Nadeosa Symposium
"Enrolment Planning, Funding and Sustaining Quality ODL Provisioning"
Critical Contributions to the Revisions of the Funding Framework

Co-hosted by the Unisa Department of Strategy, Planning and Quality Assurance (DSPQA) on
22nd June 2011, Bamboo Auditorium, Kgorong.

Key Participants (from left to right)

Ms J. Glennie (SAIDE), Prof N Baijnath (Unisa's PVC), Dr M. Lethu (DHET Higher
Education Planning (Unit), Ms L Griesel (Executive Director: DSPQA) and Mr T Mays
(Programme Director and NADEOSA Vice- President)

NADEOSA and the DSPQA co-hosted this event to critically reflect on the higher education
and training policy context and to examine the extent to which the current higher education
steering mechanisms support quality ODL provisioning.

The following two principled assumptions guided the debate. Firstly, an acknowledgment that
the policy goals and national imperatives of expanding access in an environment are
characterised by fiscal constraints and austerity, which require a concerted and research-based
response to ground sustainable ODL provisioning. Secondly, the convergence and migration to
more flexible and ICT enhanced or blended forms of delivery is inevitable and critical if South
Africa is to remain relevant, responsive and globally competitive.
The symposium set clear aims and outcomes and planned to achieve the following objectives
through a structured facilitated process.

- To provide a consultative platform for sharing the pitfalls and prospects for quality
   ODL provisioning in the current HE policy environment;
- To unpack the enrolment planning and target setting process to reveal the unresolved
   tensions that mitigate against increasing participation in higher education and training;
- To explore the preparation of a NADEOSA policy position and response to the DHET envisaged
   changes to the funding framework.

The report provides an integrated summary of the presentations and plenary discussions. The full papers will be available on the DSPQA and NADEOSA websites for ease of reference.

In his opening address, entitled *"Pitfalls and Prospects for quality ODL provisioning in the HE policy environment",* Prof Narend Baijnath, the Unisa Pro-Vice Chancellor, reiterated the greater understanding amongst policy makers of the significant role that ODL should play in the national development agenda. He referred to the Minister of Higher Education's statement that,

> "ODL, if properly conceptualized, could be a key ingredient in a long term government strategy for development"[1]

He argued that a proper conceptualization should begin with comprehensive policy created specifically for ODL institutions by ODL institutions and their interlocutors in the higher education environment. In this regard, NADEOSA has made a sustained contribution to policy debates and the creation of a sound quality regime, but the potential of this civil society platform has yet to be fully realised in his view.

New and innovative pillars that escape the relative orthodoxy of residential positions must inform the policy and the regulatory environment for ODL to make a meaningful contribution. Acknowledging institutional contributions to retention and graduate throughput is a classical example. There are 20% of occasional students registered at Unisa and the highest numbers are in SET.

In the current DHET stagnant policy vacuum, massification and the need to be responsive to the post schooling sector, with an identified additional 175 000 school leavers planned to access HE by 2014, cannot remain the sole responsibility of Unisa. A national review and serious rethink is required to reposition Unisa as the dedicated ODL provider, within the higher education and training landscape. Otherwise Unisa will continue to bear the burden of increasing financial losses in subsidy, which in turn impacts on its future sustainability, the quality of its service provision to students and ultimately, on institutional performance and increasing throughput rates[2].

Unisa's social mandate and preferential option is clearly articulated in the *2015 Strategic Plan as follows:*

> "We take as axiomatic our role in deepening democracy, reducing inequalities, pursuing social justice and supporting the national development agenda"[3].

But, it is not Unisa's responsibility to provide the necessary infrastructure to do so and the discriminatory notion of economies of scale must be debunked once and for all. The actual costs of ODL provisioning must be determined for rural and marginalized students and the intensive support needed in these contexts.

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[1] Key note address by Minister of Higher Education and Training Dr Blade Ndzimande at the International Council for Open and Distant Education standing conference of presidents dinner. www.dhet.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=TOpWmT9Dm6U%3D.

[2] Botha, J The role of higher education policy in distant education provision in SA. Unisa D. Thesis 2011:139-149.
[3] 2015 Strategic Plan pg 2.

