

PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT TO SENATE

My statement to Senate on 15 March concluded on a personal note. I reported that Council was engaged in a process to review the Principal's contract of employment at Unisa. I explained that I was open to consider another term at Unisa should one be offered to me. I explained that "I was excited not so much by what has been achieved than by what lies ahead." It is now common knowledge that in April Council resolved to extend my contract by another term, until retirement. I have accepted this offer, pledging to continue this project of building a new Unisa. Many colleagues wrote to offer congratulations and to express support for my next term as Principal. Many wrote appreciative letters. I have not been able to reply to any of these individually. I merely wish to take advantage of this medium to thank all those who wrote in support, or who congratulated us on a second term as Principal of Unisa.

Once again, I had the privilege and the honour to appear in the Presidential National Honours List in April 2006, and the Order of the Grand Counsellor of the Baobab was awarded to me and to about 20 other South Africans at a ceremony in the Union Buildings on 20 April 2006. Again, I do not take these tokens of recognition for granted. It was a humbling experience to be among the list of great South Africans who have offered and sacrificed so much in public service. It was an honour to be among them. Once again, Unisa was proudly in support, and many colleagues wrote to congratulate and to share the honour with me. I value such support, and I wish to thank all those who took the trouble to write so fondly and appreciatively. I thank you all and I shall endeavour to live up to your expectations.

Council then requested me to present proposals on the senior Management team. After consultations with colleagues, I presented proposals to Council in April, which were accepted. The result is that a Council Tenure Committee chaired by the Deputy Chairperson of Council, Dr Sebeletso Mokone-Matabane was appointed. The Committee consists of members of Council, a representative of Senate and of the Institutional Forum, and two external experts. The Committee met last week and interviewed the Pro Vice Chancellor and all the Vice Principals with a view to making recommendations to Council at its July meeting.

Following the Council meeting, we also advertised the positions in Management due to be vacated by Proff CF Swanepoel and GJ deJ Cronje who are due to retire end of 2006. Once again the Council Tenure Committee referred to above reviewed all the applications and drew up a short list which will be shared with the executive Committee of Council and with Senex at its next meeting. The plan is that all appointments will be finalised at Council's July meeting.

I am grateful to all colleagues in the executive Management team for willingly subjecting themselves to this process, especially those whose contracts are still running. I believe that they have shown a willingness to seek a fresh mandate for further service in the executive

management team of this university, given the changing circumstances in which our university is growing. This is indicative of the high regard in which they hold their membership of the senior management body at this university. I ask that we in turn, support colleagues who are willing to serve the university in this manner.

2006 Operational Plan:

It will be recalled that at the last meeting I reported on the three focus areas management has adopted for the 2006 Operational Plan. I am grateful to Dr TND Sidzumo-Mazibuko, Prof DJ Titus and to Dr JC Henning who were charged at Kloofzicht with the task of serving as champions of each of the three focus areas. They have since been visiting the colleges to explain what was intended by the focus areas and what each college can do to popularise and give effect to what is desired for 2006 at Unisa. Dr Sidzumo-Mazibuko is now also coordinating reports from all portfolio managers on progress in each of these areas,

You will recall that we announced several strategic initiatives in this regard: the appointment of a University Ombudsman; the adoption of a Service Charter; monitoring telephone performance for quality purposes, and the establishment of an ICT Academy. I can report that progress is being made on the University Ombudsman and the Service Charter. I expect to receive final proposals by end of June, and hopefully take the proposals to Council in July. It is also hoped that the ICT Academy will be up and running soon, but I am yet to receive a report on the telephone management system. I believe that these initiatives will focus our minds to service excellence and customer orientation, as well as to the values of an ICT enhanced management and student learning environment at Unisa. Even more, it will cultivate in each and every one of us a sense of personal participation in the changes necessary to make Unisa a centre of excellence in service and learning.

