Habib calls for courage

WITS vice-chancellor Professor Adam Habib has called on all stakeholders in higher education to “collectively” take the blame for all the wrongs in the sector and come up with solutions.

Habib was speaking yesterday in Pretoria at Unisa’s fifth research and innovation week.

He said last year students had raised “massive struggles” including #FeesMustFall.

But he said #RhodesMustFall was not about removing the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town, but was about the alienation of black people at universities.

“We’ve got a problem of student demographics, not in all the universities, but in some. At the moment at Wits we’ve got 77% of black students but in Stellenbosch University 63% of students are white. How the hell do you accept that in a post-colonial society? What is the legitimacy? And that’s the question we have to ask.”

He said the problem was that people were afraid to speak up frankly about issues, making it difficult to resolve them.

However, Habib said it was also not acceptable that there were universities with 100% black students and “let’s have the courage to put that on the agenda”.

“So let’s take on the debate about Stellenbosch but let’s also take on the debate about the University of Zululand which is sitting at 99% black students. And ask the question why, and how do we resolve it.”

Habib said the problem was also about staffing.

“If you ... go to the so-called liberal universities... you have to ask why is staffing so bad? There was no African women professor at UCT, Wits did better, we got one. It’s a tragedy 20 years on, it’s shocking.

“What is wrong and who should we blame? I sat in the portfolio committee [of higher education and training] and people said you are the vice-chancellor and you should be blamed. I said yes, I take the blame.

“But are you innocent as the portfolio committee? Because how do you create professors if you do not have senior lecturers and how do you create senior lecturers if you do not have postgraduate students and you have been underfunding postgraduate studies. Let’s have the courage to collectively admit we have made mistakes and figure out how to resolve them.” – Bongekile Macupe

Wits vice-chancellor
Professor Adam Habib