



# CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

## FOR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) 2017

### Preamble

As a non-profit organisation, HELTASA's **mission and vision** is to:

- support teaching and learning scholarship and scholarly practices in higher education,
- strengthen collegial and professional relationships among members and key stakeholders across the sector,
- build an inclusive and diverse association that prioritises the upliftment of professional development of the sector.

HELTASA's **core values** are: collegiality; professionalism; quality; equity; excellence; development; creativity; criticality and innovation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

South African Higher Education faces a crisis of identity and legitimacy. The student protests of 2015 and 2016 have highlighted the urgent need for rethinking traditional teaching, learning and assessment practices, as well as the development of decolonised and transformative curricula. Post #RMF and in the current crisis around fee-free education in 2017, the academy is being challenged to become more relevant and responsive. Curriculum change is a key priority with teaching, assessment and related aspects seriously looked at for potential for change. Academic development for students needs to be re-thought and more deliberate and considered professional development programme for academics as scholarly teachers needs to be created.

### 2. HELTASA'S ROLE

HELTASA is well placed to be a key player in contributing to the above changes as its purpose is to support and grow learning and teaching in Southern Africa. Based on a growing and robust membership base of committed and passionate higher education teachers, HELTASA provides support for hundreds of professionals working in the field of higher education teaching and learning across the region. We

need to respond to the call and be creative and intellectually astute in how we position ourselves as agents of change in the sector.

We continue to fulfil our goals by adhering to the tenets of the four strategic objectives that emerged from the executive committee meetings. These are ongoing concerns/activities that will frame HELTASA's position in contributing to the teaching and learning agenda in the country.

These objectives fall within an overarching HELTASA purpose statement:

## **STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020**

### **Strategic Objective 1:**

To continue creating an enabling environment for AD practitioners to engage with and advance SOTL.

### **Strategic Objective 2:**

Particular focus on strengthening regionally and nationally collaborated AD events, beyond the annual conference.

### **Strategic Objective 3:**

Creating opportunities for members to be more involved in advocacy work by contributing to important policy debates shaping teaching and learning.

### **Strategic Objective 4:**

Ensuring the sustainability of the organization as well as maintaining and developing new strategic partnerships.

In this spirit, earlier this year at its first meeting, the executive team engaged in a process that focussed on traditional meeting procedure and critically challenging the hegemonic practices that continue to silence and marginalise mainly black and female academics. With a new focus on who we are and what we bring, the exec meetings this year used Reflective Practice as a key methodological tool for our executive activities. This enabled members to exercise their agency in ways that recognises their strengths and talents. This was captured in an Opinion Editorial in *The Conversation* entitled *Decolonising the curriculum: it's in the detail, not just in the definition* <https://theconversation.com/decolonising-the-curriculum-its-in-the-detail-not-just-in-the-definition-73772>

This year the executive team raises a critical question in relation to Academic Development in the current critical juncture in higher education: How to BE or not to BE? Limitations and opportunities of Academic Development (AD) as a movement in the current higher education context. This question will be explored by the exec panel in a critical dialogue session at the conference.

## **3. HELTASA ACTIVITIES**

HELTASA continues to work with and strengthen links with key stakeholders in the sector. Our interactions include projects with The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the International Consortium of Educational Development (ICED) on matters pertaining to teaching and learning, quality, capacity-building and professional recognition of educators and trainers in the sector. We also interact on educational matters with relevant statutory

bodies in the sector and promote peer review as a means of recognising quality in Higher Education practice.

### 3.1. DHET

This year HELTASA strengthened existing ties with DHET through the **Framework for Strengthening University Teaching** Project launched in May 2017. The HELTASA chair represented the association and argued a very strong case for the project to be grounded in a locally relevant and contextually rich framework, increasing visibility of those teachers and students who are traditionally marginalised and minimised in the sector. HELTASA was also represented at the National Workshop on this project which facilitated input from various universities in the sector.

A more visible presence by DHET will feature in the **Revitalising of the CHE-HELTASA Teaching Excellence Awards**. A document is being finalised to explicate what this process will entail. HELTASA members and the HE community in general will benefit from the increased visibility being created for excellence in teaching.

### 3.2. CHE

We continue to have strong links with the CHE, especially regarding the **National Excellence in Teaching Awards**. The 2017 committee convened by Rejoice Nsibandé (Wits University) comprised of Diane Grayson (CHE), Kasturi Behari-Leak (HELTASA chair UCT), Kwena Masha (University of Limpopo), Langutani Masehela (HELTASA rep University of Venda), Jean Farmer (Stellenbosch University), Rubby Dhunpath (University of KwaZulu-Natal) and Lindsay Clowes (University of Western Cape).

Building on the conceptual and operational strides made in 2016, a renewed focus in the current awards is on helping applicants to submit portfolios that demonstrate how our curriculum development processes encourage innovative approaches designed to improve the student experience. The criteria seek teaching experiences that acknowledge and incorporate into the learning experiences the rich diversity of our student population represented in our classrooms. While the awards focus on how disciplinary specialists are committed to scholarly enquiry that encourages students to engage deeply and critically with disciplinary knowledge, the criteria firmly acknowledge the complexities involved in quality teaching and call for an account of the impact of local, global and social contexts. This year's committee applied the new set of criteria to the marketing of the applications and the resulting shortlists to encourage a wider pool applicants to focus on their pedagogy in the contested context in which our teaching and learning takes place. This proved to be fortuitous and our 2017 award winners demonstrate a keen penchant for teaching with national transformation goals and imperatives in mind.

