

**Why Governance, Leadership and Management in Higher Education matter?
An opening address to be delivered by the CEO of HESA, Dr Jeffrey
Mabelebele, on the occasion of HELM LEAD workshop to be held on 15
October 2013, at Kopanong Hotel and Conference Centre in Benoni, Gauteng**

Programme Director
2013 HELM LEAD Fellows
Ladies and gentlemen

1 INTRODUCTION

Good evening.

It is indeed my pleasure to welcome you to the 2013 HELM LEAD workshop, due to formally commence tomorrow. I am mindful of the fact that you have chosen to participate in this programme, even though you have many other important priorities to pursue as the year draws closer to the end. As you know, this programme seeks to make a contribution to development of management and leadership capacity within our Higher Education sector. Since 2003, HESA and its predecessor organisation, South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association, has been running this programme, in part to respond to the management and leadership challenges facing the sector at the time. The thinking was that after about five years, the programme would be dissolved, as adequate capacity would have been built and developed. This was not to be as the demand for capacity development grew as new policies emerged from the State, and the institution of the university became more and more complex to manage and lead.

2 GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES FACING THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

From time immemorial, a university has always been seen as a collegial organisation, governed and managed by a community of scholars. As Professor Alan Gilbert, Vice-Chancellor of The University of Melbourne, argued in 1996:

*The idea of a university as a collegial organisation implies that universities are particular kinds of organisations, whose members expect to have a voice in the governance and management of their corporate activities. A cognate idea is that of **universitas**, the original meaning of which, for institutions of higher learning, was that of a community devoted to scholarship and wisdom. To reflect these ideals, a collegial university need not resemble an Athenian democracy; nor must its decision-making processes be democratic at all in any strict sense. (Gilbert, 1996, p.2)ⁱ*

However, in the last few decades, the collegial governance and management system was dismantled in part because of forces of globalisation and the need for universities to become publicly accountable, not just to their own governing bodies and internal stakeholders, but to broader society and donor agencies. This trend has

revolutionised not only the operations of the University of the past, but has also recreated a new university governance and management model.

In our own country, the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, as amended, provides for the establishment of the following structures for each Public Higher Education Institution: council; senate; institutional forum, student representative council and so on. Whereas academics were responsible for the governance of the university as community of scholars through the senate, it is interesting to observe that the Act clearly stipulates that "... council of a public higher education institution must govern the public higher education institution, subject to this Act, any other law and the institutional statute". The senate of the university, which was originally the highest decision-making body on academic matters of the university, now finds itself accountable to Council. S28 of the Act stipulates "The senate of a public higher education institution is accountable to the council for the academic and research functions of the public higher education institution and must perform such other functions as may be delegated or assigned to it by Council. Although it is still dominated by academics, its role has now been circumscribed within accountability requirements of Council.

A second most important development of governance nature for the universities in South Africa is that the Minister is now given more powers to intervene if the institution is not able to comply with any of the provision of this Act. In fact the new amendments to the Act introduced in 2012, give a person of the Minister, in my view, wide-ranging powers to intervene in the affairs of the university, way beyond the imagination of the architects of the post-1994 Higher Education system.

The third important development is the introduction of reporting regulations, which have somewhat reconfigured the universities to be driven largely by government accountability requirements. At the moment, a new set of reporting regulations is on the table, and will if adopted, strengthen government accountability requirements in significant ways.

Fourthly, the appointment of a new Transformation Oversight Committee also calls upon universities to put at the centre of their work, a transformation agenda, not just in equity terms, but also transformation of epistemology and the very academic project itself.

3 THREE PROPOSITIONS

Therefore, those of you who are aspiring to take up positions of leadership and management in our public universities should familiarise themselves with these emerging trends. As you embark on this programme from tomorrow onwards, I would like to share with you some few fundamental propositions, to think about:

Proposition 1: The starting point, one can argue, is to accept that the universities are increasingly becoming difficult places to govern, manage and lead. They operate in volatile environment, and therefore have to constantly embrace change and adapt to emerging trends and dynamics. They have become places where industry, civil society, community and government interest often coalesce or coincide.

Proposition 2: Not many management and leadership theories taught in prestigious business schools apply to the institution of a university. In the ultimate end, one has to learn by doing, listening, engaging, reflecting etc.

Proposition 3: The traditional collegial governance and management model, at the apex of which is community of scholars, has now given way to managerialism, with Council as key governing body. However, one should indicate that this kind of managerialism is being threatened more and more by increasing government, industry, and public accountability requirements.

4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the programme will enable you to:

- Discuss the challenges and trends in university management, including implications for managers and leaders;
- Discuss the imperatives of managing and leading change in universities, including a need to build winning teams;
- Debate challenges and problems of managing university-stakeholder partnerships; and
- Deepen and sharpen your understanding of the Higher Education policy and regulatory framework.

As you navigate through the programme in the next few weeks, I would like to leave you with a profound statement by Sir George Bain, a former Vice-Chancellor of Queen University (Belfast), Principal of London Business School and Chairman of Industrial and Business Studies, University of Warwick:

“Universities are pluralistic institutions with multiple, ambiguous and conflicting goals; Professional institutions that are primarily run by the profession (i.e. academics) often in its own interests rather than those of the clients; and Collegial institutions in which the Vice-Chancellor is less a CEO who can manage by diktat and decree, and more a managing partner in a professional firm who was to manage by negotiation and persuasion.”ⁱⁱⁱ

With these few words, I would like to welcome you to the 2013 2nd Edition of the HELM LEAD workshop, and wish you everything of the best during your participation in this programme.

I thank you

END.

ⁱ Gilbert, A.D. 1996. Heeding Machiavelli: Managing change in a collegial culture. Paper presented to the Association of Commonwealth Universities Executive Heads Conference, Malta, March.

ⁱⁱ Sir George Bain. 2004. Leading and managing universities. A paper presented at the European University Association / EFMD Workshop, UCD on 27 February 2004.