



**POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA**

**WELCOME REMARKS**

**BY**

**PROF TJAMA TJIVIKUA**

*RECTOR OF THE POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA*

**ON**

**THE OCCASION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL TECHNOLOGY DAY**

**ON**

**23OCTOBER 2013**

**08:15**

**Auditorium 1**

**POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA**

Director of Ceremonies, Dr Michael Tjivikua

Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Hon Joel Kaapanda

Managing Director of Telecom Namibia, Mr Frans Ndoroma

Senior Management, Faculty and Staff of the Polytechnic of Namibia

Distinguished Invited Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

I welcome you to the first Technology Day hosted by the Polytechnic of Namibia. This year, we have all worked very hard to carefully construct our 4<sup>th</sup> Strategic Plan and the Transformation Plan to ensure that, come January 2014, we open our doors as Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST).

When one thinks of transformation, one of the most complex metamorphosis processes by which a caterpillar turns into a butterfly comes to mind. Just like the metamorphosis process gives the butterfly its wings to fly, our metamorphosis thus far from a small business college to a formidable institution have placed us on good footing. I am of the firm belief that the foundation we have laid to always be an institution of excellence since 1995 will help us soar to greater heights to become a university of science and technology.

Technology has been a crucial and inherent part of all our operations and we continue to make the necessary investments to ensure that we maximise our output and make our processes efficient through the integration of technology. Our institution runs on a robust and reliable fibre optic network infrastructure to which more than 3500 computers are connected. We own 49 laboratories all with smart boards installed and classrooms with smart boards and/or motorised symposiums. We further extend our services and support to all corners of the country, through 10 well-equipped and technology-resourced Regional Centres.

**We started a laptop initiative three years ago, which provides students with the opportunity to own their own laptops. This is an ongoing initiative and through the provision of Wi-Fi hotspots, more and more students are able to benefit from technology-enhanced teaching and learning.** We are currently at a ratio of 6 students to 1 computer and continue to work towards a 1:1 ratio. The future is **more mobile, more flexible, and we are thus looking at solutions to connect each student to a laptop and or a smart device in the near future.**

The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching, learning and research is at the core of our mandate as a university of science and technology. Much has been achieved and I would like to elaborate further. We currently have **two professional development online courses** through the Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning (COLL) and Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), which allow the academic staff to either **develop fully online eLearning courses for distance education students or blended eLearning courses for on-**

**campus students. We started offering fully online courses in 2010 through COLL and to date have nine fully online courses with more in development.**

In the case of **blended eLearning to date we have over 236 (17%) courses having a minimum to moderate presence on the website; however, only 2 courses have advanced presence (0.2%).**An important development has been that **e-assessment is now being used to evaluate student learning in over 32 courses.**Given the critical importance of ICT in the teaching and learning area, I am convinced that we are **not deriving maximum benefits from these technologies.**In an institution that is struggling to find solutions to heavy teaching workloads, just imagine how much load would be taken off the shoulders of faculty simply by **doing all our assessments online?** This would **create more space for faculty to become better facilitators of learning and to engage in other academic activities** such as research and community engagement.

As we move to the Namibia University of Science and Technology and if we are to **have a transformative impact on our core business, it will be imperative that we move away from piecemeal approaches to a more urgent strategic thrust that should place integration of ICT at the centre of our core business.**

Director of Ceremonies,

The library at the Polytechnic of Namibia also plays a fundamental role in the teaching, learning and research activities of the institution by

**coordinating access to electronic and other information resources as well as training on how to use these resources. All eLearning courses have a link to the Library's website and/or eResources via their courses.** In this way, students are enabled to **access information from the Library's online catalogue, electronic databases, federated search engines, eJournals, eBooks, institutional repository and other online tools, services and resources.**

Furthermore, by **providing our students with access to the Library's own eLearning course**, and by working with the Subject Librarians, the Polytechnic students **graduate as information-literate lifelong learners**, who have the ability to effectively search for, evaluate, use and cite the Library's electronic and other resources. **Information literacy skills are a must for today's graduate.**

The above indicates how ICTs have become the backbone of modern economies and the major role they play in **how we gather, assimilate and use information to create new knowledge.** In order to prepare our graduates for today's knowledge economy and drive the development of this country, we need to ensure that along with the discipline specific skills and knowledge, **our graduates must also be able to network, collaborate, think critically, solve problems creatively and communicate effectively, and indeed create learning communities wherever they may find themselves.** Developing this **complex set of graduate attributes is not a simple or easy task and cheap exercise.**

