NADEOSA – Executive Report to the AGM 03 October 2013

# Context

It should be acknowledged at the outset that the last few years have been difficult ones for NADEOSA. The merger of different institutions, the movement of institutional representatives without identifying replacements and a growing number of conferences, including conferences with an ODL focus or theme, have all militated against the optimal operation of the association. It has also proved increasingly difficult to agree on times and dates on which to have quorate Executive meetings attesting to the increasingly busy schedules of many of the current executive and suggestive of the need to recruit a new cadre of leadership.

On the other hand, the emerging policy framework in the form of the Green paper on Post-Schooling and the Draft Policy Framework for Distance Provision by South African Universities, as well as recent discussions hosted by the DHET on conceptualising a more holistic open learning system suggests there is now an even greater need for a national forum embracing schooling, vocational and FET provision, adult education and higher education to explore open and distance provision.

The current Executive were elected during the 2010 conference and AGM and we should have elected a new Executive in 2012. However, despite several suggestions for possible themes and dates for a conference or workshop with an AGM attached, it proved impossible to find a time, date and venue that suited the majority of members. Although we had a generous offer from the University of the Free State and the Belgian development agency VVOB to host a conference in September 2013, a host of competing conferences which resulted in the receipt of very few abstracts as well as the sudden unavailability of our identified keynote speakers has meant that we needed to postpone this event, possibly to early 2014.

It is therefore highly serendipitous that the Council on Higher Education wished to hold a consultative national workshop on its draft Good Practice Guide and that the President of COL, Prof Kanwar, was in the country and willing to offer a keynote address on the key issue being discussed at the workshop. We are highly grateful both to the CHE and Prof Kanwar for making it possible for us to host a meaningful day’s activities to explore open and distance provision and also to host this AGM. (Round of applause)

# Funding and fees

One of the problem issues for NADEOSA over the past few years has been how to sustain the Association financially, especially in light of a declining membership on the one hand and a host of competing conferences on the other. At the AGMs in 2010 and 2011, a new membership fees structure based on institutional footprint was proposed and adopted. However, in line with NADEOSA’s constitution and established practice, some institutions objected to the revised fees structure and this led to a number of heated discussions and debates within the Executive. During the financial report that forms part of this AGM, we will table a proposed revised membership fees structure that was brokered through these various discussions and which we hope will now be acceptable for all members.

Despite the challenges outlined above, NADEOSA has managed to make some contributions to the national agenda on ODL provision.

# Funding task team

During the course of 2011, the DHET constituted a funding task team to explore the funding of higher education going forward. A member of the NADEOSA Executive participated in this task team, albeit with a different hat, and was able to help ensure that discussions in relation to the funding of distance provision were based on empirical evidence and direct engagement with providers.

# Case studies of good practice

Towards the end of 2011 and at the beginning of 2012, three more case studies illustrative of good practice provision and illustrative of the NADEOSA quality guidelines and criteria were added to the NADEOSA website.

# Green Paper on Post-Schooling

NADEOSA members also contributed a coordinated response to the Green paper on Post Schooling. In view of the number of policies developed by DHET and the Department’s expectations regarding open and distance learning I would like to propose that NADEOSA agree at this meeting to forge a relationship with government – my suggestion would be to have a DHET representative elected/co-opted onto the executive of NADEOSA.

# OER Symposium and Exhibition

NADEOSA was represented on an ICDE chaired panel discussion at the OER Symposium and Exhibition that complemented the world OER Congress hosted at the Unesco offices in Paris in June 2012. In fact, the NADEOSA Vice-President, again albeit wearing a different hat, chaired the two-day symposium which was streamed live online.

# SAERA 2013

Members will recall that NADEOSA participated in discussions regarding the need for a national research association from 2011 and this culminated in January 2013 in the launch conference of the South African Educational Research Association (SAERA) at the AKTV in Klein Kariba in North West Province with ODL and OER positioned within the larger research agenda.

# Migration of website

The NADEOSA website has been redesigned with a more modern look and feel and has been migrated to the open source Drupal platform. One of the challenges for the new executive will be how to make better use of this site to communicate the needs and interests of the ODL community.

# NADEOSA conference

The University of the Free State and VVOB remain committed to hosting a NADEOSA conference. We are currently exploring the possibility of holding the conference early in 2014 and we hope that members will respond positively to the new call for papers once the new executive has agreed on appropriate dates.

# Conclusion

In concluding, we would like to reiterate what we said at the start. For a variety of reasons, the last few years have been difficult ones for NADEOSA. However, the wheel is turning and an increasing number of increasingly diverse institutions will in future be engaged with open and distance provision in pursuit of a national goal of increased enrolment, success and throughput in a more open and coordinated education system. NADEOSA is positioned to play a leading role in realising this vision, and members are encouraged to bear this in mind when electing a new executive to take us forward.

As outgoing president it is my task to thank all the members of the executive for their time and effort to keep NADEOSA going through tough times. I have been privileged to work with a group of highly talented people who all have a passion for open and distance learning. I would like to single out two people in particular: Jenny Louw who as secretary at times acted as a stern mother to guide us and Tony Mays our vice-president without whose support I would not have been able to fulfil my duties. He has had to stand in for me so often that I prefer to think of him as co-president. It has been an honour to serve as president, but the time has come where I can spend my remaining years as an ordinary member researching the complexities of curriculum development for open and distance learning.