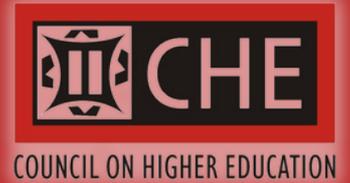


SPECIAL TRIBUTE

30 September 2022



Back row, left to right: Dr Mafu Rakometsi, Dr Julie Reddy, Dr Daniel van der Nest, Mr Luzuko Buku, Dr Muki Moeng, Prof Vukosi Marivate, Mr Cassie Kruger, Dr Whitfield Green. Front row, left to right: Mrs Vuyo Memani-Sedile, Mrs Kokettjo Magongoa, Prof Mala Singh, Prof Mvuyo Tom, Prof N. Themba Mosia, Prof Angina Parekh and Prof Lesley Le Grange

CELEBRATING OUTGOING COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE TRANSFORMATIVE ORGANISATION THAT IS THE CHE

By Rivonia Naidu-Hoffmeester

It was an evening of celebration and gratitude to acknowledge the contributions of outgoing council members of the Council of Higher Education (CHE), one of which being the chair of council, Professor Themba Mosia.

Bidding them farewell, the outgoing council members were thanked for their service to the CHE in the last five years. The outgoing council members were treated to a commemorative dinner, and they also received certificates of recognition signed by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr BE Nzimande.

Opening the event was Dr Britta Zawada (Director: Institutional Audits) and Dr Phumzile Dlamini (Acting Director: Accreditation) with a quote by Henri Frederic Amiel that spoke to the importance of having the dinner: "Thankfulness is only the beginning of gratitude; gratitude is the completion of thankfulness; thankfulness may be merely expressed in words. Gratitude is shown in acts."

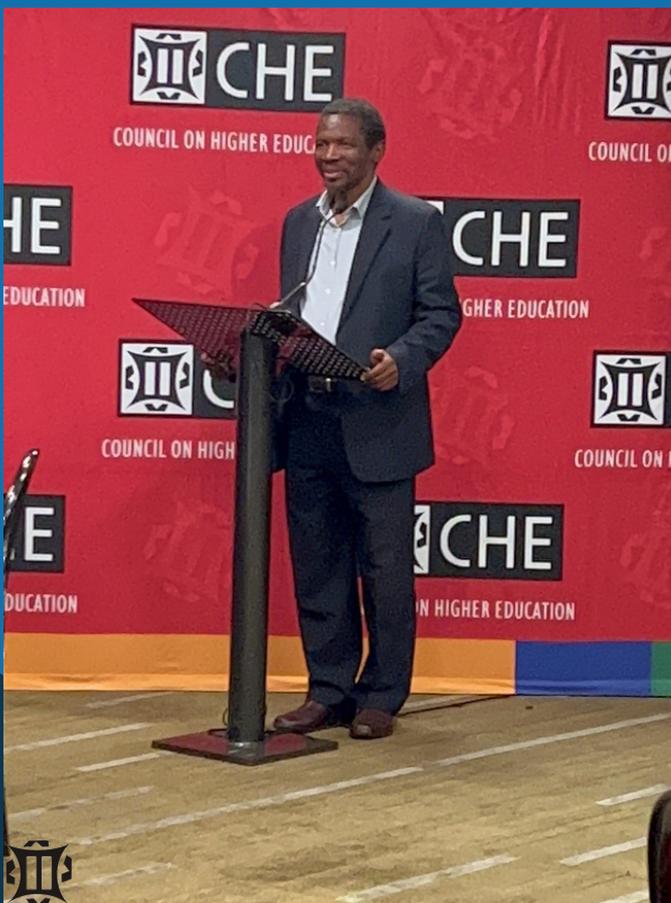


Dr Phumzile Dlamini and Dr Britta Zawada



Welcoming guests was Professor Mvuyo Tom, interim chair of council, who also concludes his council duties this year. He expressed how “happy” he was to see the attendees “healthy” and “full of life”. He highlighted that due to COVID-19, many colleagues had lost their lives, and it is therefore important to focus on life, and one’s contributions holistically.

He said it was important to recognise the work Council had done in the last term, and also to reflect on the history of the CHE and the big role it has played, and continues to play, in the transformation agenda of the South African higher education landscape. He also spoke about individual transformation and growth, but not just of skills, in behaviour as well, and how this is linked to the holistic development of South Africa. “If we don’t do this, we will never move forward as a nation,” he said.