This is why events such as today are of vital importance. We will not be able to produce the graduate that the country, the continent and the world

at large needs, without everyone having a **common understanding of how technology can be developed and used in education.**

Let me put the challenge to the Honourable Minister and the Managing Director of Telecom Namibia. Currently, the following rates apply: ADSL 20 Mb/sec in Europe costs N\$350, ADSL 10 Mb/sec in Namibia costs N\$8 290. This means in respect of bandwidth, comparing apples with apples (ADSL in this instance) is 47 times more expensive in Namibia. But fixed line bandwidth has a bigger ratio, in the region of 250 times. In Ireland, Vodafone offers unlimited broadband at 70 Mb/sec for N\$ 750 per month. In Namibia, the same speed costs N\$ 224 00; that is 300 times more expensive! And Rwanda is now offering free broadband!

It is for these reasons that we continue to appeal to government to support our efforts by proper funding and creating the enabling environment. How can Government and the ICT providers such as Telecom Namibia and MTC Namibia do wonders for education in Namibia? How can they innovate the old model to create new, more affordable solutions, at least for the higher education sector? How can our education system, especially higher education be competitive without innovation and better enablers?

Ladies and Gentlemen

In spite of the challenges, we have forged ahead in providing solutions. The Polytechnic of Namibia uses the **Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)** software, called **Integrated Tertiary System (ITS)** to manage all its

**business processes within each department.** A typical example of the way ITS has been able to add value to our business processes is through an online leave application system which also allows users to upload supporting documents that need to accompany their applications. Online registration has been made possible through the ITS system since 2000, and as from 2013, a voucher system was enabled which would allow students to buy a prepaid voucher to pay for online applications. This enables a student to apply from wherever s/he has access to the Internet.

The ITS system also renders support to Student Affairs in maintaining and enhancing the clinic system, including residence applications and placements and an on-line facility to book meals from their computers. While the institution has been a trailblazer in introducing a number of ICT innovations, just a month ago for the first for Namibia we utilised the newly developed electronic voting system according to our specifications to elect the 2014 Students Representative Council (SRC). This system allowed students to vote a month ago from their cellphones and any PC as long as they had access to such devices.

These are just some of the ways in which by innovatively integrating technology into our operations, we are indeed **transforming the way we do business and more importantly, providing a more student-centred service and experience to the students.** There is still much more work we can do in this area, and we are determined to **remain a trailblazer.**

**We have seen the move from classroom to eLearning and then from eLearning to mLearning.** Now we are seeing a move to ubiquitous

learning (uLearning), which means learning environments can be accessed in various contexts and situations. In other words, we are moving towards truly becoming lifelong learners and living in borderless classrooms, and will have to embrace the MOOCs (massive open online courses). We have to move on. Learning used to depend on the teacher. Now, the dynamic world of various available ICTs, learning depends on the student with the professor as facilitator of learning. This does not mean that the teacher is irrelevant. ICTs have changed the role of the teacher to a facilitator and mentor. Are you prepared for this change in your role as an educator? Or are you relegated to an industry of mediocrity? (similar to that described in today's the *New York Times* article).

I urge you today to carefully think about whether our teaching and learning practices are effective in producing the graduates we need for the knowledge economy. How much of the contemporary teaching and learning philosophies have you adopted in your classrooms? How far are you in the transition from PowerPoint to using new and emerging technologies that are available for innovative ways in teaching, learning and assessment? How accurately do our assessments measure the true capabilities of our students? How authentic is our assessments in helping students move from the theory to the practical nature of problem solving? How do you nurture innovative, critical and creative thinking processes that are needed to solve the ill structured problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? These are all questions I urge you to deliberate about, because our teaching philosophy and attitudes towards using technology will guide the

**teaching, learning and assessment processes of our university and ensure whether we achieve our goals or not.**

Ladies and gentlemen, I am here reminded of the statement made a **100 years ago by Dr Laurence Lowell<sup>1</sup>, President of Harvard University** when he said ***“Institutions are rarely murdered;...they die because they have outlived their usefulness, or they fail to do the work the world wants done.”*** America’s universities quickly began *“the work that the world wants done”* and soon became a dominant force in higher education. This is what we all want the NUST to be. This is what we shall become.

With these few remarks, I warmly welcome you and look forward to a day of enlightening discussions and presentations that will pave the way for the development of a technology plan for our institution.

I thank you.

#### **References**

1. Quoted by J Schumpeter in University Challenge (2011) The Economist, 10 December, 2011.