

New Chairperson of HESA: Prof Ahmed Bawa

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Higher Education South Africa held its AGM on 27 October. One of the outcomes of that meeting was that Prof Ahmed Bawa was appointed as the Chairperson of HESA as from 01 January 2012.

Prof Bawa is currently the Vice-Chancellor of the Durban University of Technology (DUT). A relative newcomer to the HESA Board, Prof Bawa took over as Vice-Chancellor of DUT in September 2010.

Before returning to South Africa, Prof Bawa spent time as Associate Provost and Professor of Physics at the City University of New York. Prior to working abroad, he held the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. A former Chair of the Board of the Foundation for Research Development, member of the Board of the National Research Foundation and member of the National Advisory Council of Innovation, he brings with him a rare skill set of a physicist who understands higher education management.

It is this mix of abilities that he will bring to HESA during his period as Chairperson. "A couple of years ago, the challenges faced by an organisation like HESA were firmly focussed on university issues: access, success, research, autonomy and the like," says Bawa. "The incorporation of Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges, SETAs and the universities into one space has changed the higher education terrain in ways that we are only beginning to understand.

"In addition to university-specific issues, HESA is now thinking through what a seamless post-secondary education system looks like, how to advocate for additional infrastructural funding based on the governments' research and development priorities, and how to increase graduation in specific scarce skill areas. HESA is working in a much bigger arena with different objectives and different partners.

"The first task that myself and the Executive need to set ourselves, is a clearer demarcation of what the university can and cannot achieve. It is still the public perception that the university is the only higher education option – we will continue to work with the FET Colleges and SETAs in order to change that perception.

These other sub-sectors are crucial in fixing the skills shortage in the country. We cannot, nor do we want to, be seen as the only post-secondary choice open to young

people after they finish school. That means greater connectedness with sectors in and out of higher education in order to achieve alignment and integration”.

Prof Duma Malaza, the CEO of HESA, agrees that the rules of engagement have changed. “HESA is engaging with an increasingly diverse group of stakeholders whose work intersects with the university in some shape or form. As the pressure mounts to solve the skill and unemployment problems in the country I anticipate that HESA will play a greater role in the debates of the day. I am also sure that collectively, and with the guidance of Prof Bawa and his Executive team, there is more than enough wisdom and insight for universities to respond positively and creatively to the challenges that it will, no doubt, face”.

Prof Bawa’s term as Chairperson of HESA runs from 01 January 2012 to 31 December 2013.

About Higher Education South Africa

Higher Education South Africa (HESA) is the leadership body that represents the 23 public universities. Led by the Vice-Chancellors of our universities, HESA acts to support and advance the higher education sector in South Africa.

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