

**OPENING ADDRESS BY THE HON. MINISTER OF EDUCATION,
PROFESSOR KADER ASMAL**

Master of Ceremonies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me to open this Conference of the Design Education Forum of Southern Africa.

Last night at Peninsula Technikon here in Cape Town we had the pleasure of listening to Dr. David Potter, founder of PSION PLC. Dr. Potter was presenting the second of our National Lecture Series that considers issues of concern to higher education. In the course of a stimulating lecture he made a point most germane to this Conference. According to Dr. Potter, invention is but a small component of innovation. If innovation means successfully bringing a new product or process into wide usage, it is sound design that separates winners and losers. One may have access to various technologies, but design is crucial in determining their effective transfer. Inventors are not necessarily innovators, and there is a long way from good idea to good product.

The issue of design and what some call 'soundness of fit' is an area that has held my interest for some time. In my previous portfolio as Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry I participated in the Design for Development Initiative of the SABS Design Institute. Of particular importance is their annual award scheme involving all Southern African countries that focuses on products specifically geared towards the

needs of developing communities. This concept has attracted such international acclaim that it is currently exhibited at the WORLDEXPO 2000 in Hanover as one of the main attractions on the South African Pavilion.

Another example of design in development is the WATER INTERDESIGN meeting. It was the first held in Africa and was simultaneously held in Mexico, Australia and South Africa. These three countries share mutual problems related to water utilisation and rational uses of water. Since water related problems are universal, solutions of this workshop are usable in many other countries.

This two week INTERDESIGN differed from any others. Coordinated by the Design Institute at the South African Bureau of Standards, developments and opinions at each venue were shared through the Internet. Cutting edge technology was implemented to solve one of the oldest problems of humanity. Indeed ample design thinking was evident. Professional SA Designers including six of our top students worked and mingled with leading designers of the international design community and valuable experience was gained.

The INTERDESIGN focused on projects and products at the interface between users and the supply of water, which is a particular need of the developing communities in both rural and urban areas. The objectives were to increase the awareness of the benefits of design to solve Southern African development problems; to generate sound design concepts appropriate for further development and industrial implementation; and to increase design awareness.

Last year parliamentarians were exposed to the ideas of design through the 30 Years of SA Design Excellence exhibition in parliament. This included

a day summit on the importance of government support for the structured development of design in South Africa. The participants included representatives from the Departments of Education, Trade and Industry and Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, as well as representatives from design education, Science Councils; design professionals and corporate sponsors. They considered issues such as incentives for industrial design development and the worrying shortfalls in training industrial designers. The report of this summit is now in its final stages of preparation and I look forward to receiving a copy at the earliest opportunity. What was then already clear was the importance of design education at all levels. The theme for this conference: RESHAPING SA THROUGH DESIGN was also established at the summit.

My present portfolio is Education, and as you are all no doubt aware, we are currently reviewing many aspects of the education system. Of particular interest to this Conference is the Review of Curriculum 2005 whose Report we received on Monday this week. This was an entirely independent review of the implementation of Curriculum 2005 conducted under a wide-ranging mandate. The draft findings of the Review were disseminated in print and via the Department web site. Public comment was invited and considered.

We have accepted the main thrust of the Report and are giving further consideration to some details. There are now two specific points that I would like to make. The first is that Curriculum 2005 set out to implement an outcomes based education system that would in values, intent and quality not only take us into the future, but also mark a clear break with the past. Curriculum change is a process, not an event. We have broken with the past. We have therefore not scrapped

Curriculum 2005. Yes, we are changing some elements, but we remain committed to OBE and the overarching values and outcomes of the National Qualifications Framework.

The second point relates to the details of the learning areas. We received a large number of representations concerning the future of Technology and Economic and Management Sciences. These were offered by schools, NGOs and teacher unions. We are a listening Department, and have taken heed. We have declared that the implementation of grades 4 and 8 will proceed as intended, which implies the continuation of the original eight learning areas. We shall give careful consideration to the relationship between Technology and Economic and Management Sciences and the other learning areas and the extent to which these are to remain distinct or be merged.

To clarify the curriculum intentions we shall develop curriculum statements for each learning area, a process that will run into the new year. These curriculum statements will provide guidance on the crucial matters of scope, content and sequence, without being overly prescriptive. There is thus scope to consider the intentions for each learning area and to re-visit unresolved issues. There are certain open questions: what is the relationship between science and technology in the curriculum? Where should Design be addressed? Do we develop a Design and Technology curriculum? How do we make information technology more widely available?

If you like, these are the crucial issues of curriculum design, a subject that is taught in many universities abroad, but that is given insufficient attention here at home.

Regarding higher education, we shall shortly receive the Council on Higher Education 'Size and Shape' study that will provide advice on the role and functions of our higher education system. More issues of design. How do the universities and technikons contribute to national development? Where is the fit? So many questions so little time to find answers.

There are therefore many opportunities available to the design education community to influence our thinking on where design itself fits. I invite you to forward your views to the Department, in the confidence that you will give careful attention to the issues of resources and implementation!

The recognition that South African Design already enjoys is not always known. A good example of a world success is the Freeplay radio developed here in Cape Town that is a world hit and is exhibited in Modern Design museums worldwide together with the Freeplay Lantern. Pity that production has moved offshore!

Initiatives like the Interdesign and the Design Achievers event that took place last weekend in Pretoria have my support and encouragement. Former finalists are amongst the most dedicated promoters of the benefits of design excellence for South Africa and are already heading up many prominent agencies and professional activities.

The importance of design as well as the many energetic endeavours to this effect in the design industry are remarkable in comparison with as little as four years ago. The number of young design entrepreneurs bodes well for the future.

Government has a responsibility to enhance the quality of life of all its citizens through sustained economic development. A cornerstone is the creation of conditions that will support both creativity and innovation throughout our society.

The field of design holds a special place in this since it combines inputs from the arts, culture, the natural and social sciences, and technology into an end result. In the words of Augusto Morello, the current president of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design: 'Design Is The Humanization Of Technology'.

In conclusion, I wish you a successful conference.