



Community Engagement NEWSLETTER

From the Manager/Editor

In this issue, two critical documents are discussed: the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and the White Paper on Post-school Education and Training. Of relevance to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Community Engagement (CE) in particular, are Chapter 9 of the National Development Plan 2030 and Page 39 of the Post-school White Paper 2013. Some of the key points include:

- Improved quality of basic, further and higher education,
- A skilled and capable workforce to support an inclusive growth path.
- Further Education and Training (FET) colleges; public adult learning centres; Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs); professional colleges; and community education and training centres are important elements of the post-school system that provide diverse learning opportunities (Post-school White Paper 2013).
- Research and Innovation by Universities, Science Councils, Departments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the private sector have a key role to play in improving the country.

Whilst these are the key issues that universities should pursue, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) made the following comment:

“Given budgetary and other resource constraints within higher education and the vastly different ways in which universities approach community engagement, it is likely that future funding of such initiatives in universities will be restricted”

(DHET, 2013:39).

This has implications for CE. This was further discussed at a seminar on 3- 4 April 2014. The University of the Western Cape (UWC) hosted a seminar on behalf of the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF) on the NDP 2030 and the Post-school White Paper 2013. Various speakers presented different views, offering dissected viewpoints. See what these speakers say!

Regards

Jeeva Munsamy

There were seven speakers over these two days.

1. Professor Shirley Walters from UWC regards connectivity as central to learning. Therefore, a radical curriculum is required for CE to function effectively, one that engages on what matters and is central to humanity.

2. Professor Leslie Bank from the University of Fort Hare suggests the need to move away from city-wide planning to more district-/precinct-level planning, and the notion of building cities from below. Therefore, the following is of importance:

- The history of the place where a university is situated and its needs (geographical area, the community and the university) should be taken into account in CE and economic development.
- Urban-rural dichotomies should be investigated in terms of separated connectedness.

3. Mr John Pampallis, Special Advisor to the Minister of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), stated that, while CE is not new in South Africa, it should be made more relevant to the South Africa of today. He acknowledged that CE was not directly funded by the DHET and that, from the DHET's perspective, it is difficult to consult with higher education. In terms of universities in their 'place', there was no mandate for local government to engage with universities.

4. Mr Francois van Schalkwyk from the Centre for Higher Education Transformation presented a research project that investigated CE projects and programmes to determine the extent to which these feed back into the teaching and learning and research within an institution. The preliminary findings indicate:

- Little collaboration between universities, even at a regional level.
- Tension between engaging and the traditional academic core.
- Issues of external capacity versus internal capacity to manage projects.
- The assumption of CE as service-orientated is outdated. It has shifted towards reciprocity and engagement, and the extent to which it is aligned with national goals.

5. Professor Ramesh Bharuthram, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic at UWC, reflected on Higher Education South Africa (HESA) meeting the National Development Plan (NDP). In order to become a knowledge economy such as Japan or South Korea, the following is required:

- A large shift in student enrolment.
- A CE strategy that partners with various post-school institutions, and more especially with commerce and industry.
- The private sector could do more with regards to development.

6. Professor Joseph Francis, Director of the Institute of Rural Development at the University of Venda, reflected on how CE enables rural development, questioning the role of the university and its relevance to society. The inclination to look at hidden elements in CE tends to take us away from seeing the obvious. He questioned with whom we engage and who defines with whom we engage. The challenge in South Africa, he argued, in 'pulling down' development is the tension and contradictions between community leaders, politics, etc. Similarly, the time factor is an important issue. How long has the CE project been there? In terms of funding, he found that there tends to be little money for 'social preparation', the processes of connection; building trust; and negotiating entry into a place, before any project or programme gets off the ground. In addition, the National Research Foundation (NRF), which funds CE initiatives, only considers masters' and doctoral studies as part of human capital development, but not the very people with whom you are working.

7. Ms Judy Favish of the University of Cape Town shared a historical analysis of how CE evolved in higher education in South Africa.

- The consensus reached: It would be impossible to reach a definition of CE that would fit all institutions and all contexts, and common characteristics that could guide CE meaning and understandings.
- Furthermore, the chapter in this publication offered ways to enhance the developmental role of universities and promoting the scholarship of engagement. Universities need to define CE in their own contexts. The scholarship of engagement must take into account the mutual reciprocity and the curriculum
- Barriers that need unlocking, such as funding.
- The task team would expand on the research to such areas as measuring CE impact, for example.

In a nutshell, CE should be central to development, and partnerships are essential in driving the economy, whilst commerce and industry are pivotal in development. Therefore, the curriculum should focus on reciprocity and engagement, and CE aligned with national goals. Student enrolment should be optimised in order for South Africa to progress like Japan and South Korea. The private sector can contribute much more to development.

Some points to ponder on:

The White Paper on Post-school Education 2013, the National Development Plan 2030 and Vision 2020 of CUT raise a number of issues for CE:

- How best can we strengthen CE at CUT, utilising the curriculum at undergraduate and postgraduate level and in the extended curriculum programme, as well as using the model proposed.
- Connecting the foci areas of CE to development in a holistic manner.
- Clarifying the ambiguity surrounding CE's definition and functions at CUT.

Publications

1. The Global Universities Network for Innovation (GUNI) Higher Education 5. *"Knowledge, Engagement and Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change"* (published by Palgrave).
2. *"Service Learning in South Africa"* (published by Oxford University Press).



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