

NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION POLICIES, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE-LEARNING



OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of community engagement in South African higher education.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the notion of a 'scholarship of engagement'.
- Describe the relationship between community engagement and service-learning.
- List the policies, post-1994, that were instrumental in highlighting the necessity for community engagement in South African higher education.
- Discuss the national policy initiatives that embed community engagement as a 'public good' issue for higher education.
- Present a rationale for the development and implementation of service-learning at programme and institutional level.
- Access the references and readings that pertain to issues covered in this chapter.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that engagement with any policy is a task academics would like to avoid as far as possible, notwithstanding the fact that policy informs institutional strategies and plans. This in turn informs planning at the micro level.

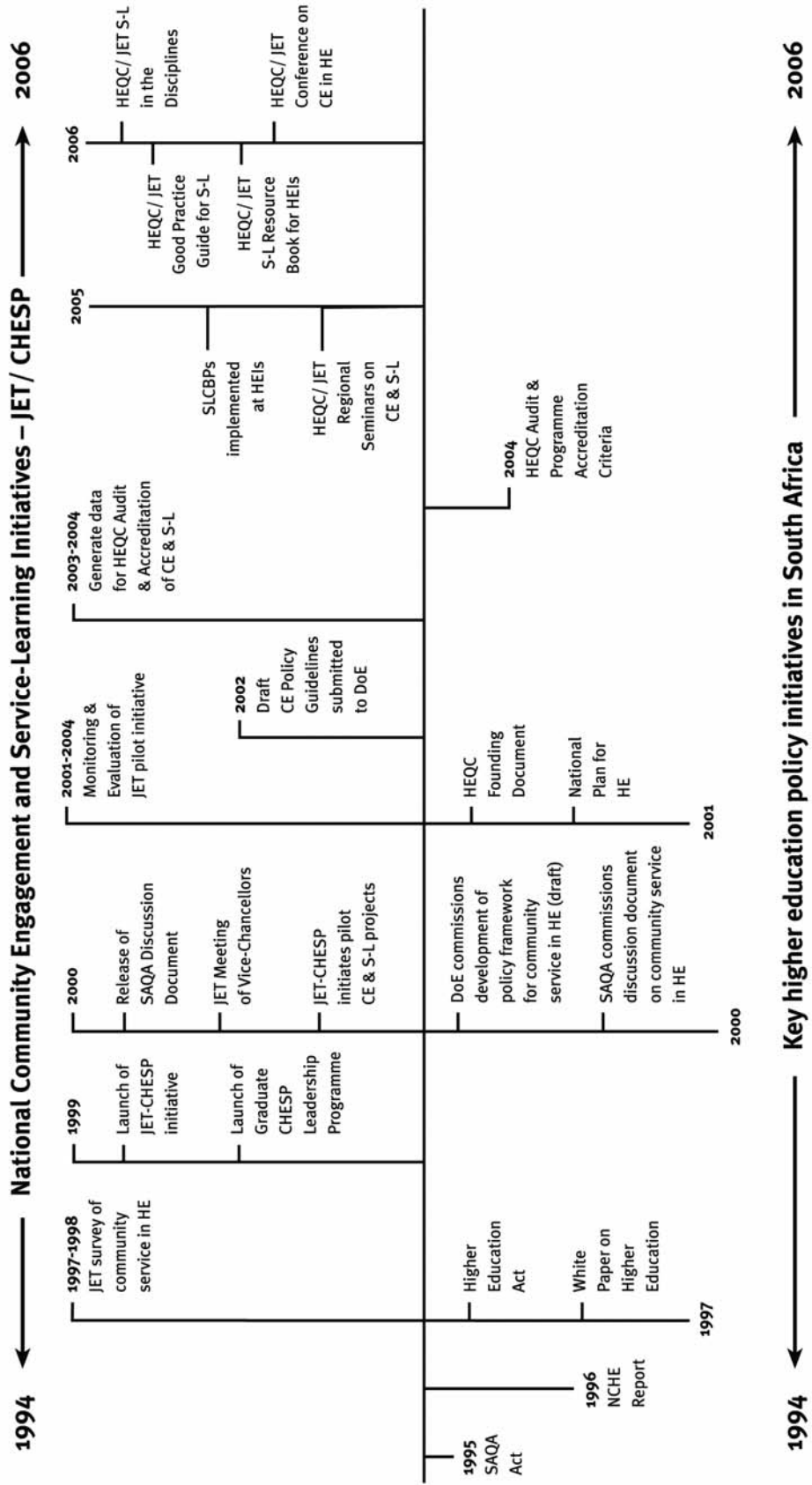
However, a basic knowledge and understanding of national policies and their implications are vital if academics are to be responsive in a manner that contributes to the advancement of the national agenda with regard to the transformation of higher education and its role in society.

