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# REFLECTING ON THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE ROLE OF THE DESIGN EDUCATION FORUM OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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## Introduction

This article reflects on the role played by the Design Education Forum of Southern Africa (DEFSA) over the past 18 years, particularly with regard to tertiary design education. It also presents projections on the future role of DEFSA based on current circumstances and expectations. The reflection is sectioned into three periods; past, present and future. The first period, described as the technikon phase, outlines the past history and liaison activities undertaken by DEFSA from its inception in 1991 to the announcement of the higher education institutional mergers in 2002. The second period reflects on the present, which is described as the higher education merger and restructuring phase as consideration is given to the impact of institutional mergers, the restructuring of the design education landscape, design programme offerings and the role that DEFSA fulfilled during this period. Lastly, the third period offers suggestions for future directions based on the expectations and challenges that are likely to impact on the future of DEFSA. The article thus aims to trace the original focus of DEFSA, its performance and its contribution to tertiary design education during the past 18 years in order to determine a future direction for the Forum. The underlying assumption is that DEFSA's role and contributions are defined by the manner in which the Forum has addressed both challenges and

expectations prevalent in the design education environment over the past 18 years.

DEFSA has received both praise and criticism from its membership and other design educators particularly over the last ten years. From 2001, feedback received from conference delegates ranges from complimentary to presenting critical concerns that question the research depth, focus and rigour of conferences and conference proceedings. To date, no formal research, review or evaluation of the role and function of DEFSA have been conducted and a central archive has not been established by the Forum. Very little commentary, formal documentation or archival material is thus available to a researcher. This article has had to rely on the limited information that could be obtained from available DEFSA Management Committee Minutes, conference records and discipline workgroup reports. The author's involvement in the DEFSA Management Committee over a significant period of time assisted in the mapping of processes and events.

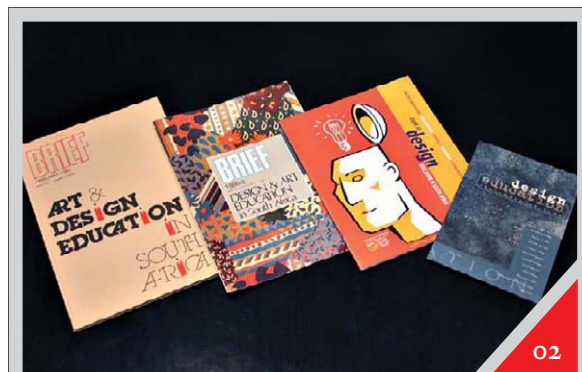
## Inception, management and focus

The Design Education Forum has its origins in the Joint Standing Committee on Design Education (Figure 1)



**Figure 1:** Joint Standing Committee on Design Education established in 1985 by the SABS Design Institute

that was established at the instigation of the Design Institute of the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) in 1985 (Hagen [sa]:1). From 1986 to 1990, annual design education conferences were organised by the Design Institute. These conferences provided an opportunity for tertiary design educators to present papers and discuss common concerns based on a central theme (Design Institute of the South African Bureau of Standards 1990). In 1991, the Standing Committee was reconstituted as the Design Education Forum of Southern Africa, and was officially launched at the first national conference hosted by the then Cape Technikon. Ms Adrienne Viljoen, manager of the SABS Design Institute, continued to provide support and encouragement to DEFSA after the official separation from the SABS. The secretariat of DEFSA remained with the SABS Design Institute until 1999 (DEFSA 1999).



**Figure 2:** The SABS Design Institute has been supporting the development of design education in South Africa since the early 1980s through its career guides on design education.