2006: Operational Crisis

I am sure that you are all aware that the university experienced very embarrassing breaches of service at the beginning of this year. In essence, students that were registered, could not receive their learning materials, could not hand in their assignments on time; those who did, had their assignments piled up without assessment and no feedback; the Digital Contact centre was unable to cope with the calls, and often information given to enquirers was inaccurate or misleading. Throughout this crisis Unisa has been in the public eye, with students complaining on radio and in the press about the ineptitude and shambles that Unisa has become. At its peak I was receiving about 3 student complaints a day.

One can attribute this to the fact that about 221 000 students had enrolled at Unisa by the end of the first registration cycle. At the same time many of the changes instituted at the end of 2005 were not ready for registrations, e.g. the Contact Centre, the ICT Migration etc. That may well be the case, but at the heart of the crisis is a combination of systems that were not

copied with a large influx of students, and staff who were none too bothered whether they responded to the crisis adequately or not. Regarding the first, this crisis demonstrates clearly that Unisa's systems are not functionally geared to embrace high-level distance education operational systems. That is the reason we need a new way of doing things, because in itself a 10% increase in student registrations need never have created such chaos. Many universities among the mega-universities which we proudly count ourselves a valued member, are able to cope with much larger numbers. This crisis therefore points to the urgency of Unisa reviewing its business model. Second, it tells us that Unisa needs a brand of staff who care.

To assist in this we have taken some initiatives. We now have a report from Mandate Molefi Human Resource Consultants (May 2006) who investigated what could only be described as a severe breakdown in operations at Despatch during this period. The report sets out findings and makes recommendations which are being followed up. I have requested Prof DL Mosoma to furnish me with interventions which must be undertaken to resolve the impasse. Prof NR Mathabe was requested to convene a team which would look at the customer service challenges being experienced in different sections of the university at this time. Working with the Executive Deans, she has identified and isolated key areas that need monitoring and active interventions, especially at this time at the Assignments Section in the Examinations Directorate. Finally, Management has recognised that somehow we are experiencing a systems breakdown. Prof G Subotzky and Ms Liana Griesel were nominated to work with an external consultant, Accenture, to examine the entire supply chain management processes at Unisa, and the IT systems and staff competencies necessary to drive them. We trust that we shall receive a valuable diagnostic tool and remedies for the future. I for one have no desire to leave this matter unattended to for much longer. I am also looking for permanent solutions. I trust that the interventions we have made so far will establish Unisa's operational systems and management processes to a level of excellence we aspire to.

Unisa In-House Week 2006: *Unisa Inspired*

In an effort to build social cohesion and intellectual engagement at Unisa, as well as to inform Unisa staff on the exciting developments at this Unisa, and to enhance communication as well as orientation of staff, especially new staff, Management has set aside the week of 20-23 June as an In-House Week. A Steering group has been hard at work developing a programme that will be as exciting and informative as it will be challenging. At Unisa we need to build community, to break down the prevailing silos and match-boxes, and learn to appreciate one another more.

Except for Registrations which unfortunately take place that week, we are asking all staff to participate fully in the events. Arrangements can be made for skeleton staff to remain in office

where operational requirements demand it. We urge that we all suspend our usual activities as much as possible, and devote ourselves to community life. Please note that this is not a time off from one's university responsibilities; it is not recess. We have urged that the normal cycle of meetings be suspended, and certainly no meetings involving outsiders should take place this week. This is not an event for the media either. It is for the university community to speak to itself about our common life together.

I wish to thank Mrs Firoza Patel on whose Directorate the burden of planning and executing this event lies. Ably supported by colleagues in Human Resources, Corporate Communications and Marketing and from the Vice Chancellor's Office, we should expect a festive occasion. I also wish to thank all the colleges, departments and centres/units who are exhibiting, and for being on hand to inform colleagues about their exciting achievements, as well as those who are organising special seminars - especially those who have prepared presentations for this event. Above all I trust that the Sports and Fun day on the 23rd will be just that – fun!