If your institution has a policy unit, then these national policies (described below) should be available through this unit. Alternatively, the policies may be obtained from the relevant government gazette in your institution's library or from the relevant government website. Government documents, Bills, Acts and other policy documents may be accessed from the following sites: <http://education.pwv.gov.za/legislation/government> and www.polity.org.za/pol/home/

The HEQC policies are available from the CHE website – www.che.org.za.

Not all policies are explicit about community engagement; but community engagement may be implied – especially where policies refer to “foundations of a critical civil society” (Department of Education, DoE, 1996) or to “democratic ethos and a sense of citizenship perceived as commitment to a common good” (DoE, 1996). Figure 1.1 illustrates national service-learning initiatives against a backdrop of national policies.

Figure 4.1: Timeline Indicating National Policies and Concurrent Service-Learning Initiatives in South Africa Post-1994



(Adapted from Cooke, L.A., unpublished, 2004)

1.2 THE NATIONAL POLICY MILIEU RELEVANT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT / SERVICE-LEARNING

1.2.1 *Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation, 1996*

*The Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation*² (DoE, 1996) acknowledges and draws on the report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996). The following are some of the deficiencies in higher education, as identified in the Green Paper:

Higher Education has not succeeded in laying the foundations of a critical civil society with a culture of tolerance, public debate and accommodation of differences and competing interests. Nor has it contributed significantly to a democratic ethos and a sense of citizenship perceived as commitment to a common good.

There is inadequate consideration of and response to the needs of our society and insufficient attention to the problems and challenges of the broader African context. (DoE, 1996: 2)

The Green Paper goes on to articulate the goals for higher education and, at institutional level, identifies *inter alia* the need for co-operation and partnerships between HEIs and “sectors of the wider society”. In addition, the Green Paper identifies the need to offer programmes that are responsive “to the social, political, economic and cultural needs of the country and all its people”. Increased participation in higher education would require “different patterns of teaching and learning, new curriculums [sic] and more varied modes of delivery” (DoE, 1996: 3).

The above references from the Green Paper are early indicators of the direction being set for higher education curriculum transformation with regard both to civic responsibility and community engagement.

1.2.2 *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation, 1997*³

The Green Paper, subsequent to comment from stakeholders, evolved into the White Paper, and the goals of the White Paper later informed the development of the National Plan for Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2001).

2. Hereafter: Green Paper (DoE, 1996).

3. Hereafter: White Paper (DoE, 1997).

The White Paper reaffirms the purpose of higher education with regard to social responsibility and articulates one of the systems-level goals at a national level:

To promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmed [sic]. (1997: 10)

The White Paper goes on to identify one of the institutional level goals as follows:

To demonstrate social responsibility of institutions and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmed [sic]. (1997: 11)

The above extracts clearly signal the need for HEIs to review their societal purpose and to develop strategic initiatives to give effect to these goals. However, such initiatives should be integrated in the core business of HEIs: that is, teaching, research and community service. Therefore, community service should become embedded in the culture and values of HEIs through service-learning, thus ensuring that students, HEI staff and the community benefit from such initiatives.

In the section on Planning, the White Paper signals the Ministry's growing interest in community service programmes:

The Ministry is highly receptive to the growing interest in community service programmes for students, to harness the social commitment and energy of young people [...] the Ministry will encourage suitable feasibility studies and pilot programmes which explore the potential of community service

- to answer the call of young people for constructive social engagement
 - to enhance the Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service in higher education.
- (1997: 17)

1.2.3 Higher Education Act, 1997

The Higher Education Act (Republic of South Africa, 1997) gives effect to the recommendations of the White Paper and makes provision for the establishment of the HEQC as a permanent sub-committee of the CHE. The HEQC in turn has given effect to the goals of the White Paper with regard to community service.

