

From the Council Chair

In the year under review the HSRC continued to pursue in a very focused way its plans for organisational transformation, growth, development and consolidation.

The principled and systematic interaction and engagement between the senior management and the Council resulted in the formulation of development plans that Council could with comfort take responsibility for. The quality of reporting and the creation of mechanisms for non-executive scrutiny and involvement allowed Council to keep abreast of the implementation process and make critical inputs as that process unfolds.

This relationship between Council and the President and senior management had been one of the exemplary features of the operation of the HSRC. The President commissioned a risk management audit that was presented to Council, ensuring that it was informed about and could debate the key issues and areas affecting its fiduciary responsibilities and obligations. Council meetings are deliberately and carefully structured to allow for comprehensive yet digestible reporting on the key areas and issues within the responsibility of Council.

The Audit Committee plays a crucial role in assisting management and Council to jointly oversee and monitor corporate governance and establish traditions of best practice; and we need to express our appreciation to the chairperson and members of that committee.

Council also has ample opportunity to inform itself of and to make inputs into the core work of the HSRC. A Research Committee has been established through which Council members could interrogate and help shape the broad policy framework within which the research activities of the organisation take place. The full Council is systematically briefed on both the proposed research programme and the outcomes of research undertaken.

The HSRC under the leadership of Dr Mark Orkin has assembled an impressive and intellectually exciting group of research leaders and researchers who are now also located in different centres around the country. Part of our performance agreement with Dr Orkin refers to the need to transform the organisation both with regards to the racial and gender demographics of participation and the intellectual substance of the work undertaken. The HSRC has become a vibrant centre of intellectual work in our national life and increasingly a representative South African organisation.

A marked feature of the success of the "new HSRC" has been the almost dramatic increase in earnings and income from contract research. This has substantially improved the financial situation of the organisation and has given it the space and scope to innovate and to do social science that makes a difference, as its motto runs. More importantly even is that the contract and commissioned work it acquires is fast establishing the HSRC as a significant scientific and research presence intimately and actively engaged in the transformation, reconstruction and development of a society in one of the most challenging processes of transition.

The relationship, and balance, between contract and commissioned research on the one hand and more fundamental enquiry on the other continues to occupy the mind of Council. It is recognised that if our research is to make a difference to aspects of national life it must be responsive to the needs of users and to relevant and topical social issues. At the same time a national research body should provide the space and capacity for reflection on and exploration of more fundamental underlying trends and principles.

A society in transition is probably more vulnerable to the danger of having its intellectuals so engaged with the immediately urgent issues that the development of a body of reflexive and critical theory could be postponed. Council continues to remind that transition does not mean transience, and is satisfied that the work of the HSRC does in fact strive to strike that balance between addressing immediate issues and developing a theoretically informed understanding of our society.

The very good relationship between the HSRC and the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Dr Ben Ngubane and Deputy Minister Brigitte Mabandla, continues to be a source of strength for the organisation. The Ministry and Department lend assurance that the government takes science and research very seriously and that encourages the HSRC in its attempts to contribute meaningfully to our national life. We express our appreciation to the Minister, Deputy Minister and Director-General.

We must congratulate Dr Orkin and his entire staff for the quality and volume of their work and for the tangible enthusiasm with which they plan and execute that work. And, finally, my thanks to the members of the Council for their commitment to the organisation and for overseeing its well-being.

G J Gerwel
Chairman



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