



COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Address of the CEO to the City of Johannesburg and Higher Education Institutions Summit

Hilton Sandton

24 March 2003

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Introduction

Chairperson

Councillor Mr. Prem Naidoo

City Manager, Mr Pascal Moloji

Deputy-Director General of Higher education, Ms. Nasima Badsha

Deputy Vice-Chancellors, leaders and representatives of the public sector

Leaders and representatives of the business sector

Invited guests from the donor community and media

Comrades and colleagues

Welcome to this Summit and thank you for the opportunity to share some ideas with you on the question of the building of partnerships between higher education private/public sector institutions such as the City of Johannesburg.

Some of the Council on Higher Education's (CHE) core functions include:

- *Advising* the Minister at his/her request or proactively on all matters related to higher education
- *Monitoring and evaluating* whether the policy goals and objectives for higher education are being realised, including the responsiveness of higher education institutions
- *Reporting annually to parliament* on the state of South African higher education, and
- Generally contributing in modest ways to *developing higher education* through strategic initiatives, such as the one that brings us together today.

One specific responsibility allocated to the CHE is to advise the Minister of Education on stimulating greater responsiveness on the part of higher education to societal needs, especially those linked to developing South Africa's economy through enhanced higher education – industry partnerships.

To this end the CHE established a research investigation and convened a colloquium in August last year on the theme of *Building Relationships between Higher Education and*

the Private and Public Sectors so as to address and contribute to the high-level personpower and knowledge needs of the private and public sectors.

It is important that this summit builds on the colloquium of last year and that there be some continuity between the colloquium and this and other future similar events. So allow me to share with you the salient aspects of the deliberations of the CHE's colloquium.

CHE initiative on Responsiveness

The CHE put the issue of the responsiveness of higher education on the agenda of its Second National Consultative Conference of all national stakeholders in 2000. That conference agreed on the need for an initiative on the theme of "Building Relationships between Higher Education and the Private and Public Sectors" to address and contribute to the high-level personpower and knowledge needs of the private and public sectors. The CHE's principal aim was to advise the Minister of Education on the nature of this relationship and on possible mechanisms to develop fruitful, responsive, close, durable and effective relationships between higher education and the private and public sectors in order to respond to the challenges of economic growth and development.

This advice, however, implied the investigation of some fundamental aspects of the relationship between higher education and the private and public sectors. Primarily, it was necessary to develop an understanding of the changing requirements of knowledge, skills, and competencies in the world of work and their implications for the work of higher education institutions (HEIs). In addition, it was necessary also to investigate the theoretical and methodological approaches that underpin the issue of responsiveness and the different forms of organising the relationship between higher education and industry that derive from them.

To these ends the CHE did two things. First, we commissioned research and prepared background papers on the following concerns:

- What are the necessary attributes of high-level personpower in South Africa and what are the challenges of its formation and development?
- What are private and public sector views and perceptions on the role and contribution of HEIs in the creation of knowledge and the development of high-level personpower for the economy and society?
- How can higher education respond to the needs of the labour market in a rapidly evolving and dynamic economic and social environment and, in particular, in the context of the systemic changes which characterise the world of work as we enter the 21st century?
- What are the most effective approaches and strategies for higher education to contribute to the demand for high-level personpower?
- What are the problems and tensions in developing strategic and long-term relationships between higher education and the private and public sectors? Of what use are comparative international experiences in developing strategies?
- What demands do the development of intellectual property rights place on the relationships between HEIs, business and government? What should be the nature of the relationships between higher education and business and government in regard to their reciprocal rights and responsibilities in the production, ownership and dissemination of knowledge? What should be the regulatory role of government in these relationships?
- Finally, what kind of relationships should exist between the private and public sectors and higher education in the light of the diverse social purposes that have been accorded to higher education and the idea of higher education as a public good?

Second, we convened a Colloquium, which took place at the Sandton Convention Centre on 27 and 28 June 2002. The colloquium itself gathered together representatives of higher education, the private and public sectors, and labour as well as three government ministers, the Ministers of Education, Trade and Industry and Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. The Colloquium had three aims:

- To begin a dialogue about the nature, strengths and weaknesses of present relationships between higher education and the private and public sectors.
- To explore possible mechanisms and ways to build robust and long-term relationships between higher education and the public and private sectors to

advance South Africa's economic and social development through the production of appropriate knowledge and high-level personpower.

- To provide an opportunity for leaders and representatives of higher education and the public and private sectors to engage with issues concerning the knowledge, skills and competencies required by the world of work and how these relate to the diverse social purposes of higher education.

Lessons of the CHE initiative

I will return to the outcomes of the colloquium and the challenges they present to us. For the moment I want to turn briefly to some critical issues related to the themes of higher education and the world of work and partnerships between higher education and the public and private sectors.

First, it is clear that the relationship between educational outcomes and economic growth and social development is not a simple matter of predicting labour demand and supply in the manner of the old 'manpower planning'. This was made clear by the research commissioned by the CHE. The difficult relationship between higher education and the world of work is a worldwide phenomenon. A recent UNESCO report recognises that 'the signals from the employment system are more blurred and ambivalent than ever before'.¹

Second, the complex relationship between economic and social development and education is often confounded by the incomplete definitions of "employability" that are pervasive in national and international discourses. The Report into Higher Education in the UK recognised the problem of adequately defining employability. However, it suggests that despite this there is an "emerging consensus"² that the skills required for employability should include:

¹ Higher education in the 21st Century: Vision and Action (1998) October (Unesco, Paris).