Professor Mvuyo Tom – Interim Chair of Council

HISTORY OF THE CHE

Taking guests down memory lane was Professor Mala Singh, who was instrumental, together with Professor Saleem Badat, in the formation of the CHE in 1997/1998. She said it was a great pleasure and privilege having been involved in the CHE for 25 years. “Those of us who were there in the CHE at the beginning felt immensely privileged, we felt that it was such an exciting time,” said Professor Singh, adding that the CHE started with two people – the CEO (Professor Badat) and an administrative assistant – and with a budget of R1 million.

Addressing the challenges that the CHE currently faces, Professor Singh spoke on the many subcommittees and the range of administrative, bureaucratic, and technocratic reporting requirements. This can limit focus on the strategic work of the CHE, which is to concentrate on the intellectual and policy work that it has been mandated in terms of legislation to carry out.



Professor Mala Singh

She reminded guests that the CHE is a statutory body, which means it is part of the state, but it is not part of government. “The CHE is fortunate that it has this independence. It is quiet critical not to





forget that while you are part of the state, you are not necessarily part of government, even though we share the task of giving effect to common constitutional and policy goals in higher education."

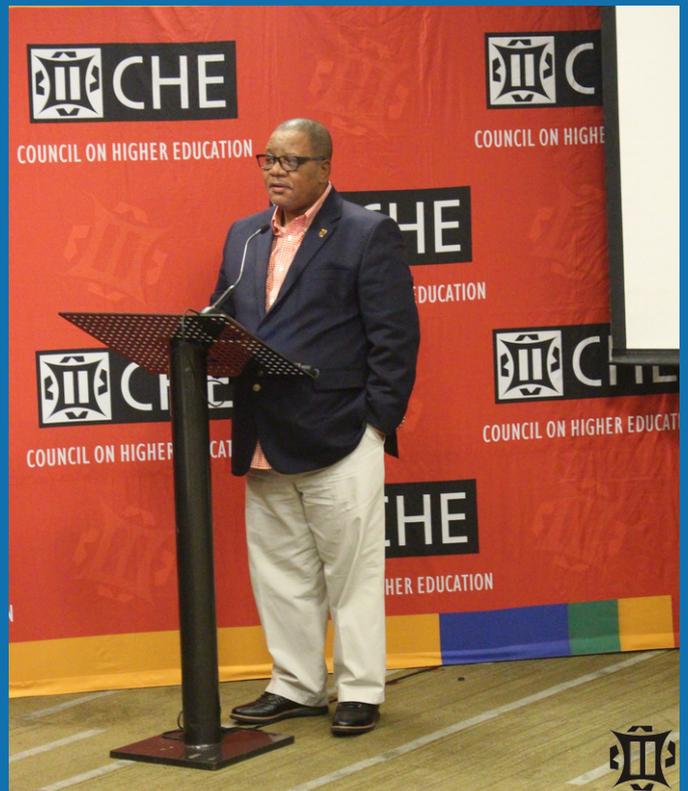
Professor Singh concluded: "My wish for the CHE going forward is that it will be seen by all its stakeholders, all the constituencies that it works with, as a credible and a respected organisation that provides intellectual and policy leadership in the continuing transformation of higher education in South Africa."

EXCITED TO STEER THE CHE COUNCIL

The evening's second speaker was the outgoing chair of council, Professor Mosia. He said that his CHE journey started in 1999 at a conference on quality assurance held at the Kruger National Park. In attendance were international specialists on quality assurance. "That triggered my passion for quality assurance."

He said that the CHE started like a movement that exploded into what he called a revolution. "It was just revolutionising higher education. In that difficult period, when it was just Professors Badat and Singh, there was this mobilisation of teams who worked without getting paid. At that time, we had 35 universities in the country and I remember those many training sessions that we had were very intense. It took a lot of hard work, and we drew from different expertise and people who were interested to share their experiences with us. We also started reading quite intensely about quality and quality assurance."

Professor Mosia said that along his journey, he learned from some of the best in the area of practice. When he assumed the chair of council position in 2013, he said he was excited to return to the CHE in that capacity. "From a distance, I had a sense that there was some kind of drift from the core mandate. It was very apparent in some instances that there was just a glossing over of things, just ticking a box and moving on."



Professor N. Themba Mosia

He said at the time there was an interim chair, and he is uncertain as to why the role had not been filled. "The CEO at the time was a very bright man, Ahmed Essop, and there were certainly some intellectuals in the council," said Professor Mosia, adding that a few months later, a new and revamped council was appointed.

"I remember how active I was, for long hours sitting, going through those applications trying to assist the Minister in a small team of people there. And we made a very good selection of members. It was a huge sigh of relief when the Minister appointed a very diverse and vibrant group of members. I remember feeling like a lightweight."