It is not impossible for Unisa to provide the technological infrastructure and more concerted and bold actions should be taken in this regard. Within the context of the developmental state that allows rampant profiteering, the political and moral obligations of big business to support education, especially when there are huge profit margins are an imperative. Initially the condition of awarding licenses was to provide low cost devices to institutions offering higher education. We need to put pressure on them to offer differential rates – a moral and public kind of pressure – to ensure that the country develops in tandem with emerging technologies, as in other parts of the developing world. The need for re-examining public/private funding as there is very little encouragement from the DHET at the moment. The matter will be looked at in the funding task team as a principle as some countries fund private providers up front.

Although Unisa academic staff has disciplinary expertise they are underequipped in ODL skills and live less than ideal lives with trolley loads of scripts and mark sheets. The ratio of staff – students requires more nuanced HR allocations preferably at the departmental level and not course level and a deeper understanding of the nuances of ODL teaching and learning, and levels of expertise available.

The entire Learner Support Model is being reviewed by August to determine the quality and nature of student support within a new regional dispensation. A tutor network is being developed to offer a menu of differentiated services to the diverse student profile. The assumption that tutorials are necessary for all students is questionable and should be revisited, linked to student needs and performance.

Enrolment planning is currently premised on the carrying capacity of residential institutions, but in an ODL context this needs to be empirically investigated since the relationship between enrolment planning, academic, physical and technological infrastructure capacity is much more complex. The historical and statistical biases in the DHET projections furthermore do not enable proper advance planning. Linking capacity to existing realities and HR constraints - undermines curriculum and programme innovation.

The national funding framework needs to accommodate preparedness for those wishing to enter university. The principle of alignment across the NQF levels needs to be explored. The Commonwealth of Learning is pushing hard on the issue of open schooling and useful examples exist in Namibia and Botswana in this regard.

Ms Jennifer Glennie, a NADEOSA Executive Member, and member of the DHET Ministerial funding task team under the chairmanship of Cyril Ramaphosa, focussed on **"Funding Principles for Distance Higher Education in South Africa".**

The update on the policy environment indicated that the Ministerial task team has been established but has not yet met to date. The respondent, Dr Lusani Netshitomboni, queried why Unisa is not represented on the team and proposed that a conscious attempt be made to engage proactively.

 In the meantime, the draft distance education policy is required by the end of July, 2011. The 'funding principles for distance higher education are required to feed into the work of this policy task team.

Her overview of the context within which higher education and post schooling need to plan for growth revealed that in 2009, with 837 000 headcount enrolments, the public higher education participation rate was only 16/17% .The target in the national plan aimed at 20% by 2015. Public FET Colleges during the same time had 420 000 headcount enrolments, about half the size of higher education! The post-schooling profile is the one that sends off all alarm bells since 2.8 million (or 41.6%) of the 18 to 24 year-old cohort in 2007 are currently not in employment, nor in education or training, often referred to as the NEETS. Two million of these citizens have less than a Senior Certificate (SC) and 600 000 have a SC without 'university exemption'.

Changes in the context of DE between 2000 to 2009 reveal the following shifts in patterns of full time equivalents:

- ➢ FTEs (Full-time equivalent students)

    - – Science, eng. & tech:12% to 11% of national provision
    - – Business/management: 35% to 34%
    - – Education: 66% to 54%
    - – Other humanities: 35% to 30%
    - – Total: 31% to 28%

- ➢ Graduates/diplomates
    - – 29% to 25% of total, with Unisa providing 15.6% in 2009

The table below reaffirms Unisa's position as the dedicated ODL provider in the country and the earlier point about bearing the full burden for unfunded students is worth reiterating here.

Profile of D E Providers in South Africa: 2001 to 2009

Provider	2001 distance headcount as % of whole	2009 distance headcount as % of whole
Unisa	71	83.1
NW	3.4	7.5
Pretoria	10.5	4.4
KZN	2.2	2
NMMU	5.5	1
Free State	0.5	1.1
Tshwane	3.6	0.5

Overview of Selected Policy Issues in Distance Education

The following agenda items were shared to facilitate the debate and reflections:

- ➢ Should distance education constitute more or less than the 38% headcount enrolment it currently enjoys?

- ➢ Under what conditions providers should be 'allowed'/encouraged to offer and/or expand distance education programmes to ensure quality?

- ➢ How could distance education contribute to the need to expand the post-schooling system? – An 'FET' national college linked to existing institutions and the new HEIs in NC and Mpumalanga?

- ➢ How can policy support higher distance education utilisation of ICTs to the benefit of *all* potential students?

- ➢ How can policy support the development and utilisation of OERs?

- ➢ Should DE be funded differently from face-to-face?