Since the inception of DEFSA, emphasis has always been placed on institutional membership of the Forum, rather than individual membership, to ensure an engagement with national, regional and institutional design education requirements and expectations. The Forum's activities and focus areas are overseen by a Management Committee. The aim and focus of the Forum, as well as the structure and function of the Management Committee, were defined in the first Design Education Forum of Southern Africa Constitution approved and circulated in April 1996. The Constitution states that the Forum's operation is co-ordinated by a President, Vice-President and Management Committee that are elected bi-annually at the annual general meeting (DEFSA 2002a). In 2007, the position of Vice-President was altered to that of President-Elect. The office bearers and committee members are not remunerated for any services rendered and funds are utilised solely for the furtherance of the aims of the Forum (DEFSA 2002b). The Forum is therefore dependant on and indebted to the personal efforts and commitments made by people in the design education system who are willing to participate in the Forum's activities.

To date, seven presidents have served the Forum, namely:

1991 – 1994: Stan Slack, Director of the School of Art and Design at the then Cape Technikon. He provided visionary leadership in defining the original focus and direction of the Forum.

1995 – 1998: Ian Sutherland, Head of the Department of Design Studies at the then ML Sultan Technikon and currently associate professor at the Durban University of Technology. Sutherland provided acute insight into matters relating to access to tertiary design education.

1998 – 1999: Eric Dinkelman, Dean at the then Technikon Pretoria and widely recognised as a design

education curriculum expert until his retirement in 2002.

1999 – 2002: Mel Hagen, Dean of the Faculty of the Built Environment and Design at the then Cape Technikon. Hagen made significant contributions to the expansion of DEFSA activities through the establishment of links to secondary educational institutions.

2003 – 2004: Rudy de Lange, Head of the Graphic Design Department at the then Free State Technikon. De Lange provided valuable insight into national research funding mechanisms.

2004 – 2008: Colin Daniels, currently Vice-Dean in the Faculty of Informatics and Design at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. He provided leadership to the Forum during the national institutional merger period.

2008 to date: Amanda Breytenbach, currently Vice-Dean in the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg. She has been involved in design curricula and higher education quality assurance since 2004.

It is evident that these presidents were nominated and elected because of their individual strengths and the leadership positions they held in higher education. All are from previous technikons or from re-constituted technikons such as universities of technology or comprehensive universities.

Since DEFSA's inception in 1991, the annual (at times bi-annual) design education conferences have been the most prominent event undertaken by the Forum, resulting in the delivery and organisation of conferences becoming the Management Committee's main focus. Conferences provide the ideal opportunity for DEFSA to deliver on the majority of the sub-aims presented in the DEFSA Constitution, the main aim of which is to 'foster design education in the Southern African

region' (DEFSA 2007a). The target audience for DEFSA conferences comprises members from tertiary education institutions across the Southern African region. The stated aims of DEFSA conferences are to ensure that attendees are provided the opportunity to network, engage with research and exchange design knowledge and ideas. Discipline specific workgroup discussions have sometimes been included in conference programmes. Conferences have also provided South African delegates with the opportunity to meet prominent international design educators such as professors Richard Buchanan, Ken Friedman, Carlos Hinrichsen, Karen Blincoe, Ezio Manzini, Piet Kommers and Linda Drew, to name a few. Conference funding is predominantly provided by the host institution, but some funding has also been received from institutions such as the National Research Fund (NRF).

From 1991 to 2009, DEFSA presented twelve national and five international conferences, the majority of which were hosted by technikons. From 1991 to 2001, the conference themes and activities of the Forum ran parallel to a period of dramatic change within the political dispensation of South Africa.

## Technikon phase (1991 to 2001)

DEFSA commenced at a time in which state governance by the National Party made a clear distinction between universities and technikons. Ian Bunting (2002) explains that the pre-1994 Nationalist government reasoned that the essence of a university was *science* and that the essence of a technikon was *technology*. The differentiation between institutional type and qualification type resulted in an educational system where each institutional type delivered programmes that related to a teaching and learning methodology as



**Figure 3:** A selection of education-related publications produced by the SABS Design Institute during the past three decades.



described by state policy. Universities, generally speaking, were required to concentrate on the teaching and research of fundamental scientific principles while technikons concentrated on the application of scientific principles to practical problems and to technology. Technikons furthermore were tasked with the promotion and transfer of technology within a particular vocation or industry (Council of Higher Education 2002).

