

# Message from the IEASA President



By **Ms Orla Quinlan**, President IEASA 2019-2020

## Global challenges and the role of international educators

Globalisation and the advent of rapidly developing technologies have made the world appear smaller and increasingly accessible. However, we are simultaneously witnessing widespread disruptions, at the macro and micro levels, intent on polarising populations. Established democracies are experiencing serious challenges. The political promulgation of fear, the rise of the far right and hyper-nationalisation, as well as an increase in obstacles to migration are but some of the prevalent phenomena we are facing.

Each new generation needs a cohort of people who have the experience, interest, and know-how to engage with people from other places. International education can provide these opportunities and experiences. A successful future relies on the ability to navigate an interconnected, globalised world.

These phenomena conspire to make human access to other places and people, who are different to us, more challenging and arguably less attractive. They cultivate an insularity that 'others' and mitigates against the desire to reach out, explore and learn. These phenomena call for a fundamental rethink of human societies and our future: how we are organised; how we are operating and how we are communicating.

It is precisely in such an environment that international educators need to step forward, raise their voices, advocate and advance their professional purposes in visible and meaningful ways. International educators need to be vigilant in actively promoting and encouraging educational opportunities for staff and students from different places to get to know each other and to open their minds to broader and different perspectives. International educators also need to reach out and engage with academic colleagues at home and partners abroad to collaborate and to demonstrate alternative, hopeful and encouraging narratives to mitigate the dominant-negative and divisive narratives that foster xenophobia, insularity and fear. Furthermore, international educators need to collectively challenge immigration systems and practises that place obstacles in the path of achieving the core mandate of international education. Finally, international educators must seek new avenues, including those offered by new technologies, for meaningful and relevant international educational engagement.

Each new generation needs a cohort of people who have experience, interest and know-how to engage with people from other places. International education can provide these opportunities and experiences. A successful future relies on the ability to navigate an interconnected, globalised world. It is only in experiencing interaction with people from other places that one truly gets a comparative sense of the prevailing conditions, life experiences and capacities in ones own home country.

We are regularly consulted by our established partners globally, as well as those seeking potential partnerships.





## Africa rising and the role of South Africa

With the African population set to be one of the largest and most youthful, by comparison with anywhere else in the world, Africa is seen as both a continent of great wealth and potential. By 2055, the continent's youth population (aged 15-24), is expected to be more than double the 2015 total of 226 million. (UNDP, 2017) Within this continental landscape, South Africa has a significant role to play.

South Africa is a relatively new and functioning democracy. We have just elected our fifth President since democracy in 1994. While there is no doubt that many challenges lie ahead, South Africa remains a country rich in the diversity of its people and its natural beauty. It is a country with many achievements and enormous potential. South Africa is a constitutional democracy that is governed by the rule of law. It has a much-admired constitution that espouses a separation of power between the executive, legislature and the judiciary, that allows for checks and balances that we have seen at work (especially in the last few years).

South Africa also has chapter 9 institutions, such as the Human Rights Commission and the Public Protector's office, which provides the underpinnings to hold the government and people of South Africa to account in terms of the tenets of the South African constitution. The country has held free and fair elections and experienced a peaceful transfer of power every five years since 1994. As a country, we are deeply engaged with the rest of the world, having come from a pre-1994 period of deep isolation. A case in point is that our capital city, Pretoria, in which our IEASA offices are located, has more embassies than any city outside Washington DC. South Africa also has a complex and diverse economy, is a member of the G21 nations and participates fully in global markets.

## The South African Higher Education sector and internationalisation

The South African Higher Education sector remains robust. It is the most diverse and increasingly the most sought-after Higher Education system in Africa, especially for postgraduates.

Participation in Higher Education has more than doubled in the last 25 years. The South African Higher Education system is also the eighth biggest attractor of international students in the world.

South Africa's Higher Education system is in the post – “#FeesMustfall” era, which has had a significant impact on its priorities. Conversations revolve around increasing the access of local students to Higher Education and the transformation of both the demographics of Faculty and curriculum content. There is a shortage of PhD students in the South African system and, while the NGap programme is supporting the career acceleration of young black academics, the system is producing significantly fewer PhD graduates than is required and a significant proportion of these are international students from the rest of Africa. South Africa is increasingly becoming a hub for postgraduates from the rest of the continent. There are new opportunities for international PhD graduates to apply for critical skills visas to then work at South African Higher Education institutions.

South Africa's Higher Education system is in the post – “#FeesMustfall” era, which has had a significant impact on its priorities. Conversations revolve around increasing the access of local students to Higher Education and transformation of both the demographics of Faculty and curriculum content.

As the demands on South African Higher Education institutions increase, we need to find ways to teach more students with less human resources. We need “transgress” and constructively disrupt the traditional ways of teaching and learning. One such opportunity is the use of technology to promote engagement beyond the traditional classroom. This new growing movement is taking hold in many parts of the world and is gathering traction in South Africa with several universities now engaged in Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) programmes. Virtual engagement brings students and academics together around internet-based tools and digital technology, drawn from geographically distant locations, different cultural backgrounds, perspectives and experiences so that they may engage in meaningful academic and cultural exchanges.