Africa Roundtable

I am pleased to announce that His Excellency Prof Alpha Oumare Konare, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission based in Addis Ababa will be at Unisa on Saturday 24 June 2006. He will deliver a keynote address at a gathering hosted both by Unisa and the Department of Foreign Affairs on the subject: *Confronting the Challenges Facing Africa Today*. The event will be broadcast live. Invitations have gone out to all the higher education institutions in Pretoria and Johannesburg, to the diplomatic community in Pretoria, and to the media. Protocol requires that everyone be seated at the senate hall by 0830. I urge every member of Senate to attend this very important event, and to invite other colleagues so that we can make a big show of support to the African Union at Unisa. Prof Tandeka Nkiwane of the College of Human Sciences Directorate for Graduate Studies, and CC&M are to be commended for bringing this event to Unisa. Let us make a success of it.

Concluding Remarks:

I began this address hoping to outline a platform for my second term as Principal and Vice Chancellor of Unisa. I have not managed to do that because there were some pressing matters which demanded attention. I expect I shall take the opportunity to reflect on the second term either at the November meeting or in March 2007. After all, my current contract does not end until 27 November 2006!

In this address I have raised many issues critical to the success of this university. I like to think that we should not only participate fully at Senate meetings, but that we must also debate issues and challenge each other appropriately. But above all we must embrace a common commitment to the realisation of the goals we have set ourselves in the 2015

Strategic Plan. If you had not noticed it, the intention and strategic goal is to change the face of this university for the better, so that future generations can mould and shape their own Unisa to meet their contemporary needs. For now the responsibility falls on us.

N Barney Pityana

PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

Pretoria, 14 June 2006.

QUESTION TIME

Senate Meeting, 24 June 2006

Question 1

Has Council or Management taken any decisions or made any recommendations that may affect the future service conditions of academic personnel with regard to inter alia office hours, flexi-time, 'work from home', recess leave, research and development leave, remuneration, long-service bonuses, merit bonuses, study benefits for dependants of staff, medical benefits, retirement age and early retirement packages?, and if so:

- What are the details of such decisions and recommendations?
- Will such decisions and recommendations be negotiated with academic staff, and if so, how and when?
- How and when will such decisions and recommendations be implemented?

Answer 1

The Conditions of Service for staff are matters that must be negotiated in the Unisa Bargaining Forum. The UBF has now been established and it has agreed on an Agenda and a timetable for matters that require resolution between Management and staff. Unfortunately, Senate is not a negotiating forum and as such I am not in a position to address prematurely matters currently before the UBF. One thing that is clear though is that the new Unisa must look afresh at all matters relating to conditions of employment in the light of the merged institution. It is no longer sufficient to take the view that it is business as usual in the new Unisa. We shall have to consider harmonised Conditions of Service, and in the context of that, decisions will have to be made that are compatible with the vision and culture of the new Unisa, which, I submit, is vastly different from anything that obtained before in any of our founding institutions.

Question 2

When will payment of special merit allowances (for academics at the top of their salary scales for three years and nine years respectively) be resumed?

Answer 2

Once again, the issue of so-called "merit payments" must be looked at afresh in the light of the changes and developments that have occurred at Unisa since the merger. For one thing a major breakthrough was made when Council approved R30m for special promotions last year. In addition, Council also approved cash ex gratia payments to all academic staff in 2005. All such initiatives must be examined to understand clearly what the purpose of the "merit-payments" truly was, and to what extent recent Council initiatives have addressed the concerns.

Question 3

Despite past promises that negotiations on annual salary increases would be completed early in the year, it has once again been stalled until June/July before staff receives these increases.

Answer 3

The annual salary increments have now been concluded. The annual salary negotiations with the UBF took longer than expected. In any event, it was not possible to begin negotiations without a properly constituted bargaining forum. Once the UBF was in place, and unions that so wished had signed the Constitution, negotiations could begin.

Question 4

Much of the current patchwork to academics' salaries are a consequence of the inability to get a new remuneration policy implemented. JEPA was initiated 6 -8 years ago and nothing came of it. In the meantime, the merit award system has been applied until a new remuneration policy is in place. The latter has not yet materialised.

