



POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

WELCOME REMARKS

BY

PROF TJAMA TJIVIKUA

RECTOR: POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

ON

THE OCCASION OF HANDING OVER RESEARCH GRANTS TO THE
POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA BY THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON
RESEARCH SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (NCRST)

ON

11 JUNE 2014

AT

14H30

POLYTECHNIC HOTEL SCHOOL

Director of Ceremonies, Dr Anna Matros-Goreses
Manager of Resource Mobilization and Fund Management at the National Commission
on Research Science and Technology, Ms Alushe Nditya
Senior Management and Members of Staff of the Polytechnic
Distinguished Invited Guests
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all at this Handing-over
Ceremony of Research Grants to the Polytechnic of Namibia from the National
Commission of Research Science and Technology (NCRST). This is an initiative of the
Namibia/South Africa Joint Bilateral Collaboration Research Programme. I would like to
warmly welcome Ms Alushe Nditya, who will later hand over the research grants.

The timing of this ceremony could not have been better. You are all aware that the
Polytechnic is transforming into the Namibia University of Science and Technology
(NUST) and to that end, the NUST Bill is in the hands of the Law Reform and
Development Commission for finalisation and presentation through the parliamentary
process. We are optimistic that, come the new year, it will herald the birth of the NUST.
I say this because the transformation to NUST has meant profound changes in our core
business.

Our new mandate requires, amongst others, that the institution increase programmes
and students in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields and
intensify training at postgraduate level as well as bolster research capacity. In response
we have developed new programmes in STEM, including higher degree programmes,
and embarked on strategic recruitment of academic staff to bring in research expertise.
Furthermore, we are implementing an aggressive staff development programme to
ensure that staff can acquire higher degrees. More importantly, we are investing our
limited resources in research activities within the institution.

Director of Ceremonies

Just last week an article appearing in Inside Higher Education titled "Study questions whether some countries see much payoff from research"¹ caught my attention and caused me a little concern. This is so because it comes at a time when in our country we continue to persuade the government to spend more resources on research and development. The article referred to a UNESCO study on Malaysia and Thailand² which found that, contrary to the accepted belief amongst policymakers that investment in university research leads to economic growth, research spending yielded very little commercialisation and hence investment "does not yield large financial payoff". However, the study asserts that investment in research can lead to higher quality university education and so improve a country's human capital.

On the other hand, the report notes that research and development spending by business has "a clear positive impact on productivity and hence economic growth in a country"² The latter statement is encouraging to us because the thrust of the institution is on applied research and innovation, which means addressing problems occurring in society and finding appropriate solutions in this regard. This necessarily requires that the institution engage in partnerships with business and industry, as well as society as a whole, in order to apply research, innovate and commercialise findings. Apart from the applied research pursued by the different Schools in the institution, we have set up various institutes interacting with society to promote innovation and entrepreneurship. Examples of these institutes are the Namibia German Logistics Centre (NGLC), Namibia Energy Institute (NEI), Namibia Business Innovation Centre (NBIC), FabLab Namibia, to name but a few.

Ladies and gentlemen, the issue of inadequate funding of the Polytechnic by the Government has been with us for a long time. However, we do not subscribe to the notion that limited resources should limit our imagination, thinking and innovation. Therefore, two years ago we established the Project Services Unit under the leadership of Dr Matros-Goreses, with the aim of working with the Schools to source international grants for specific projects in the institution. Today, I would like to congratulate Dr Matros-Goreses for bringing to the institution substantive resources to drive research.

Her Office was involved in mobilising, cajoling and providing professional support to the staff who submitted proposals for the Namibia/South Africa Joint Bilateral Collaboration Research Programme. Let me add that we are also eagerly awaiting the outcomes of the first call for proposals that the NCRST made at the beginning of the year, and again the Project Service Unit put in a lot of effort to ensure that our researchers responded positively.

Director of Ceremonies

The research grants we are receiving today are so important to our research agenda. First, the Mission and Values of the institution as well as our research strategy put emphasis on collaboration with stakeholders. In this instance, our researchers will be collaborating with their South African counterparts. This is particularly important at this stage of research development at the Polytechnic where leveraging external expertise would help accelerate our endeavours to build and strengthen research capacity. However, the advantage in working with scientists from the region lies in the fact that it allows us to address challenges facing the region and, therefore, the region will benefit from the solutions emanating from these efforts.

Secondly, the requirement that students are involved in the research projects to be undertaken is welcomed. The recognition that postgraduate students are a critical component of any dynamic research programme will help us towards meeting our goal of strengthening postgraduate training.

At this point I would like to congratulate the researchers whose projects have won a grant from the NCRST. We are proud that the seven successful proposals will bring in a total of over N\$ 1.3 million to be used for research activities over a period of two years. This is an indication of the sincere commitment of our staff members to add value, not only to the institutional research portfolio, but also to individual growth and development. The management of the Polytechnic appreciates and commends you on this wonderful achievement. Of course, it is expected that you will receive support from the Project Service Centre in order to ensure that the conditions of the grant agreement will be honoured and the research will be implemented as planned.

Finally, I would like to thank the NCRST for availing the research grants to the Polytechnic. You are playing a critical role in fostering a stronger culture of research and innovation in our country. With greater financial investment into research and innovation, the research will gain greater traction. The outcomes generated by such research would have a national, regional and international impact. The Polytechnic, therefore, would like to assure the Commission that we are in full support of their mandate and we will endeavour to contribute to the national research programme which is due for Cabinet's approval soon.

Ladies and gentlemen, on the part of the Polytechnic we are thankful to the NCRST for the grants and look forward to meaningful collaboration in driving the national research and innovation agenda.

I thank you all

References

1. Matthews, D. (2014). Inside Higher Education, June. 5.
2. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/>