If so, how does one *define distance education precisely enough* to differentiate it from contact provisioning?

> *On % of notional learning hours in 'contact' or 'contact equivalent' sessions'?*

> *On % of time expected to be on-campus?*

If not, how does one retain the notion of cost-effectiveness?

The section that generated the most interest and engagement was the invitation to consider a draft set of funding principles and to contribute to the work of the Ministerial task team. The starting point was that what served ODL interest be retained and that discrepancies and undermining facets be tackled.

Draft Set of DE Funding Principles

> Parity of funding for distance education and contact for teaching outputs

> Reward for any contribution to teaching output

> Greater weighting for teaching outputs

> Parity of funding for teaching inputs at Masters' and Doctoral levels

> Acceptance that emerging distance education models of provision are more expensive than the traditional correspondence model and require substantial seed investment before returns can be accrued

> Input subsidy be adjusted accordingly (a *grid be developed for the different types of offerings based on empirical and benchmarked evidence)*

> Input subsidy is available on the basis of meaningful student activity in an ODL context *adjusting census dates as necessary.* This can be done almost immediately in consultation with the DHET.

> An initial national investment is required for ICT infra-structure for higher education in the 21st century from government, organised business and ICT companies

> Ring-fenced financial support is required for the collaborative development of high quality curricula and associated OERs that address identified national priorities. This implies alternative funding instruments to the current institutional support.

> Commitment to student financial aid regardless of mode of delivery, again from a wider and committed base.

Ms L Griesel, the DSPQA Executive Director, provided a comprehensive account and analysis in her presentation entitled:" **Strategic and Pragmatic Considerations – The Unisa Case Study".**
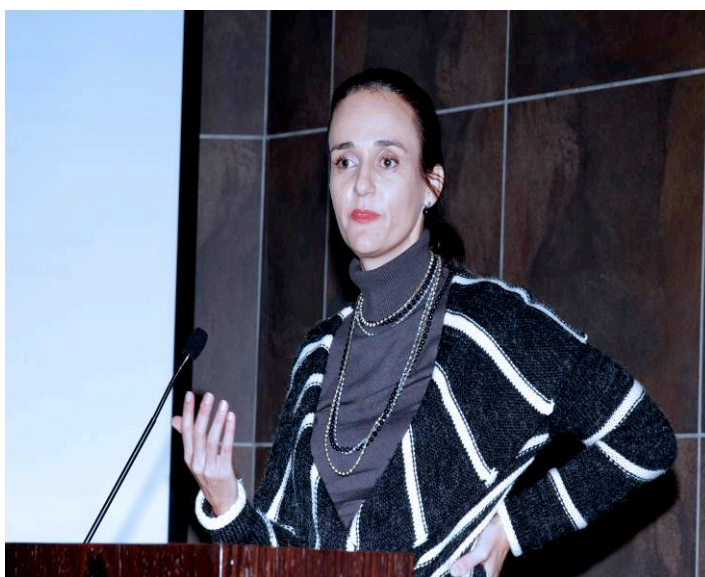
She argued that the higher education system needs to be steered more robustly to meet national goals and priorities through the combination of instruments, namely, planning, funding and quality assurance. If planning is to respond to the national development agenda in terms of access, redress and human resource development needs*, the size and shape of the system cannot be left to the vagaries of the market.* Neither do the uncoordinated institutional plans and projections on student enrolments and the maintenance of existing PQMs programme contribute to an effective and streamlined system. Programme offerings need to be brought under more careful scrutiny.

The size and shape of the higher education system must also be determined in the context of the available resources if the quality and sustainability of the system is not to be compromised.

The DHET strategic objective for the role and purpose of the higher education and training sector is to generate a skilled and capable workforce to support an inclusive growth path through effectively utilising the three steering mechanisms. The following hurdles had been identified in this regard:

> Universities not producing enough appropriately skilled and qualified people in disciplines central to social and economic development
> Data indicates that graduation rates are a key problem to achieving targets.
> Institutions have limited capacity to absorb more students and to respond to needs
> The number of people involved in research, knowledge production and innovation is low
> New generation of academics must be created

Amongst other identified actions the improvement of access and articulation in a differentiated system is based upon equivalent planning and quality assurance dimensions, which are consistent for the entire sector. The differentiated funding dimension is the area warranting a critique, as depicted in the table below:

