

**Higher Education Facilities Management
Association Conference welcome and address**

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INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson and officials of HEFMA, the organizers of the conference, presenters and participants, distinguished guests, molweni, good morning

It is a great privilege to host the HEFMA at Rhodes and also a great pleasure to welcome you all to Rhodes University, to iRhini/Grahamstown, and to the Eastern Cape. For those of you from overseas, a warm welcome also to South Africa.

I thank my colleagues for their work in the hosting of this conference at Rhodes, and I thank you all for choosing Rhodes as the venue, and for travelling long distances to grace us with your participation.

For transport, logistic and costs reasons, compared to universities in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, Rhodes staff have to work hard to attract and host national and especially international conferences. That we do so with considerable success, I believe, is testimony to the quality of the students and scholars

to be found at Rhodes and the recognition that the University enjoys nationally and internationally.

Indeed, as a University we take pride in having among South African universities the best pass and graduation rates and the best research output per academic staff member. We take especial pride that although we only have 0.8% of South Africa's university students, last year we were awarded 14% of the Mandela Rhodes scholarships and also more than any other university.

Some like to say that our successes have to do with the fact that there is very little to do in our small town. Hardly - we like to think that it has to do with the fact that at Rhodes we take knowledge and scholarship very seriously and work hard to create an institutional culture that values knowledge and scholarship.

I don't intend to speak for long, preferring instead to converse with you by drawing on my experiences of first, being a Vice-Chancellor of a university which, like others, is deeply engaged in addressing

infrastructure issues and overall campus development planning; second, of being an executive member of Higher Education South Africa (HESA) and third, of being the chairperson of the HESA Funding Strategy Group, which is in part dealing with infrastructure issues at a system level.

I do wish, however, to make a few points about our changing context and in this regard identify some of the contemporary challenges of South African universities.

Currently, we have an expanding higher education system in which increasing enrolments must be absorbed at 23 universities. In 2001 the *National Plan for Higher Education* estimated the gross participation to be 15% and set a target of 20% gross participation rate by 2011/2016 (MoE, 2001).

Head count enrolments in higher education were 556 667 in 2000, increased to 744 444 in 2004 and reached 799 388 in 2008. The target for 2010 is 816 400 and the target for 2015 is 920 000. As far as Master's and Doctoral student enrolments are

concerned, the 2008 enrolment was 51 711 and the target for 2010 is 65 000.

There has been only a minimal improvement in the overall gross participation rate, and today it is about 16%. If we are achieve a 20% participation rate then we have to find place for an additional 100 000 students at our 23 universities.

Of course much depends on the balance between expansion in undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments, the areas (science, engineering, technology, medicine, humanities etc.) in which there will be increased enrolments and the universities at which there will be increased enrolments.

The obvious questions are what is our infrastructure capacity as a higher education system and as individual universities to

- First, cope with our current enrolments, and
- Second, to absorb additional enrolments.

Of course, infrastructure capacity is not a given or immutably fixed and can be enhanced. In this regard, we have to then ask a number of questions:

- First, what is the current state of our infrastructure
- Second, whether we are adequately maintaining our current infrastructure
- Third, whether our current infrastructure is used effectively and efficiently
- Fourth, whether there are or will be the necessary finances (internally, from the Department of Higher Education & Training and/or third stream income sources) to extend our infrastructure capacity
- Fifth, whether we as individual universities have the necessary institutional expertise and capabilities to effectively and efficiently employ financial resources to extend our infrastructure and also oversee the extension of infrastructure
- Sixth, whether our expansion of infrastructure is

informed by and embedded in any overall institutional planning and campus development planning that brings together enrolment planning, academic planning, infrastructure planning and financial planning

- Seventh, whether we are giving adequate attention to environmental challenges and issues in our infrastructure development and planning, and
- Eight, whether the municipalities in which we are located have the capacities and capabilities to accommodate our infrastructure expansion.

These are all issues I would very much like to hear your views on and for us to have a conversation on.

Before this, permit me, however, to feed into our conversation some relevant information.

According to government, its priorities are to increase enrolments in engineering sciences and the built environment, health sciences, natural, physical and life sciences, and teacher education. Most of these disciplines and fields are relatively expensive in that

they require more infrastructure, plant, facilities and equipment than, say, the humanities and social sciences.

Government is also expressing a commitment to improve infrastructure through new buildings, renovating existing buildings, building new or enhancing current lecture halls, and providing state of the art laboratories and libraries; and to improve the quality of life of students through renovating and upgrading or building new student residences.

Long starved of infrastructure funding, as universities we must of course, welcome this. Thus far, the state has already committed over R 2 billion in infrastructure and efficiency funding for the three-year period 2008-2010, and will commit an additional R 3.1 billion in the two-year period 2011-2013. Each of the universities has been advised of its share for the 2011-2013 period. Indications are that such infrastructure and efficiency funding will continue into the future.

Of course, there are debates on how fields, disciplines

and areas are being prioritized, how allocations to different fields and areas are being determined, whether the needs of the historically black institutions are being adequately addressed and on other issues, and these must continue and also where necessary be taken up with the DoH&T by HESA and individual universities.

An issue that I have raised is whether we are spending the funding creatively and effectively, whether there may not be ways in which we could use the funds to leverage additional funding in the short-term, and whether there should not be more discussion among ourselves about these issues.

The DoH&T has agreed to establish a joint task team with HESA to look specifically at the challenge of providing residence accommodation for students in the light of the pressing need in this area.

Finally, you are hopefully aware that HESA through the Funding Strategy Group is conducting a study on space and equipment needs at our universities. This was communicated to all institutions early last month.

The study will investigate

- The current building facilities available at universities and the condition of the facilities, and
- The availability and condition of equipment used currently in the teaching and research programmes at universities

It is intended to use this study to help shape national policy on the provision of funds for the erection of new building facilities and land improvements other than buildings, to lobby for funding for equipment if significant backlogs and needs in equipment can be proven, and to help to improve the method of governmental allocation of funds for infrastructure expenditure at universities.

In closing I look forward to an engagement with you on the issues that I have raised.

I wish you a stimulating and productive conference on issues which are of great importance to the future of our universities.

I also wish you an enjoyable stay at Rhodes and in iRhini/Grahamstown and I am confident that you will find your Rhodes colleagues friendly and hospitable hosts.