The rigid division between universities and technikons further resulted in the establishment of specific policies relating to the function of each type of institution. The regulation of higher education programmes and qualifications were described in the following policy documents (Council on Higher Education 2002):

- A Qualification Structure for Universities in South Africa NATED Report 116 (99/02)
- General Policy for Technikon Instructional Programmes NATED Report 150 (97/01)
- Formal Technikon Institutional Programmes in the RSA NATED Report 151 (99/01).

At a national level, technikons were managed by the Council of Technikon Principals, which determined the strategic direction of technikons in relation to their programme offering and programme quality assurance.

During the initial period of its formation, DEFSa was largely supported by design educators from technikons that offered programmes with similar teaching and learning strategies and methodologies as defined in Report 150 and 151. Hagen ([sa]:1) suggests that the dominant membership of technikons may be attributed to the fact that during this time, they were the main providers of formal design education. DEFSa conferences and liaison activities gave technikon design educators the ideal opportunity to discuss similar challenges and experiences that influenced the offering

of their vocational programmes. This, coupled to the leadership of the Forum by members from technikons, led to the strong consideration of topics and issues that were highly relevant to technikons and the circumstances pertinent to their particular teaching environments.

During the technikon phase of 1991 to 2001, DEFSa presented seven national and four international conferences:

- 1991 First national conference, Title unknown, hosted by Cape Technikon.
- 1992 Second national conference, The Need for Research Development in Design hosted by the SABS Design Institute.
- 1993 First international conference, Design Education for Developing Countries hosted by Technikon Natal, Durban.
- 1994 Third national conference, Access to Design Education hosted by Technikon Free State.
- 1995 Second international conference, Design Education and Small Business Development hosted by Peninsula Technikon.
- 1996 Fourth national conference, Education Policy and Design hosted by East London Technical College.
- 1997 Third international conference, Design Education in Developing Countries: Design Education and Transformations in Culture hosted by the SABS Design Institute.
- 1998 Fifth national conference, Workshop Conference on Design Education hosted by Technikon Port Elizabeth.
- 1999 Sixth national conference, Design Fusion: Development beyond 2000 hosted by Technikon Witwatersrand.
- 2000 Seventh national conference, Reshaping South Africa by Design hosted by Cape Technikon.
- 2001 Fourth international conference, Mapping New

Territories in Design Education jointly convened by Technikon Witwatersrand, Technikon Pretoria, Vaal Triangle Technikon and the University of Pretoria.

The third national DEFSA conference (1994) serves as an excellent example of how DEFSA focused specifically on the challenges of reorganising that technikons faced with the introduction of degree programmes. Workshops on common design issues and the reorganisation of technikon design programmes for BTech degrees featured quite prominently on the conference agenda. The topic of this conference was a response to the promulgation of the Technikon Act (No.125) of 1993. This Act enabled technikons to become degree-awarding institutions (Committee of Technikon Principles [sa]). The division between universities and technikons had resulted in an education programme structure that did not give ample attention to articulation possibilities between the different types of educational systems (Council of Higher Education 2002). The introduction of the technikon degree programmes aimed to give appropriate recognition to the tertiary nature of technikon education and address the need of equivalence between technikon and university qualifications (Committee of Technikon Principles [sa]).

In 1997, with the publication of the *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (SA 1997), the Education Ministry announced a vision for the establishment of a single, national co-ordinated system. It was evident that the rigid division between technikons and universities required rethinking with the proposal for a combined centrally co-ordinated system. The theme of reorganisation was again highlighted as a workshop topic at the fifth international conference held in 1997. Access and reorganisation have subsequently appeared regularly as a conference

sub-theme, owing to the promulgation and approval of the Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF).

The second national conference held in 1992 addressed another important technikon dilemma, namely, the role, need and inclusion of research development in design education. The introduction of degree programmes called for an increase in research activities and research output at technikons. One of the keynote speakers at the conference, Prof John Butler-Adam from the University of Durban-Westville, summed up the double bind faced by design educators at technikons. In his paper entitled *The dilemma of the educator of creative disciplines and formal research*, Butler-Adam identifies the issues associated with the nature of research in the creative disciplines (Hagen [sa]:5).