Differentiated Funding as a Steering Mechanism

Dimension		ODL	Contact
MTEF			
Enrolment projections - TIU			
Teaching input	Undergraduate Honors	50%	100%
	Master Doctoral	100%	100%
Teaching output		Different Norms	
Research		Different Norms	

In a related vein, the same funding grid is applied for ODL and contact institutions. ODL is funded at 50% for undergraduate levels although all providers contribute to all 20 CESM and 183 Sub CESM levels. The CESM categories furthermore do not reflect national priorities as Education falls into the lowest level 1 of the funding grid. The conceptual distinctions between Psychology (18) in level 1 and the (09) Health Professions and related Clinical Sciences category in level 4 are also unclear. Given the crisis in effective service delivery in the country, incentives for promoting (19) Public Administration and Services and relocating it into a higher funding group would have made more sense. The assumptions underlying the funding grid warrants deeper investigation. The table below indicates the relationship between the numbers of course enrolments per funding category.

ODL Delivery Norms

	Funding Group 1	Funding Group 2	Funding Group 3	Funding Group 4
Access courses	1125 course enrolments	750 course enrolments	450 course enrolments	321.43 course enrolments
Undergraduate study units	1125 course enrolments	750 course enrolments	450 course enrolments	321.43 course enrolments
Postgraduate diplomas	750 course enrolments	500 course enrolments	300 course enrolments	214.29 course enrolments
Honours	450 course enrolments	300 course enrolments	180 course enrolments	128.57 course enrolments
Coursework master's	450 course enrolments	300 course enrolments	180 course enrolments	128.57 course enrolments
Research master's	22.5 registered students	15 registered students	9 registered students	6.43 registered students
Doctorate	15 registered students	10 registered students	6 registered students	4.29 registered students

The presentation also provided an analysis of the extent to which enrolment projections and planned resource capacity allocations had envisaged Unisa's growth and carrying capacity.

Dr L.Netshitomboni (Chief Planner) acted as a respondent to distil key issues from the presentations and ensuring dialogue. He provided a useful summary and highlighted the following issues for consideration:

- ➢ Clearly identifying whose role is it within the national context to bridge the divide between schooling and entrance to university.
- ➢ Need to revisit the policy making processes in the country that excludes key role players and their relevant expertise
- ➢ Supported the contention that there must be greater correlation between political rhetoric that creates expectations and restrictive national policy. The expectations are perfectly legitimate in unequal society and needs to be managed responsibly. Access without success is criminal and unethical.

Professor K. Dzvimbo, (Executive Dean of the College of Education), concluded with summative reflections, which included the following recommendations:

1. Unisa is on to a fantastic start in implementing the ODL framework, but we need to push the boundaries in this regard to become an African university within the global context. We need to develop an ODL framework to accommodate needs of both urban and rural students.
2. The 16-17% participation statistic compels us to revisit the carrying capacity of this institution and all other higher education institutions in the country. In comparison with developing country and southern hemisphere counterparts RSA is left way behind.
3. HE needs FET intervention models to expand and reach the 420 000 students and in so doing develop the needed skilled workforce.
4. We need to engage proactively with the task force on higher education as Unisa and develop a position paper in this regard. The Makere University book on funding was noted as a useful example.
5. Many workshops remain only talk shops. Colleges should be invited to submit feedback to the symposium report .The outcomes of the workshop should be used as an impetus for dialogue and further conversations. Enrolment planning, planning generally and the issues of funding and sustainability are just not on the radar.
6. The Office of the PVC should champion and drive this process.

The Way Forward

There was absolutely no time left to evaluate the extent to which the planned workshop objectives had met. A *three pronged strategy* was agreed as the most constructive way forward:

1. Through the Office of the PVC, Unisa embark upon an internal process of conversation circles raise consciousness and deepen understanding with the immediate purpose of soliciting inputs Unisa position paper and submission to the DHET Ministerial task team. Secondly, that a more proactive and coherent strategy be developed to engage with the DHET and external stakeholde (funders, development agencies) to avail Unisa's expertise and contribute to policy making and development of appropriate ODL models and frameworks.
2. Unisa consider establishing an expert task team to conduct an empirically benchmarked study o relationship between enrolment planning, academic and carrying capacity in all its facets. This should include providing the actual costs for a diverse range of programmes (Engineering, Fina Management, Education and WIL types of programmes) to inform revisions to the funding gric principles for differentiation and diverse HET landscape.
3. NADEOSA will consider the outcomes of the symposium process to facilitate a similar conver amongst its membership to arrive at a consolidated civil society position and submission.