Promising developments in internationalisation include the availability of European Union (EU) funded programmes in South Africa, which have enabled a significant amount of mobility and created new and effective networks for South African institutions. A South African Swedish University Forum (SASUF) has recently been established and there are increasingly active collaborations between South African and Swedish researchers. The Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (DIKU), also visited and engaged with IEASA, USAf and other Higher Education entities in 2018. There is ongoing and in-depth engagement with other international partners in Higher Education, including the German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD), Netherlands Education Support Office (NUFFIC NESO), British Council, the Fulbright US Scholarship Programme and the Chinese Embassy. Other

scholarship opportunities from around the world on offer to South Africans are listed on the DHET website <http://www.internationalscholarships.dhet.gov.za/scholarships.html>

The eagerly awaited Draft Framework Policy for Internationalisation of Higher Education recommends a comprehensive approach to internationalisation. Internationalisation is currently approached very differently in different institutions. For some, it is central to their university strategy; for others, it is less explicit in the strategy but evident in practice and, for a minority, it is not yet part of the thinking or activities.

The capacity of, and the roles and responsibilities assigned to each international office, also vary greatly across South African Higher Education institutions. In certain universities, the responsibility for internationalisation has been elevated to dedicated Deputy Vice-Chancellors (DVCs); in some instances, there are quite large and well-staffed international offices; in others, medium-size offices are struggling to meet demands and, in a minority, there is no dedicated international office.

### **IEASA: Staying relevant and responsive**

In his thought-provoking article on “Disrupting traditional international education” Dr Kishun reflected on the critical role that IEASA played in re-integrating South Africa into the global Higher Education fabric, from which it was excluded, and asserts that, going forward, the greater challenge for IEASA “will be to re-define international education to take into consideration the future world disrupted by seismic changes in new technologies and a young generation of “smart” people who see technology as an extension of themselves and who are looking for educational opportunities offering greater flexibility, different modes of learning at low cost and de-linked from traditional qualifications”. (Study SA, 2018).

**This edition’s proposed theme is Engaged Universities: Comprehensive Internationalisation - A Dialogue Between Local and Global Realities. The official launch of the 18th edition of Study SA will take place at IEASA’s 2019 annual conference, August 21st-23rd, in Somerset West, located near Cape Town.**

IEASA’s 22nd conference to be held between August 21st-23rd, in Somerset West, located near Cape Town, focuses on the theme Internationalisation of Higher Education in the 4th Industrial Revolution: Innovation, Diversity, Inequality and Inclusion. This conference offers the opportunity to discuss how we might navigate our way forward for Internationalisation in this fraught and disrupted global environment.

Every organisation needs to continually analyse the external environment in which it is operating to ensure that it remains relevant and impactful. Making IEASA a sustainable organisation has been an ongoing conversation for a few years. One of the smaller International Education Associations, IEASA needs to refresh, renew and reinvent itself to stay relevant. With the Draft Policy Framework for Internationalisation in Higher Education due to be released in 2019, one could argue that IEASA could

play an even more significant role in South Africa. As such, we have a wonderful opportunity to reimagine and re-energise the organisation.

IEASA has a legal identity, independent of its staff or office bearers and needs to be nurtured, protected, strengthened and rejuvenated by every one of its members. As individual office bearers have come and gone, the IEASA collective has ensured the delivery of some great flagship projects, including its Annual Conference and the Study SA publication. It has engaged with the rest of the world at huge International Conferences, including NAFSA, EAIE and APAIE and exhibited in these spaces, on behalf of the South Africa Higher Education system. A sincere debt of gratitude is owed to many IEASA members who, over the years, have given of their time and effort to contribute to these successes.

IEASA’s earliest Management Councils were comprised of very active Registrars, DVCs and senior academics from South Africa’s public universities. The Directors Forum was later set up to ensure that the senior practitioners from the International Offices could inform and advise the Management Council of IEASA about the practical issues facing international students. In recent years, IEASA might arguably be seen as an organisation largely led by senior staff from international offices. Comprehensive internationalisation, the thrust of the anticipated policy, is the concern of the whole university. To truly promote a comprehensive internationalisation, IEASA needs to expand and incorporate a range of professionals and academics from universities and expose them to the “window on the world” that IEASA has to offer. Furthermore, IEASA also needs to develop the core of its organisation and could benefit greatly from members with financial, legal, human resources skills, committed to international Higher Education, participating in the organisation. I invite IEASA members to identify and encourage university colleagues, with a passion for internationalisation, from a wide range of academic and professional strands, to join IEASA.

### **Welcoming the Network of International Education Associations (NIEA) back to South Africa**

Both the 2014 Global Dialogue, held in Port Elizabeth, which led to the Nelson Mandela Bay Declaration, and the 2016 Global Conference, held in Kruger National Park, brought together International Education Associations leaders from all over the world on South African soil. As we approach the 2019 IEASA conference, we are delighted to welcome the Network of International Education Associations (NIEA) leaders back to South Africa to have their second official meeting of 2019.

The challenges facing internationalisation in Higher Education share many similarities, regardless of where in the world we each are located. We need to build networks of open-minded people who understand the global issues and are committed to playing their part in creating a more inclusive and more equitable world locally and globally.

I thank everyone who gives of their time, ideas and energy to IEASA and invite you all to continue to contribute to shaping and building a better IEASA, a better South African Higher Education System and a better future for our students.