Professor Mosia said the council started with numerous strategic conversations but the long and short of it was that it culminated into a number of important decisions. "I can't mention them all, but one prominent one is the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF). There were also a number of priorities that I had for the CHE, number one being good governance and whatever else goes with good governance because we needed to fix that as it was in the best interest of the organisation. A second priority was compliance as we simply couldn't function as an organisation if we don't comply."





The third one was just reclaiming the reputation of the CHE in the sector because you could just see the trend was going downwards and the CHE had started on a very high point. So I was very happy to have that council and I am very happy to see where we are now."

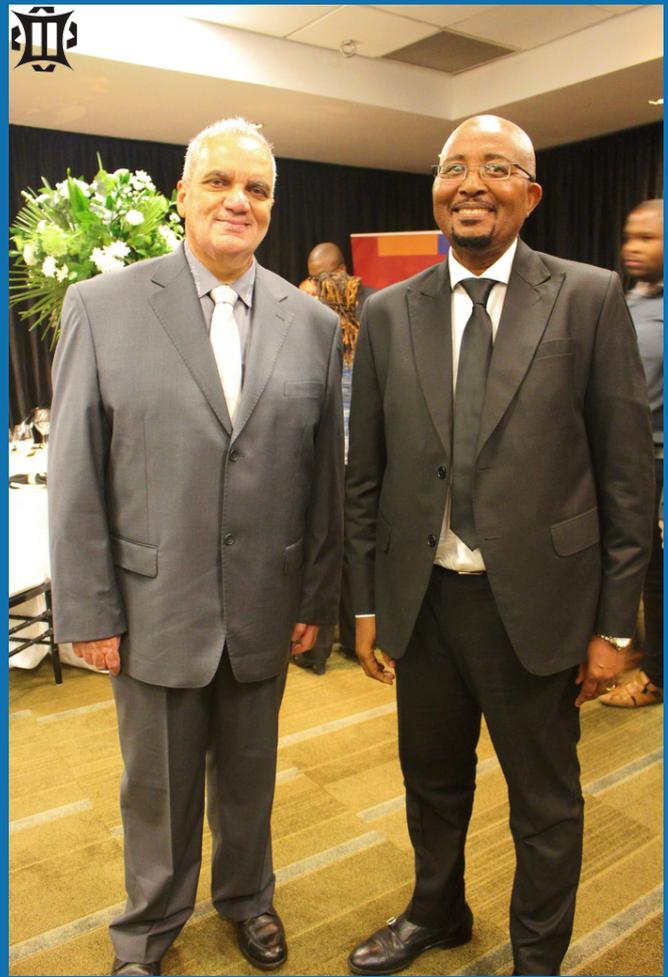
He said the fourth priority was focused on building working relationships with the Minister responsible for higher education. "I don't know what happened, but I know we just needed to fix that, and I am very happy that it was sorted." A fifth priority was to advance the core mandate of the CHE, and chief among that was to reinstate the institutional audits.

Professor Mosia listed funding, #feesmustfall movement, numerous litigations (of which there is only one left), poor working relationships, the loss of competent managers in the organisation, and the COVID-19 pandemic as some of the prominent challenges that the council faced.

He thanked council members for their support and respect. "You're actually the ones who made me look good and I have learned a lot, and I truly appreciate that." He added that those who will be steering the council must make sure that the CHE doesn't just survive, it must succeed. He also thanked the CEO, Dr Whitfield Green, and his team for their passion and numerous achievements in a very short space of time.

DHET SUPPORT CONTINUES

The Director-General of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), Dr Nkosinathi Sishi, delivered a speech on behalf of the Minister, Dr Blade Nzimande. He said: "I feel that it is indeed fitting that we set aside time to appreciate the contribution and knowledge of the highly skilled individuals who have contributed to national service and provided expert guidance and leadership to the sector."



Dr Whitfield Green – CHE CEO and Dr Nkosinathi Sishi DHET DG

Dr Sishi said that the CHE, which has the support of the Minister, is tasked through the Higher Education Act of 1997 to play a critical role in the higher education landscape. It is therefore essential that it is led strategically by intellectuals such as outgoing chair, Professor Mosia, and the interim chair, Professor Tom.

He said that council had been forward looking, taking decisions and adopting strategies that enable the CHE to be responsive to the current and future context. "Your contribution is recognised by the Minister, and I'm pleased to confirm that this council is trusted to carry out its tasks, which it has been able to execute effectively. The CHE is well placed to move forward on the strong foundation that already has been established, and we recognise this and we appreciate this work, and we assure you of our support going forward. We would like to record our appreciation to the members of council for their contribution."