In 2001 the Founding Document of the HEQC identified academically based community service as one of the three areas for the quality assurance of higher education, along with teaching and research. During 2003 a collaborative effort among the HEQC, a number of South African HEIs

and JET generated comprehensive criteria for the quality assurance of service-learning at an institutional, faculty, programme and module level. Although these criteria were significantly reduced in the final HEQC *Criteria for Institutional Audits* published in April 2004 (2004a), they provide substance to and guidelines for the implementation of the broad community engagement criteria in that document, and are in the process of being published by the HEQC and JET as *A Good Practice Guide and Self-evaluation Instruments for Managing the Quality of Service Learning*.⁴

The HEQC audit criteria call on HEIs to have “quality-related arrangements for community engagement (which) are formalized and integrated with those for teaching and learning, where appropriate, and are adequately resourced and monitored” (HEQC, 2004a: 19). In order to meet this criterion, examples of what might be expected include:

- Policies and procedures for the quality management of community engagement;
- Integration of policies and procedures for community engagement with those for teaching and learning and research, where appropriate;
- Adequate resources allocated to facilitate quality delivery in community engagement; and
- Regular review of the effectiveness of quality-related arrangements for community engagement. (HEQC, 2004a: 19)

The discussion of the HEQC's documents in the sections below will clarify this further.

1.2.4 The Founding Document, HEQC, 2001

The HEQC Founding Document (2001) articulates the HEQC's vision, mission, goals and values:

The central objective of the HEQC is to ensure that providers effectively and efficiently implement education, training, research and community service which are of high quality and which produce socially useful and enriching knowledge as well as a relevant range of graduate skills and competencies necessary for social and economic progress. The policies and programmes of the HEQC will be guided by the above commitments and objectives. (2001: 5)

In clarifying its primary responsibility of monitoring and evaluating the capacity of HEIs ('providers'), the HEQC includes the following responsibilities as part of its mandate:

- Evaluating the assessment and moderation arrangements of providers.
- Registering assessors for specified standards and qualifications in accordance with criteria which will be developed in consultation with providers and other stakeholders.
- Evaluating the responsiveness, relevance and coherence of provider qualifications in relation to their specified institutional mandates and missions. (2001: 6)

4. Hereafter: *Good Practice Guide* (HEQC/ JET, 2006).

The above has implications for service-learning, in that service-learning will be subjected to the same quality requirements as any other mode of delivery. Therefore, it is necessary that HEIs develop and implement systems for managing quality that take cognisance of the requirements of the HEQC. In this regard, the need for rigorous internal quality assurance mechanisms cannot be overemphasised.

1.2.5 Institutional Audit Framework and Institutional Audit Criteria, HEQC, June 2004

The *Framework for Institutional Audits* (HEQC, 2004d) gives effect to the mandate of the HEQC and articulates the HEQC's approach to quality, which “encompasses fitness for purpose, value for money, and individual and social transformation, within an overarching fitness of purpose framework” (HEQC, 2004d: 5).

Thus, the framework reiterates the goals of the White Paper with regard to the purpose of HEIs and their civic responsibility. The audit criteria go further, and explicitly state the requirements for HEIs to meet the criteria that embed community engagement. The specific requirements of the relevant criteria are indicated below:

Criterion 1

- (iii) The translation of the mission into a strategic plan with clear timeframes and resources for the achievement of goals and targets in its core functions.

Criterion 2

- (i) Key quality-related priorities in the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement aligned with the mission and strategic goals of the institution.

Criterion 7

- (iv) In the case of institutions with service learning as part of their mission:
- Service learning programmes which are integrated into institutional and academic planning, as part of the institution's mission and strategic goals;
 - Adequate resources and enabling mechanisms (including incentives) to support the implementation of service learning, including staff and student capacity development; and
 - Review and monitoring arrangements to gauge the impact and outcomes of service learning programmes on the institution, as well as on other participating constituencies.

Criterion 18

Quality-related arrangements for community engagement are formalised and integrated with those for teaching and learning, where appropriate, and are adequately resourced and monitored.

- (i) Policies and procedures for the quality management of community engagement.
- (ii) Integration of policies and procedures for community engagement with those for teaching and learning and research, where appropriate.

- (iii) Adequate resources allocated to facilitate quality delivery in community engagement.
- (iv) Regular review of the effectiveness of quality-related arrangements for community engagement. (HEQC, 2004a: 19)

The above criteria serve to emphasise the need for community engagement to be integrated in the academic endeavour.