Answer 4

As far as Management is concerned, proposals for the remuneration of all staff below Director Level have been on the table for over a year. The remuneration packages for staff below Director level are subject to negotiation with the unions. This is one of the matters on the Agenda of the UBF.

Question 5

- a) Despite the existing contractual obligations of Management towards staff, payments of the merit awards to academics who received them for the period 2003 – 2005 was stopped at the end of 2005. Although academics resubmitted reapplication for these awards already during January – February 2006, nothing has yet come of it.
- b) Despite the existing contractual obligations of Management towards staff the so-called 9-year merit awards have not been finalised and payments made. Applications for these were submitted more than a year ago, but the process of evaluating such applications and payments has been stalled.

Does management plan to meet its obligations in this regard and if so, when will these processes be concluded and payments made to academic staff?

Answer 5

This question must be once again viewed against the point made in Question 2 above. We have to review the purpose of this arrangement against the awards Council made in 2005. To be candid, it does not help very much to talk about contractual obligations at a time when so much in the new Unisa is changing and must change. We are obliged to address questions of equity and fairness within the same work place, otherwise we may be guilty of unfair and unjustified discrimination. I suspect that many of these arrangements were designed to perpetuate precisely such a tradition of manifest unfairness. We are accordingly reviewing all these arrangements with a view to introducing a substantially fair, consistent and scientifically justifiable remuneration system.

In any event, I invite you to problematise this conception of "merit" payments in such an instance. In reality "merit" is a loaded term. The Performance Management System and the outcomes set out in the 2015 Strategic Plan point to a need to introduce an institutional factor in performance management. There is a danger at Unisa that we reward mediocrity and indifference; we reward colleagues who exhibit no commitment to this institution and the values we espouse, and we reward negativity that is often latent in the hostile manner by which too many colleagues view their own institution. Merit in the new Unisa must mean just that; *actions or activities of value, or which have an intrinsic worth, deserving of recognition or reward, and which amount to excellence*. Merit should address one's individual academic merit, the contribution one makes to the enhancement of knowledge, and to the worth of others. It must include our contribution to student advancement and success, to the well-being of the institution and to collegial relations.

Question 6

Details of the new salary structure and the changes in conditions of service to be implemented as from 2007 have not been sent out to staff. Once again rumours are all staff have to go on – a highly frustrating and unhealthy situation.

Answer 6

I regret to say that I am in no position to furnish answers to this question seeing that it is a matter before the UBF. There is no need for rumours in this matter because the remuneration structure was approved by Council, and is subject to negotiation with the representative unions.

Question 7

Details of how and when Management will address the disparities in salaries between the staff of the former TSA, Vudec and Unisa have not been relayed to staff members.

Answer 7

I have been answering this question in all the above answers. The new remuneration structure and Conditions of Service must address any disparities that pre-existed in our various founding institutions.

Question 8

How far is management on the issue of the proposal regarding the possibility of full professors working from home? If this is to materialise, what kind of impact is this likely to have on the issue of staff availability to students?

Answer 8

The question of professors working from home was, in part, occasioned by the accommodation crisis being experienced at the Muckleneuk Campus of Unisa. Upon investigating the matter and looking for solutions, we became aware that in any event, distance learning institutions have the bulk of academics working from home. Appropriate arrangements, of course, will have to be made to ensure access and accountability. These days that is not such a difficult matter, as communications systems enable reliable access to take place.

This proposal having originated from Management, was the subject of further consultations with senior academics in the colleges and individually, over some time. We have a sense of what the feeling is within colleges in this regard, and all these views will be taken into account in the application of the policy. With the help of some academics, guidelines are now being drafted to take account of all the eventualities mentioned.

In any event, the current arrangements where academics only spend at the most five hours in their offices, and where they hardly participate in any university activities such as Senate meetings, graduations, seminars, visiting lectures, or are interested in attending assemblies or information sessions, is hardly a good example to emulate. As a body, academics are conspicuous by their absence in the life of this university. The student satisfaction survey shows that students complain about the inaccessibility of academic staff, especially after 1300 during the week. Academics working from home will need to make arrangements about accessibility, prescribe fixed hours for access or make alternative arrangements. In relation to meetings either in the Department or with students, once again reliable arrangements can be made.