Although the DEFSA conferences provided opportunities for design educators to connect and interact beyond their institutional boundaries, the network consisted mostly of members of technikons. For instance, by 2000 institutional membership comprised eight technikons, one university and one college. In her 1999 President Report, Hagen (DEFSA 1999) lists ten goals that DEFSA aimed to achieve before 2001. One of these goals was to extend the DEFSA network through the forging of links to both private and public tertiary and secondary education institutions as well as industry and relevant regional and national government departments. Hagen ([sa]:3) explains that originally the focus of DEFSA activities was concentrated on the requirements of tertiary design education, but that DEFSA came to recognise that a close interconnectedness existed within the entire design education system. The Forum therefore decided to expand its activities into the broader education arena and include all areas and levels of design education.

Cape Technikon, organisers of the seventh national conference held in 2000, indicate that deliberate efforts were made to broaden the target audience to include disciplines and areas such as engineering design, architecture, craft and the school sector (DEFSA 2001). This attempt was further enhanced by the organisation of the fourth international conference in 2001, which was jointly convened and hosted by three technikons and one university. The technikon phase did not, however, end solely owing to the strategies and visionary objectives identified by DEFSA, but also as a result of the large scale higher education restructuring policy announced in 2002.

## Higher education merger and restructuring (2002 to date)

The first five years of post-apartheid South Africa were land marked by the emphasis placed on the development and introduction of new policies and legislation. In higher education, the period after 2001 signifies a time of dramatic change in both the restructuring of the higher education landscape and the approval of a new programme qualification framework.

In 2002, the then Minister of Education, Kadar Asmal, announced that the number of public higher education institutions would be reduced in order to improve the institutional landscape of the higher education system. The Transformation and Restructuring Policy (SA 2002) presented the new institutional landscape and the mandatory mergers in higher education. The consolidation of institutions resulted in the reduction of the number of public institutions from 36 to 21. This did not lead to a decrease in provision, as all the existing sites of delivery were continued, but it did lead to new institutional and organisational forms. The new higher education landscape was shaped by three

types of institutions, namely, traditional universities, universities of technology (which replaced the term technikon) and the introduction of a new institutional type referred to as comprehensive institutions (SA 2002). The term comprehensive institution is used in the Transformation and Restructuring Policy (2002) as a reference to the merger of a technikon and a traditional university structure.

In addition, the Ministry of Education presented the first draft Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF) in July 2004, which was finally approved in October 2007 (SA 2007). The HEQF aims to establish a single qualification framework for higher education with a shift away from technikon-type degrees, since these programmes are not included as qualifications within the framework. The predicted outcome is that the technikon degrees, approved in 1993 and implemented in 1995, will have to be removed from programme offering structures over an undisclosed period of time.

The announcement of the national higher education mergers in 2002 signifies the beginning of a period that is described by DEFSA members as turbulent and uncertain (DEFSA 2002c). The restructuring and reformation of the South African Higher Education Institutions (HEI) impacted significantly on the design education landscape with the national mergers causing an unexpected decline in DEFSA activities. An immediate impact can be seen in the planning and offering of conferences. In September 2001, DEFSA assigned the institutional hosts for the annual conferences from 2002 to 2005 (DEFSA 2001). A year later, in September 2002, the Management Committee was informed that the financial cutbacks that were being experienced within higher education owing to mergers were constraining institutions' abilities to host conferences. Institutional merger activities demanded additional time, energy and money from all stakeholders, resulting

in institutions identified as conference hosts in 2001 no longer being able to take on these responsibilities. DEFSA activities could thus not receive the attention and priority they experienced prior 2002.

