchanges across the higher education sector.

The HESA/ACE Fellows exchange programme in collaboration with the American Council on Education (ACE) provides participants with learning opportunities by enabling them to participate in high standard simulations on strategic leadership training during the week long ACE seminar and a five week long institutional placement in the United States. The objectives for this programme are to:

- Enhance the competence of practicing senior leaders and managers in the HE sector.
- Targeting aspirant institutional managers in order to expand the pool from which senior leaders and managers in the HE sector could be drawn.
- Contribute to the stability of leadership and management in the HE sector.
- Contribute to improved effective leadership and management practices in the HE sector.
- On their return continue to contribute to the HELM programme development.

HESA is piloting in 2011 a South African version of this fellowship program among South African universities. It aims at enhancing the exchange of experiences and

promoting experiential learning among South African university management and leadership professionals. HESA has prioritised the awarding of fifteen (15) Fellowships for the academic year 2011, under the co-sponsorship of the Mellon Foundation. Awards are granted on competitive basis.

We hope HEFAF will take interest in this initiative aimed at improving effective management practices within the sector.

Once again I thank you for the invitation to this conference and wish you successful deliberations that will strengthen your capacity to achieve your mission, goals and objectives.

Thank you.

Keynote Opening Address delivered by the  
Chief Executive Officer  
Prof Duma Malaza  
Higher Education South Africa (HESA)