Question 9

The challenge on the M and D registration files in terms of delays, loss, etc. Is there any effort done to address this challenge as it is not helpful in the University's commitment to customer service even as it also lead to concerned staff members spending a significant percentage of their time doing administration work?

Answer 9

I concede that this has been a matter of acute embarrassment to the university over the years. One initiative we made was to restructure the Student Administration Dept. We believe that many of these problems, however, will be resolved or easily identifiable if Colleges have a Student Admissions Officer. The de-centralisation project is rather stalled having fallen victim, like so much else, to the accommodation crisis at Unisa. It is difficult for me to understand the nature of the difficulty suggested by academics doing administrative work.

Question 10

Which reason led to the University Management's / Council's decision that on the "new" senate, only one full professor per department would be the only departmental representative? Shouldn't all full professors be given the prerogative to sit on this important academic body of the University?

Answer 10

The Institutional Statute of the university was discussed, debated and approved by Senate in at least two meetings. The Institutional Statute is not Management/Council's decision. We must all take ownership of it. Academics served in the Sub Committee that drafted the Statute under the leadership of Prof TH Links. Presumably, reasons were advanced and fully canvassed both at the committee stage and at Senate. In any event, the Institutional Statute is subject to review, and members of Senate may propose some changes to the Institutional Statute as appropriate.

Question 11

Will the Principal be prepared to regard academics as knowledge workers and treat them accordingly?

Answer 11

I am not aware that I personally have ever treated academics in any other way. I do demand accountability though. One has had to challenge many of the prevailing *laissez faire* attitudes at Unisa. Finally, I hardly believe it to be true that academics are the only "knowledge workers" in this institution. Everyone deserves to be recognised.

Question 12

What steps does the Principal envisage to bridge the gap between his management team together with council and the academic sector, now that the latter has been left without any representation on campus?

Answer 12

One must explain that APSA as a union that claims to represent the majority of academic staff at Unisa took a particular attitude to the changes that needed to happen at this university as a result of the merger. This process of negotiations took well over a year. Management made several concessions in order to accommodate the views of the representatives of APSA, except that we would not concede that APSA was the sole representative of academic staff and as such could effectively operate as a closed shop. It was important to defend the principle that all university staff must be treated alike within the same shop floor or workplace. We were then compelled to withdraw recognition from all unions that failed to subscribe to the Constitution of the Bargaining Forum. Subsequently two unions signed but APSA and management agreed to take the matter on compulsory arbitration. The ruling of the arbitrator was that the actions of Management were not unfair, and as such our decision to withdraw recognition to APSA was upheld.

Throughout this process, I reported regularly to Senate as the crisis unfolded. I also held several assemblies to explain the decision of Management. Members of APSA took no action to reverse the confrontational trend the leadership of APSA was advancing. My view is that

the membership of APSA failed to take their leadership to account during a long history of adversarial dealings with Management. The question, therefore, is wrongly addressed if it seeks to extract from Management an answer about the future relations with APSA. Members of APSA must determine that for themselves. One must remember though that there are three unions at this university who enjoy participation at the Bargaining Forum. I understand that they all have academics as members. To that extent they represent the interests of the academic staff as well.

We have now formally advised APSA that it is no longer a recognised union of this university, and as such no longer has the privileges that went with such recognition, including office facilities and attendance of the Bargaining Forum. We have also advised APSA that we shall discontinue the deductions made from payroll with effect from 30 June 2006. This also applies to Solidarity which though never recognised as such, benefited from standing order facilities extended by Management. We are prepared, however, to consider APSA's application for organisational rights provided that the appropriate membership threshold of 25% of all university personnel is satisfied. Upon application membership of the UBF will be considered provided the 30% membership threshold is met. An application by an alliance of APSA and Solidarity (AcaSol) is now under consideration.

Question 13

Regarding rationalisation, what use is there now for the efforts of Project Team 5 now that all the small disciplines has been eradicated?