Management Committee members proposed that DEFSA should introduce bi-annual conferences and consider alternative offerings such as mini-seminars or workshops (DEFSA 2002c). The SABS Design Institute offered to assist DEFSA during the merger period by hosting the 2004 and 2005 conferences. DEFSA is indebted to the financial and organisational support that was provided by the SABS Design Institute during the period. The conferences convened by the Design Institute did not present a call for papers, but comprised invited international and national keynote speakers:

- 2004 Ninth national conference, Developing Leaderships for South Africa. Keynote Speakers: Karen Blincoe from Denmark and Prof Kyung-won Chung from Korea
- 2005 Tenth national conference, Design Education in a Creative Economy. Keynote speakers: Prof Carlos Hinrichsen from Chile and Michael Thomson from England.

A positive aspect evident from conference delegate feedback was that ample time was provided for discipline specific workgroup discussions. A chairperson was nominated for each discipline workgroup prior to the conference. The discussion groups were requested to submit a report to DEFSA reflecting on the discussion that took place in each group. Topics such as staff workload, issues relating to research and curriculum challenges in relation to the promulgation of the HEQF were documented (DEFSA 2004a; DEFSA 2005). Judging from the reports, conference attendees used the group discussions as an opportunity to exchange questions pertaining to the merger experiences and responses to the draft HEQF.

Concerns that relate to the poor delivery of DEFSA conference proceedings are presented in the research discussion group report that was submitted after the 2004 DEFSA conference. The discussion group report recommends that DEFSA should take urgent action with regard to outstanding DEFSA conference proceedings (DEFSA 2004a). The report identifies that three sets of conference proceedings, from 2000 to 2002, were not published and urged that they be located and placed on the DEFSA website. The report further suggests that DEFSA should preferably adopt a double blind peer review process and ensure that nationally accepted standards for research conference proceeding be implemented.

In 2006, the newly constituted comprehensive institution, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, hosted the first post-merger conference, followed in 2007 by a conference offered by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. No conference was held in 2008, however, a conference was held in 2009.

- 2006 Eleventh national conference, Re-design Design Education hosted by Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- 2007 Fifth international conference, Flux: Design Education in a Changing World hosted by Cape Peninsula University of Technology.
- 2009 Twelfth national conference, Opening Gates Between and Beyond Design Disciplines co-hosted by Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and the International Mohair Summit.

The conferences offered from 2006 to 2009 indicate a shift in focus from those offered prior to 2002 in their consideration of broader issues. Although the fourth international conference (2001) attempted to explore and map new directions and territories in design education, it was impossible for it to predict the drastic



changes in both institutional and curriculum structures that were to be announced in 2002 and 2004. In 2006 and 2007, DEFSA delegates were given the opportunity to reflect on national changes and their impact on design education.

The international conference held in 2007 received a record-breaking number of 130 abstracts and 200 conference delegates (DEFSA 2007b). Although DEFSA had excellent conference attendance in 2007, the decrease in delegate numbers for the 2009 conference, held in Graaff Reinet, shows a drop of 75 percent in attendance. Probable factors for this drop indicated by conference delegates are that the remote location of the conference provided logistical difficulties and the conference was offered at the beginning of November, which falls parallel to the final assessment period at the majority of tertiary institutions. The 2009 conference did, however, provide unexpected advantages such as well advertised national exposure of the event and participation with the largest mohair production industry in the world.

Surprisingly, institutional membership has remained relatively stable during the merger period although individual membership has drastically declined. The figures extracted from minutes of DEFSA annual general meetings indicate the following membership figures since 2000:

2000	10 Institutional members and 42 individual members
2001	12 Institutional members and 44 individual members
2003/4	Not available
2005	13 Institutional members and 5 individual members
2006	13 Institutional members and 9 individual members

2007	10 Institutional members and 13 individual members
2008	10 Institutional members and 13 individual members
2009	12 Institutional members and 18 individual members

Noteworthy is the shift in membership profile. In 2000, institutional membership comprised eight technikons, one university and one college. By 2009, the institutional membership comprises three universities of technology, seven private schools and two universities. The two universities are comprehensive institutions and their institutional membership is a continuation from their prior involvement as technikon institutions. A drastic increase in private institutions and an absence in institutional membership from traditional universities are evident.