He said that the processes to appoint a new council chairperson and new council members was well underway. "I can assure you that the ministerial advisors are right at the final stage of tabling the recommendations to the Minister. As you know, the Minister really applies his mind on these issues. And if you look at his previous appointments, you can actually see that we have chosen excellence over mediocrity. And in this regard, we also assure you that we'll do the best to make you proud and not to undermine the work that you've done over so many years. I am sure that the new council will continue to steer the CHE along the strategic trajectories that have been put in motion. And we look forward to welcome them on board."

Dr Sishi said currently, across the world, there are a confluence of multiple challenges, which are also impacting South African society, broadly, but also in higher education. These challenges are "bread and butter issues" for education which need sharp focus, he said, adding that the role of the CHE in this regard cannot be underestimated.

CHE AS A KNOWLEDGE HUB AND INTELLECTUAL CENTRE

After certificates of service were handed to the outgoing council members by Dr Sishi, chief executive officer (CEO) of the CHE, Dr Whitfield Green, thanked those in attendance. He described the evening as "bittersweet" given that the dinner was one of celebration but also one to say farewell. "While we are here to celebrate the immense contribution of an outstanding group of people to an organisation that has an important role to play in our education sector in South Africa, we are simultaneously marking the end of term of office."

He said the Minister has been strong in his support of the CHE's work over the years, and has provided good advice on strategic direction. In this regard, a critical focus will be on its original mandate of intellectual knowledge development. "Providing policy direction based on intellectual work is something that was lost for a time, but under the leadership of the recent council, this work has come to the fore again."



Dr Nkosinathi Sishi handing over the certificate of appreciation to Prof Angina Parekh – Council member and Chairperson of the HEQC

We are working hard to reclaim the identity of the CHE as a knowledge hub and an intellectual centre in the higher education space."

Dr Green indicated that the DHET has, over the years, also provided strong support to the CHE, through participation in the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and Council. "The departmental representatives have really taken the CHE to heart in their participation in those committees, and have really helped the CHE to tackle a range of issues that it is grappling with. We look forward to continued contribution in this regard."

He also spoke about funding issues, which he said continues to be a challenge for the CHE, given that its mandate is expanding. "There are new possibilities of institutional types in higher education, and we really have to start thinking about what that means for the CHE, to be working beyond the university and private higher education institution space."



Addressing the CHE's strategic trajectory and position, Dr Green said that foundations have been put in place for the organisation to go from strength to strength over the next few years. Some of the strategic highlights he reflected on was, encouraging a greater focus on the developments of qualification standards and the implementation of national qualification reviews. "I think that has seriously enhanced the work and reach of the CHE, and the qualification standards and the reviews are really finding traction, support and appreciation in the sector."

Dr Green also spoke on the implementation of a second round of national audits. He said the system has been galvanised around the institutional audits and there is a lot of energy and action. "We have to ensure the robustness of that exercise as it goes forward."

He added that approving the implementation of the new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) placed the CHE at the forefront of thinking around quality assurance. "I think in terms of where the world is and how the CHE is positioning itself in terms of the quality assurance framework, is really placing us at the cutting edge of quality assurance."

He also briefly spoke about council's support of the CHE embarking on a digital transformation framework to significantly strengthen the digital operations of the organisation as a further vital contribution of council.

Dr Green also reflected on the acceptance of council in responding to the request of the Minister to take over the transformation monitoring and oversight function. "I think it's a critical role that hasn't really been fulfilled to the extent that it should in the country. Therefore, unpacking this role and defining it, seeing how this role aligns to the other roles and mandates of the CHE is key work for us going forward."

He then thanked the council members under the leadership of Professor Mosia for ensuring the CHE is enabled to contribute positively to the development of higher education in the service of South Africa. "We trust that the new incoming council will build strongly on your legacy but it is important to note that the expertise that resides in this room cannot be lost to the CHE, and I'm sure it will not be lost to the higher education sector. Therefore, we look forward to drawing on your expertise in different roles going forward."

Dr Green also thanked all CHE staff, and said that he recognises their contribution in implementing the strategic visions and direction set by Council. "The CHE is privileged to be served by group of highly capable and committed staff. They always go beyond minimum expectation in carrying out their work; colleagues you are seen, and you are valued."

Dr Zawada concluded the evening with a quote by Melody Beattie that summed up the evening's celebrations, "gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow."



Prof N. Themba Mosia, Prof Angina Parekh and Dr Whitfield Green



Left to right: Dr Makhapha Makhafola, Dr Britta Zawada, Ms Olivia Mokgatle, Dr Phumzile Dlamini and Dr Amani Saidi

****Ends**