Question 14

What does democracy mean within Unisa's management structures when people are told what to do without exhibiting any free will? For example, rationalisation has been done not on an academic basis, but on pure financial grounds. Society needs certain disciplines even if there are very few people taking them.

Answer 13 & 14

Rationalisation is clearly necessary on strategic as well as on academic grounds. Such rationalisation, however, has been driven by the Tuition Committee of Senate, which reports regularly to Senate. Members have been free to express themselves on the proposals. Courses and programmes that do not attract students, or whose academics do not publish, or whose strategic value cannot be demonstrated are bound to be at risk. I personally fail to understand how one can say that something must be determined on "pure" academic grounds even though such a course is irrational. I believe that academic pursuits must have an element of rationality attaching to them. No modern university anywhere in the world can be sustained or sustainable unless knowledge is made public and explicit. It must draw disciples, or it must be sustained in publications. I do not understand what "pure" financial grounds means. The Project 5 team, to the best of my knowledge, made up as it is of a peer group, considers all the issues and makes proposals accordingly. It is anticipated that by the August meeting of Senate a full report will be presented to Senate where any such disciplines at risk will be able to make a case on the basis of the guidelines already approved.

Question 15

How does the Principal harmonise the new market- related philosophy that is guiding Unisa with academic freedom?

Answer 15

This question hardly deserves an answer in its present form. It probably needs to be rephrased. There is an underlying assumption that "market-related" philosophy is inimical to academic freedom. There is also a suggestion that academic freedom is without accountability. Maybe we should go back to basics, and examine what we mean by "academic freedom". This Senate may well be persuaded to establish a lecture series on academic freedom.

Question 16

The past 15 years our department has been in the red because of low student numbers etc, and no promotions were possible along the normal route. The university ensured our department that it is possible to change this situation by publishing more. We decided to work harder on our research outputs and succeeded in changing our situation into the black again.

In several meetings, it has been acknowledged that this department is doing very well in terms of research. Even the college management has confirmed this. Early in the year we were excited by the information that our departmental costs units would enable us to advertise outside positions as well as to effect internal promotions for qualifying candidates. However, we were recently demoralised to learn that the Principal does not seem to support such promotions. This is so discouraging! Why would one continue to do research and publish under these circumstances?

Answer 16

It is impossible for me to answer anonymous allegations that masquerade as "The Principal said this..." No one has ever said that there will not be any promotions at Unisa. What we have said is something that has been raised from the moment I set foot in this institution; that is, the extent to which the current personnel formula fails to address what it was intended to resolve in the financing of academic programmes. There have been efforts to review the personnel formula. The question I am raising though is why the personnel formula should be used exclusively to employ full-time academics based on campus. As a distance education institution, should we not be looking, like other distance learning universities do, at other modes of delivering learning, which the formula must be available to support. Incidentally, the rhetorical question at the end is misplaced. All academic staff employed by Unisa are expected to perform to satisfaction in teaching and research. One earns a salary to do that. One is not doing anyone a favour by performing one's tasks for which one receives remuneration. As a matter of fact, I cannot give answers in relation to the actual situation of the Department of Old Testament Studies from which the question emanates.

Question 17

Why, in the first instance, were we given hope that we have sufficient cost units for promotions?

Answer 17

I cannot answer this question, as I do not know who gave hope for what in what circumstances.

Question 18

How much money will be made available on the budget in the medium term (2007 – 2010) for practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of indigenous languages of our people and to ensure that all official languages enjoy parity of esteem and are treated equitably?

Answer 18

It is impossible to answer such a vague question. The university has a Language Policy. The Language Policy Committee recently submitted proposals for the implementation of such a policy. The costs thereof will be considered together with the overall budget of the university. The budget process is open and participatory. In fact Senate may wish to include this item in its budget. In any event, a conference on Language Policy is scheduled to take place in October, organised by the Senate Language Committee. It is intended that all avenues for reinventing our language heritage will be explored.

N Barney Pityana
PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

Pretoria, 14 June 2006.