## DEFSA beyond 2009

A glimpse into the future is seldom accurate, but careful strategic planning could assist the Forum in mapping the road ahead. The negative criticism that the Forum has received over the past ten years needs to be addressed in order for it to be acknowledged as a worthy promoter of design education in Southern Africa. On 2 September 2008, the DEFSA Management Committee participated in the first strategic planning session to be held in eight years. It became evident that DEFSA had maintained an operational focus, rather than a strategic one, during the merger period. It therefore became one of the first tasks of the current Management Committee to evaluate and reflect on the future of DEFSA.



**Figure 4:** Amanda Breytenbach delivering the opening address at the 2009 DEFSA conference which took place in Graaff Reinet.

The Committee was divided into three groups that were tasked with the consideration of the following three critical areas: DEFSA profile, research and conference requirements and DEFSA website. It became evident that these three areas are tightly interwoven and interdependent of each other. The research group presented a report to the Committee, which provided proposals and listed recommendations that could counter criticisms and assist the Forum to address the challenges that are likely to ensure progress (DEFSA 2008). The following areas were identified in the report as needing urgent attention:

- The website was in an embarrassingly bad state, which resulted in the publication of outdated conference material and incorrect information.
- The research database should be updated. Access to archived information should be correct and provide an accurate reflection of the conference papers that are available.
- In 2007, a concerted attempt was made to get conference documentation and processes to acceptable national standards. Although a foundation was laid, problems were still evident in the publi-

cation of the conference proceedings. The problems were owing to a lack of knowledge about national research publication requirements by both the conference steering committee and DEFSA Management Committee. DEFSA has gained considerable experience in the organisation and hosting of conferences over a number of years. The Forum should now pay attention to national requirements and ensure that the research output produced for conferences meet the stated requirements for academic and subsidy acknowledgement and accreditation.

In addition, the following proposals were presented in the report as means to address expectations and challenges:

- The website should provide members access to relevant and current design education information such as a list of accredited journals that are applicable to the various fields of design, a list of applicable design niche research areas, and lists of theses and dissertations successfully completed at design institutions.



**Figure 5:** Views of delegates and presenters who participated in the 2009 DEFSa conference.

- A chat room or blog should be included on the website to allow researchers the opportunity to interact with each other on current research problems.
- DEFSa should host bi-annual rather than annual conferences. Bi-annual conferences could assist in relieving the workload and performance pressure placed on the Management Committee.
- Engage with experienced researchers and request a thorough evaluation of processes related to the conference call for abstracts, peer review and publication of proceedings.
- Well-qualified and experienced researchers should be sourced and approached to form part of the DEFSa peer review process.
- The Management Committee should follow-up on feedback and recommendations that are presented by peer reviewers to ensure that suggestions or directives are addressed.

In the view of the author, the following recommendations could also be considered:

**DEFSa should provide a trustworthy Southern African platform for the delivery of good quality research**

The numerous complaints that relate to the poor quality and non-delivery of the publication of DEFSa conference proceedings should be addressed. National criteria for research output must be adhered to and conference proceedings must meet the Department of Higher Education and Training requirements to ensure that authors are entitled to claim research output subsidy. It is essential for DEFSa to understand and implement the fundamental requirements that ensure compliance with higher education expectations.

### **Debate topical design education issues**

DEFSA should continue to use conferences, workshops and seminars to stimulate debate on topical issues that are pertinent to design education in Southern Africa. Relevant issues such as re-curriculum, design programme offerings and the increase in postgraduate design education programmes have not been resolved and require on-going debate.

### **Rethink the purpose of the website to improve communication and expand the DEFSA network**

DEFSA redesigned and updated the ten-year-old website in September 2009, but the revised website is only the first step taken to address the concerns presented to the Committee. The previous website was mostly used for the publication of conference documents and basic information that relates to DEFSA. The Forum will have to rethink the purpose and function of the website. It is recommended that the new website should become the central communication channel of the Forum. The website can assist in improving communication between individual and institutional members and increase participation in Forum activities. Upcoming events, useful research articles, displaying of national design activities and contact details of design educators could ensure that the website attracts regular visitors. The interaction that previously took place annually at conferences could be replaced with opportunities for more regular interaction provided by a well-maintained, regularly updated website.

