



And out into the world they go...

Thirty years ago, South Africa had 36 higher education institutions (including technikons, which later became universities of technology). Following the mergers instituted by the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, the country had 23 universities – now 26 after the establishment of new institutions. The specific numbers themselves are not especially significant, other than to tell us that this country has a small higher education sector: Britain has a population (this year) of about 66.5 million and over a 100 universities; South Africa's population is just over 56 million – with 26 universities.

Innumerable highly respected South African researchers have, or have had, full-time or joint appointments in universities beyond Africa's borders – too many to name. Although leading researchers such as Quarraisha and Salim Abdool Karim (Harvard and Columbia), Achille Mbembe (Columbia, California, Yale), Mala Singh (Open University), Teboho Moja (NYU) and Winston Hide (Harvard, MIT and Sheffield) come to mind (not to mention Nobel laureates), there are many more amongst them.

It is interesting, though, that from the rather small base of South African higher education institutions, nine senior university leaders (vice chancellors and deputy vice chancellors) have been appointed to senior academic or similar positions beyond, rather than in, Africa over the past 18 years.

Most recently, the Vice Chancellors of two internationally well-rated South African universities have decided to take up positions elsewhere. Professor Cheryl de la Rey – Vice Chancellor and Principal of the 110-year-old University of Pretoria, and former Chief Executive Officer of the Council of Higher Education and Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of Cape Town – has been appointed as Vice Chancellor of the University of Canterbury in New Zealand (QS 2018 ranking: 231). She will take up her new position early in 2019.

Professor Albert van Jaarsveld – Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, former Chief Executive Officer of the National Research Foundation, and before that full professor at the Universities of Pretoria and Stellenbosch – will leave South African higher education in September this year to head up the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, based in Austria, as its Director General and Chief Executive.

The first vice chancellor of a South African university to be appointed to a senior position outside the country was Dr Mamphele Ramphela. At the end of a term as Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town (where she had previously been a Deputy Vice Chancellor) she was appointed in 2000 as one of the four Managing Directors of the World Bank. Her responsibilities included overseeing the strategic positioning and operations of the World Bank Institute and she held the Vice-Presidency of External Affairs.

In early 2001, Professor Colin Bundy left the University of the Witwatersrand, after overseeing a challenging period of transformation, to become Director and Principal of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. During part of his time as Director, he also served as a Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University, before becoming the first

Principal of Green Templeton College at the University of Oxford. He remains an Honorary Fellow of the School of Oriental and African Studies.

In September 2001, Professor Brenda Gourley – Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Natal – was appointed as the fourth Vice Chancellor and Principal of the Open University in Britain, a position she held until her retirement in 2009. During that time she became a Founder Member of the Talloires Network of universities and educational institutions – an organisation aimed at strengthening the civic roles of universities and higher education. She also served on the Board of the International Association of Universities for 8 years and as Chair, for two terms, of the Association of Commonwealth Universities.

Just over a year later, in November 2002, the University of Natal lost its Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor and Acting Vice Chancellor, David Maughan Brown, when he was appointed Deputy Vice Chancellor of York St John University in England. Amongst other duties, he was responsible for the operational management of the University, and subsequently for the University's academic activities, including learning and teaching, research and quality enhancement – while deputising, when necessary, for the Vice Chancellor and Principal.

Parenthetically, not long after, the University of Natal's other Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Ahmed Bawa, spent a sojourn as Professor of Physics at Hunter College, City University of New York, so the University of Natal lost three of its most senior leaders in fairly quick succession. Professor Bawa returned to South Africa in 2010 as the Vice Chancellor and Principal of the Durban University of Technology, and is now the CEO of Universities South Africa.

Mathematician and Vice Chancellor and Principal of Stellenbosch University, Professor Chris Brink, resigned in order to take up the position of Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Newcastle in England in 2007. He served in that position until his retirement 9 years later, at the end of 2016. Professor Brink was a founding member of the Academy of Science of South Africa and remains respected for his contributions to formal aspects of computer science with emphasis on programme semantics.

The year 2009 was marked by two departures (as is the case for 2018) – Professor Martin Hall, Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, in April, and Professor Calie Pistorius, Vice Chancellor and Rector of the University of Pretoria, in September. Professor Hall became Vice Chancellor and Principal of Salford University, in England; Professor Pistorius held those positions in the University of Hull – also in England. British universities gained six of the nine departing South African higher education leaders.

In this context, the size of the sector becomes important, particularly in view of the serious challenges to be faced in providing post-school education, through to postgraduate level, in well-managed institutions, to as many young people as possible. In aiming to achieve this goal, universities cannot afford to lose highly skilled and experienced leaders – from disciplines as varied as accountancy and archaeology to mathematics and medicine – not even nine in 18 years.

