

Research and Innovation at Durban University of Technology

Welcome Address by Prof Fred Otieno

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Annual Research Awards to Honour Excellence in Research on the at Durban University of
Technology

23rd October 2012

The Chair of DUT Council Dr Jairam Reddy, Mr Chief Mabizela Chief Guest and Chief Director, Department of Higher Education and Training, Research DVCs from UKZN, MUT and UniZulu, Dean of Research at UKZN, Directors of Research, Programme Director, Distinguished Guests, Senior Staff of DUT, Researchers, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to today's DUT Annual Research Awards function to honour Excellence in Research.

Let me start by mentioning a few facts that many may be aware of but never thought much about the same.

Our world is changing fast. Twenty years ago few had heard of the Internet. Today, it's used by about R3 billion worldwide; it's a trillion-dollar marketplace; it's the platform for innovation transforming every sector from healthcare to transport.

Further, today, it's hard to predict how the world will look in a few months, let alone years: there's so much potential in the path ahead. It is this potential that we would like you as researchers to tap into for the good of our people, our country and the world in general.

Those changes are thanks to research and innovation; in new technologies, new products, and new business models.

Ladies and Gentlemen, DUT has and continues to support research and innovation. And rightly so: it's the best way to invest in future growth. And it delivers better when we do it together: when we pool our resources for economies of scale, and let the benefits spill over across individual researchers

Such support should continue. We believe that it will continue. But it also needs to change to embrace modern ways and also increase efficiencies and effectiveness.

But we need to go further. We need to give our research and innovation the three C's: more challenging; more coherent; and better at boosting competitiveness.

Firstly, remember that great innovation isn't about keeping the status quo: it's about challenging it.

Secondly, innovation needs to be coherent.

At the moment, we work within our own safe little boxes, researching in separate subject silos, or funding from separate pots of money.

And many actors, as beneficiaries, are quite happy staying in their silo, too comfortable to risk breaking out of them.

But this isn't right. The areas we are working in aren't distinct and separate: they are inherently linked, different parts of the same puzzle. We need therefore to see more multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research and research groups at DUT

The third thing we need is research and innovation focused on competitiveness.

Remember the time we're in. All of us see slow economic growth. Our young people face worrying job prospects. Unemployment in SA stands at about 30%, while that in many countries on the continent is above 50%. If this is not addressed as a matter of urgency and there is a role for Research and Innovation, then we are surely seating on a time bomb. I hope that this is something that we would be proud to be part of its solution.

Boosting competitiveness needs to be at the heart of everything we do. Including, especially our innovation agenda.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, The final area that I would like to touch on tonight is "How far should research policy be driven by Economic Impact". This question is relevant given the current global recession that threatens gains made by many countries especially developing countries.

In answering this, one should note that Innovation has been around for many years, albeit in different forms. My view then is that we need to push innovation to new levels; where we can for example, have spin out technology companies that can eventually address our needs as DUT, KZN , RSA and Africa and globally. Our aim should be to contribute to creating a better society for all. While our achievements in the past few years have been commendable and remarkable, the area of spin off companies is an area that we have performed poorly at DUT. I would like to challenge us to work towards this.

At DUT, while we have made some considerable progress in areas of research outputs and postgraduate training and graduation, there still needs to be much to be done. 2011 figures indicate that we have only 261 staff with M degree and 73 with D degrees. If we are to reach and surpass the benchmarks set by the DoHET, there needs to be much to be done. Those of you here tonight working with various HoDs, Deans and other Managers at the university should play a central role in this task. I invite you to come on board.

The resources available at DUT for research and innovation has increased over the years, the only thing is that there have been more numbers coming on board for these increased resources. In order that we can see the benefits of such increases, there needs to be considerable scope for enhanced efficiencies and effectiveness in resource utilization by all staff and students. We on our part will continue to engage the EM of DUT and indeed Council of DUT for further resources to help us achieve the various benchmarks set by DoHET.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I want to lay down a challenge to the DUT community tonight. The challenge is that we need to come together, work together and plan a future together that makes the most of DUT's competitive advantages so as to address these challenges for the benefit of us all at DUT and our country.

Together we can. Together we can innovate better and build a better future for all. Remember that the world is fast changing and we need to also change our methods of doing things.

I wish each one of you and all of you collectively a wonderful evening and a future full of hope and promise.

I thank you all. God Bless you all, God Bless South Africa, God Bless Africa.

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