All public institutions were invited to submit up to three nominations. The number of applications increased from the 20 received in 2016 to 31 applications from 16 institutions. We were pleased that both the number of applicants and the spread of institutions has increased each year. The committee short-listed 11 applicants who were subsequently interviewed via Skype. The five winners and commendees will be announced at the gala dinner during the HELTASA

2017 conference. On the last day of the conference the winners will be participating in a panel presentation.

### **3.3 ICED**

HELTASA is a member of the International Consortium of Educational Development (ICED), which has 24 different national networks as members. ICED has networks whose members are themselves national organisations such as HELTASA or networks concerned with promoting good practice in higher education. The ICED Council is formed by Presidents, or their representatives, of a country's academic staff development network(s).

As Chairperson of HELTASA, I attended the ICED council meeting in China on 6-7 July, in a very warm and humid Shanghai (36 degrees). This was a very good opportunity to put HELTASA, HE and our local issues on the table. Through the discussions and deliberations, I also signalled that HELTASA brings an important perspective concerning change in the South. I am hoping that HELTASA membership and executive will benefit directly from our liaison with ICED and that it is a mutually beneficial relationship. The council made special mention that through the ICED-HELTASA conference in 2016, the contextual challenges we faced provided real lenses for them to understand educational development and its challenges in a more nuanced way. The meeting was followed by the 2017 Chinese Higher Education Development (CHED) Network Conference at Fudan University.

HELTASA will continue as a member network and the executive will ensure that membership is linked to ICED's activities throughout the year. The next ICED conference is in Atlanta, Georgia, USA in June/July 2018.

### **3.4 CONFERENCES**

We are very grateful to Durban University of Technology (DUT) and its conference convening team, led by Nalini Chitanand, for hosting the 2017 conference. The key note speakers are critical thinkers in Higher Education and will no doubt infuse the conference with stimulating inputs for delegates to engage with. The conference convening team has been working tirelessly to deliver a conference of note. Innovations such as the Critical Dialogues and the FLIPPED PAPER add to the creativity and variety and by the sound of things, this conference is poised to be like no other.

We are also delighted to announce that the 2018 HELTASA conference will be hosted by Nelson Mandela University (NMU), under the leadership of Prof Cheryl Foxcroft's office. We look forward to being back in Port Elizabeth next year for this academic rendezvous.

### **3.5 SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGs)**

HELTASA has 9 **Special Interest Groups** (SIGs) that we have continued to strengthen and support as part of its work in 2017. Masebala Tjabane (on the executive committee) took the reins as SIG convenor this year. A SIG conveners meeting will take place at the annual conference to bring SIG leaders together to discuss opportunities and challenges for the following year and to explore how SIG

activities can integrate with the organisation's objectives as a whole. Our Special Interest Groups in 2017 include established as well as new groups, convenors and co-convenors:

No.	SIG	Convenor	Co-convenor
1	Foundation SIG	Lynn Coleman (CPUT)	Dylan Cromhout (CPUT)
2	Tutor / Mentor / SI	Subethra Pather (UWC)	Nelia Frade (UJ)
3	Writing centre	Puleng Sefalane (CPUT)	Laura Dison (Wits)
4	Technology Enhanced Learning	Alanna Reilly (UFH)	Simon Goldstone (NMU)
5	Reflective Practice Research	Pieter du Toit (UP)	Wendy Kilfoil (UP)
6	Professional Development	Jo-Anne Vorster (RU)	Rosaline Govender (DUT)
7	First Year Success	Dr André van Zyl (UJ)	Juan-Claude Lemmens (UP)
8	SAULT	Brenda Leibowitz (UJ)	Kibbie Naidoo (UJ)

### 3.6 CRITICAL DIALOGUES

The purpose of the HELTASA-led critical dialogues is to initiate opportunities for members and others in the higher education arena to debate key issues affecting the sector, with a particular focus on contemporary topics. The dialogues are designed to gather differing perspectives on how these critical issues affect teaching and learning practice. Competing work commitments as well as increased instability within institutions made the original plan of driving the initiative by an executive member not feasible. The strategy had to change to using the HELTASA website and Newsletters so that the Critical Dialogues can draw from existing events rather than initiating these public dialogues at regional level.

### 3.7 COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA

**Website:** the website continues towards the goal of becoming a more interactive space for HELTASA membership.

**Newsletter:**

SIG landing pages have had an upgrade to allow various online activities that were not possible before. The idea is to have an integrated approach to keeping the membership involved and informed about events and activities that will be of interest to them by linking the website, monthly newsletter and our newly launched Facebook page.

## 4. FINANCIAL REPORT

The financial statement will be made available by Delysia Timm who served as treasurer of the association.

## 5. ELECTIONS / VACANCIES for 2017/18

As we come to the end of the 2016/2017 cycle, 4 members on the executive committee are unavailable for re-election for 2017/2018. We therefore have to fill 4 vacancies for the new year through election at the AGM.

In October 2017, a call for nominations was sent out to the membership via the website as well as the monthly newsletter. By the deadline, i.e. 8 November, 4 nominations were received from 4 nominators. No elections are therefore necessary as these four nominations will be accepted.

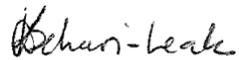
The executive will continue to co-opt willing members to serve on special projects.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

I would like to thank all members of the Executive Committee for their invaluable contributions to HELTASA in 2017. I look forward to supporting this organization as it grows from strength to strength.

Sincerely,

Dr Kasturi Behari-Leak (Chairperson)



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November 2017