1.2.6 Criteria for Programme Accreditation, HEQC, November 2004

Through its programme accreditation criteria, the HEQC ensures there is institutional accountability for the quality of provision of programmes that include service-learning. The specific requirements for the relevant criterion are as follows:

***Criterion 1:** The programme is consonant with the institution's mission, forms part of institutional planning and resource allocation, meets national requirements, the needs of students and other stakeholders, and is intellectually credible. It is designed coherently and articulates well with other relevant programmes, where possible.*

(x) In the case of institutions with service learning as part of their mission:

- Service learning programmes are integrated into institutional and academic planning as part of the institution's mission and strategic goals.
- Enabling mechanisms (which may include incentives) are in place to support the implementation of service learning, including staff and student capacity development. (HEQC: 2004b: 7-8)

1.3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The White Paper (1997) laid the foundations for making community service an integral and core part of higher education in South Africa. As already mentioned, the White Paper makes specific references to the role of community service within the overarching task of transforming the higher education system. It calls on institutions to demonstrate, by making their expertise and infrastructure available, their commitment both to the common good and to social responsibility. As we have also seen, the White Paper states as being among the goals of higher education the promotion and development of social responsibility and awareness, among students, of higher education's role – through community service programmes – in social and economic development. And finally, we have seen that the White Paper is receptive to the growing interest in community service programmes for students, giving support in principle to feasibility studies and pilot programmes to explore the potential of community service in higher education.

1.3.1 JET Education Services

Taking its cue from the White Paper, the Joint Education Trust (now JET) conducted an extensive survey of community service in South African higher education during 1997 and 1998 (Perold, 1998; Perold and Omar, 1997). The purpose of this research was to develop some understanding of community engagement and its potential role in South African higher education and to stimulate informed debate around the issue. Indicative of the importance of this research is the fact that both the Minister of Education and the Chief Director: Higher Education served on the Steering Committee for this initiative. Some of the key findings of the research were:

- The mission statements of most HEIs include the notion of community service.
- No HEI had a policy to operationalise the community service component of its mission statement.
- Most HEIs have a wide range of community service projects.
- Most of these community service projects were initiated by innovative students and academics and not as a deliberate institutional strategy.
- Few of the projects embraced all three traditional functions of higher education (i.e. teaching, research, and service).
- Few of the projects embraced any form of community partnership model.
- In the few instances where projects included teaching, research and service, and where a partnership had developed between participating constituencies, the benefits were significant.

Building on the above research, JET launched its Community – Higher Education – Service Partnerships (CHESP) initiative in 1999. The aims of the initiative have been:

- To support the conceptualisation and implementation of pilot community engagement initiatives;
- To monitor, evaluate and research these initiatives; and
- To use the data generated through this process to inform higher education policy and practice at a national, institutional and programmatic level.

Since 1999 JET has worked with numerous HEIs to implement pilot community engagement initiatives. These initiatives include: institution-wide audits of community engagement; adoption of institution-wide policies and strategies for community engagement; development of institutional capacity for community engagement; and the development of academic programmes that include the principles and practice of service-learning. To date JET has supported the research and development of more than 200 accredited courses across 39 different academic disciplines in ten HEIs involving more than 7 000 students ranging from first year through to Master's level. Documentation on these initiatives is available on the CHESP website (www.chesp.org.za).

1.3.2 Meeting of Vice-Chancellors

In July 2000 JET convened a meeting of Vice-Chancellors to explore the direction of community engagement in South African higher education. Chaired by the Minister of Education, the meeting yielded the following key issues (JET, 2000):

- **Purpose of higher education:** Concern was expressed about the overemphasis on 'education for the market place' and the need for this to be balanced with 'education for good citizenship'. It was suggested that HEIs should revive the notion of civic responsibility through their teaching, research and service programmes.
- **Compliance or serious engagement:** It was suggested that community engagement should not be optional in South African higher education. However, given the current constraints within HEIs, an emphasis on *compliance* may be counter-productive. Rather, HEIs should be encouraged and supported to take seriously their responsibility to inculcate the notion of citizenship in students through integrating community service in mainstream academic programmes.
- **Add on or integrated approach:** It was agreed that community engagement should not be an 'add on' or purely philanthropic exercise. It should be an integral part of the mainstream teaching and research business of every HEI.
- **Faculty roles and rewards:** Currently the dominant paradigm of scholarship focuses on and rewards teaching and research. If South African higher education takes its reconstruction and development role seriously, its leaders will need to promote, support and reward a scholarship of community engagement.
- **Opportune moment:** Given the fact that HEIs were at the time facing significant challenges in terms of their own transformation, it was suggested that this might be an opportune moment for institutions to reflect on their own missions and purposes and integrate community service into their teaching and research programmes.
- **Leadership support:** For the reconstruction and development agenda to take effect in South African higher education, it would need the vocal, visible and tangible support of the top leadership within HEIs.
- **Institutional audits:** All HEIs in South Africa should be encouraged to perform an audit of existing community engagement activities linked to their institution. This audit would contribute towards a national audit on community engagement in South African higher education.

- **The role of the DoE:** Although government should not necessarily drive the role of HEIs in reconstruction and development, government should provide the necessary encouragement, support and direction. The role of HEIs in reconstruction and development should be reflected in the agenda, plans and policies of government. For example, HEIs should reflect their community engagement agenda in their three-year rolling plans.