### **Regular strategic planning is required**

The Management Committee will have to ensure that regular strategic planning sessions take place to ensure that the future role and function of the Forum are correctly identified and implemented. The absence of strategic planning has resulted in a repetition of mistakes and created the impression that the Forum is incapable of addressing problems and concerns.

### **A central archive and accurate record keeping system is required**

The Forum has been in existence for over 18 years, yet it is difficult to locate and accurately map the progress that DEFSA has made over this period. Research conducted for this article further indicates that the absence of a well-managed record keeping system has contributed to the slow progress and implementation of strategic focus areas particularly during the merger period. The poor record keeping system has also impacted negatively on the publication of conference proceedings and by implication on the credibility of the Forum's activities. DEFSA should adopt a record keeping system that will ensure that information is captured and stored for reference purposes. The current electronic archive facility on the DEFSA website should be expanded to include administrative documents such as past annual general meetings, membership lists and strategic planning initiatives. Furthermore, a central archive storing facility should be identified for the record keeping of published hard copies of all DEFSA activities. An accurate and secure record keeping system could assist in preserving the history and shaping the future of the Forum.

# Conclusion

This article presented a brief history of the role and contributions that DEFSA has made with regard to its interface with tertiary design education in Southern Africa over the past 18 years. The reflection identified that the most prominent events organised by the Forum are the annual (at times bi-annual) design education conferences. These conferences have assisted the development of design research in South Africa and exposed young inexperienced researchers to research activities. The conferences furthermore enabled design educators to interact and exchange design knowledge and ideas and were instrumental in stimulating the establishment of a well-connected design education network across the country. DEFSA has provided design educators with opportunities to debate topical national and international design education issues. For instance, the Forum has responded to national events such as the restructuring and reformation of South African Higher Education Institutions by helping to clarify the shifting demands it has placed on design educators. These activities may all be viewed as significant contributions to the establishment and development of the tertiary design education sector over the past 18 years.

Unfortunately, DEFSA has also received some negative criticism, especially since 2001. During the technikon phase, DEFSA's activities mostly addressed the needs of technikon educators and excluded participation from university academics, private institutions and the school sectors. In 2000, initiatives were identified to expand the Forum's focus and develop a more inclusive approach. The immediate impact of the restructuring and transformation of the higher education landscape, however, had a visible impact on DEFSA's intended strategic initiatives, and although some of the initiatives were implemented, the Forum displayed slow progress during the merger period. The slow progress and failure

to deliver on expectations influenced perceptions of the Forum's credibility and reliability.

In 2008, the DEFSA Management Committee came to the realisation that radical and drastic changes were required to ensure that the Forum adequately addresses the identified challenges and the expectations of its membership. The Forum will have to reinstate the DEFSA network and ensure an inclusive approach in order for it to be acknowledged as a worthy and effective promoter of design education. The Committee further identified that the success of DEFSA is dependent on the consistent efforts and inputs of key people to ensure that the links in the network remain connected. DEFSA is a forum and not a professional body, and as such, it relies on the contributions that are made by individuals within the Management Committee as well as individual members who are willing to participate in DEFSA activities. The Forum can only function at an optimal level if it is managed by self-motivated and highly effective individuals who support the cause of design education and a membership body that actively supports DEFSA activities.

While the success of DEFSA is dependant on the contributions, drive and focus of the Forum members and the ability of the Management Committee to deliver on changing national and institutional expectations, probably the most important contribution that DEFSA can make over the next ten years, is to assist in the development and delivery of research output in South Africa. The national demand for an increase in research delivery and the focus on the production of accredited research outputs by tertiary institutions has placed a greater emphasis on peer reviewed conference papers that adhere strictly to national research standards. This activity requires the participation and involvement of experienced and knowledgeable people who are able to guide the implementation of relevant processes and procedures and ensure the achievement of standards that meet national and international criteria.



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