

Profiles: Chair & Vice Chair: HERS-SA Board



Professor Karen Esler has served as the Deputy Head of the Department of Conservation Ecology and Entomology at Stellenbosch University (SU) for the past eight years and will take over as Head of Department in 2015. She is a National Research Foundation (NRF)-rated researcher who, while maintaining her disciplinary interests in plant ecology, has also developed a particular interest in social-ecological systems and in linking research knowledge to management practices. She is a core team member of the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence for Invasion Biology, an associate of the SU Water Institute and a member of the SU Trans-disciplinary PhD initiative linked to the TSAMA (Trans-disciplinary, Sustainability, Analysis, Modeling & Assessment) Hub. She serves as the African representative of ISOMED, is a founding member of the IUCN Mediterranean-Type Ecosystem Thematic Group (MTEG) and of INCOMME, an international cooperative for the management of Mediterranean-Type Ecosystems. Esler also actively serves, in a local capacity, as a member of the SAEON Fynbos Node Liaison Committee and the Fynbos Forum Committee.

She is passionate about promoting women in academia, particularly in science. To this end, she was actively involved for more than 10 years on the Western Cape branch committee of the South African Association of Women in Science and Engineering (where she served as Treasurer) and was the first woman to be appointed as President of the South African Association of Botanists (2006-2008). Her involvement in the HERS-SA Board dates as far back as 2005.

On her re-appointment as the Chairperson of the HERS-SA Board in July 2014, Esler stated: *“It is a great privilege to contribute to the academic community in this way. HERS-SA was pivotal to the development of my own academic career and I believe has really helped to elevate the levels of networking, training and development of women in South Africa. In the financially challenging circumstances of today’s environment, my main goal will be to harness the Board’s exceptional knowledge of the higher education sector and to focus on innovative measures to ensure the sustainability of this much-needed organisation.”*



Firoza Patel worked in the teaching profession for 17 years. In 1979, she joined the Lenasia Muslim Association Preschool as a preschool teacher and later founded and became the Principal Teacher of The Nur-Ul Islam Preschool (1981-1983). From 1985 she worked as a Principal Teacher at the Lenasia Residents’ Association and later as a Teacher and Principal of a private pre-school called Kiddies Corner Playschool (1987-1994). In 1995, she joined Daxina Seva Samaj, a community-based center in Lenasia South, as the Principal. In that same year, she also served as Assistant Chief Education Specialist: Early Childhood Development at the Gauteng Department of Education. She joined Technikon SA in 1996 as a lecturer specialising in Early Childhood Development. After two years in the latter role, she became the Academic Manager at the Johannesburg Office of Technikon SA, a position she remained in till 2004.

Patel is passionate about Early Childhood Education and even though she is no longer in that field, she continues to be involved in an informal way. She was appointed as the Higher Education representative to the

National Skills Authority of the Department of Labour and is currently the Chairperson of both the UNISA Study Approvals Committee and the Institutional Training Committee. She is also a member of the Change Management Committee, the Employment Equity Committee and an Executive Member of the Women's Forum at the same institution.

Patel is actively involved in areas of transformation and leadership and has been responsible for a number of flagship leadership programmes at UNISA, notably the Young Academics Programme and the Building Tomorrow's Leaders Programme. She has also been responsible for the implementation of Academic Mentoring programmes at this institution and through her Directorate is responsible for the implementation of Talent Management as well.

She has presented at various conferences on topics related to Skills Development, Leadership and Management and Mentoring. In February this year Patel and the Talent Management Specialist in her Directorate received the World HRD Congress Award for Talent Management.

Regarding her appointment as the Vice-Chair of the HERS-SA Board in July 2014 Patel stated: *"I am humbled to be appointed as Vice-Chair and hope that I live up to the expectations of the people that nominated me. My goal for this term is to support and assist the Director in ensuring that the programme is relevant and contextual as well as maintaining the on-going sustainability of the HERS-SA ACADEMY. I strongly believe that the ACADEMY is an important transformation vehicle in higher education. In saying this, I believe that we need to ensure that the ACADEMY's activities and contribution towards transformation goals are clearly communicated and visible to all the relevant stakeholders."*