1.3.3 Department of Education

In December 2000 the DoE commissioned JET to develop a policy framework for community service in higher education, to give expression to the community service mandate of the White Paper and to provide direction for the growing interest in and proliferation of service-learning programmes in South African higher education. The policy, currently in draft form (DoE, 2002), was informed by research data generated through the CHESP pilot initiatives, including interviews with numerous higher education stakeholders.

1.3.4 South African Qualifications Authority

During 2000 the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) commissioned a discussion document on the role of community service in higher education (Lazarus, 2000). The purposes of the document were: (i) to stimulate debate about community service in South African higher education; (ii) to inform the development of a conceptual framework for this debate; (iii) to put community service more firmly on the agenda of higher education policy and legislative initiatives; (iv) to identify key issues in terms of the implementation of community service in South African higher education; and (v) to make recommendations for taking the issue of community service in higher education further.

1.4 TOWARDS A 'SCHOLARSHIP OF ENGAGEMENT'

Since the release of the White Paper (1997), perceptions of community service have shifted; from a view of community service as one of the three silos of higher education – along with teaching and research – to a view of community service as an integral and necessary part of teaching and research, infusing and enriching the latter two higher education functions with a sense of context, relevance and application. Along with this change in perception has been a shift in the terminology used by national higher education stakeholders (i.e. DoE; HEQC) – from “community service” (White Paper, 1997) to “academically based community service” (HEQC Founding Document, 2001) to “community engagement” (HEQC Audit Criteria, 2004a). It is suggested that the next shift in perception will be towards the notion of a 'scholarship of engagement'.

In his renowned book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Ernest Boyer (1990) proposes four necessary and interrelated forms of scholarship that, together, amount to what is increasingly referred to as the “scholarship of engagement” (Boyer, 1996).

- The first and most familiar element in Boyer's model is the *scholarship of discovery*. It closely resembles the notion of research and contributes to the total stock of human knowledge.
- The second element is the *scholarship of integration*, which underscores the need for scholars to give meaning to their discovery by putting it in perspective and interpreting it in relation to other discoveries and forms of knowledge. This means making connections across the disciplines and interpreting data in a larger intellectual and social context.
- The third element is the *scholarship of application*. Knowledge is not produced in a linear fashion. The arrow of causality can, and frequently does, point in both directions. Theory leads to practice and practice leads to theory. Community engagement, viewed and practised as a scholarly activity, provides the context for a dialogue between theory and practice through reflection.
- The final element in Boyer's model is the *scholarship of teaching*. Within the framework of a scholarship of engagement, the traditional roles of teacher and learner become somewhat blurred. What emerges is a learning community including community members, students, academic staff and service providers.

Community engagement, as a scholarly activity, is of critical importance both in shaping our students and future citizens and in producing knowledge that is most relevant and useful in the South African context.

1.5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE-LEARNING

Community engagement can take on many different shapes and forms within the context of higher education, as illustrated in figure 1.2. These include distance education, community-based research, participatory action research, professional community service and service-learning. In its fullest sense, community engagement is the combination and integration of teaching and learning (e.g. service-learning), professional community service by academic staff and participatory action research applied simultaneously to identified community development priorities.

Figure 1.2: Types of Community Engagement



(Adapted from Bringle, Games and Malloy, 1999)

1.6 CONCLUSION

From the brief description above of the relevant national policies, it is evident that service-learning as a vehicle for community engagement has to be ‘woven’ into the fabric of the institution. This cannot be achieved overnight and ‘quick and dirty’ methods will do more harm than good. It is important that service-learning is planned, resourced and managed in a developmental manner that takes cognisance of the needs of staff, students and the community, without compromising the quality of provision. Since the release of the White Paper (1997), the understanding and perception of community engagement has changed significantly in South African higher education. Through the work of JET-CHESP and numerous HEIs in South Africa, community engagement and service-learning are fast becoming an integral part of the core academic business of HEIs, contextualising and providing new insights into knowledge production, curriculum development and teaching and learning. The development of community engagement and service-learning in South Africa is unique in many respects. There are few countries, if any, where the development of national policies has been informed by the monitoring, evaluation and research of pilot programmatic initiatives and where the latter illustrate how these policies may be implemented.



SELF-STUDY ACTIVITY

You are required to make a presentation to the Senate of your institution on your rationale for including service-learning in your programme. You plan to use this as an opportunity to advance an argument for developing service-learning as an institutional initiative.