² Skills development in higher education: Short Report (c 1999) (DfEE and HEQE).

- Traditional intellectual skills (critical evaluation of evidence, application of theory, logical argument to challenge given assumptions).
- The new core or key skills (communication, information and communication technology, application of numbers, teamwork and improving performance).
- Personal attributes (self-reliance, adaptability, flexibility, nous and creativity).
- Knowledge about how organisations work.

Third, the emphases on responsiveness and employability are not accepted without reservations. There is another discourse, not only within higher education, that suggests that the role of higher education is and must be much greater than responsiveness to the labour market (the market itself reduced to the needs of industry, mining and commerce). This discourse argues that higher education must also respond to wider societal goals of a socially committed and critical citizenry that embraces new values of non-discrimination, tolerance, service to community and so forth. This discourse is particularly critical of what it interprets to be the narrowing of higher education's remit to responsiveness, to the demands of specific and identifiable high-level professions, vocations and careers, at the expense of the intellectual and critical functions associated with general higher education.

Fourth, there is an emerging discourse around the notion of the "entrepreneurial" university. HEIs are criticised for not being entrepreneurial enough and, in the face of declining public subsidies, are implored to search for new sources of income. Some consider institutions of higher learning to be businesses like any other and expect them to behave as such. They are quite comfortable with the importation into HEIs of traditionally corporate structures and styles of management.

The ostensible benefits of, and enthusiasm for, entrepreneurial institutions, however, are not equally shared by all higher education constituencies. There are worries about the consequences of this for traditional practices of knowledge production and dissemination and for the nature and trajectory of learning and teaching. Those in doubt about the value of entrepreneurialism also express concern about the effects on traditional academic cultures, communities and conduct of borrowing from the corporate culture.

Institutions that, because of our apartheid past, did not have opportunities to develop strong relationships with the private and public sectors could be especially lukewarm about calls to become entrepreneurial since this could reinforce and set up new bases of disadvantage and privilege amongst institutions. More generally, there could be the concern that the active promotion of relationships between higher education and the private and public sectors is simply another manifestation of the push towards entrepreneurial higher education.

No doubt there could be benefits for higher education becoming more entrepreneurial. Equally there could also be dangers and unfortunate consequences for knowledge production and dissemination and other areas of higher education life. Ultimately, it requires debate on the purposes and aims of higher education entrepreneurialism, the possible forms of entrepreneurialism and those that are appropriate to the specific missions of HEIs.

Fifth, on the terrain of research and, fundamentally, of research and development, there is similar contestation and potential conflict over the ownership, use and diffusion of knowledge and technology and the property rights attached to it. These contestations are shaped by conceptions about the nature of the ties between industry and higher education. Some welcome the closer ties between higher education and industry. Others express apprehension that these ties result in increased emphasis on commercially relevant research at the expense of basic and fundamental research. A recent book on university-industry relations notes that:

The last few decades have been characterized by growing contributions of academic research to the foundations of industrial innovation and to the informing of regulatory decisions and legislation relating to resources, environment, health and safety. This positive development, however, has had certain side effects that create problems for academic researchers and research institutions. One of these is the erosion of the traditional openness of the academic research system through restraints on the disclosure of, and free access of all qualified scholars to, the results of academic research. A second is public concern about possible undisclosed conflicts-of-interest or strong

ideological affiliations of university researchers and their effects on the objectivity and public credibility of the research results emanating from academic R&D.³

These arguments relate essentially to the seeming incompatibilities between industry and higher education arising from questions about research objectives, policies concerning the disclosure of research findings, the ownership of proprietary rights in the research and from conflicting financial interests. These incompatibilities in turn threaten to undermine the possibilities for closer higher education-industry cooperation.

Finally, the question of responsiveness is not easily separable from concerns about higher education as a public good and there is the vexed issue of reconciling the public good and private and particular interests with the idea of higher education responsiveness.

The CHE itself devoted the first issue of its Higher Education Discussion Series, *Kagisano*, to this question. There it is argued that far-reaching changes captured by the concept “globalisation” have a direct bearing on the role of higher education in developed and developing countries alike. It is noted that:

With globalisation and the increasing marketisation of higher education it appears that locally and internationally the notion of higher education as a public good is being eroded. At the same time, it may be that higher education’s relation to the public good is not self-evident and the benefits of higher education are not immediately obvious to or felt by particular social groups.⁴

Conceptions of public good are therefore likely to be highly contested because of the many claims that higher education is expected to satisfy. In the transformative role ascribed to it in South Africa, higher education is obliged to contend not only with the “globally homogenising pressure for conformity to particular economic principles” but also with the “differences in the social political and moral demands made on the notion of transformation as invoked in the contexts where far-reaching changes in higher

³ Brooks H and Randazzese, University-Industry Relations: The Next four years and Beyond [Full Reference to follow][Page 391]

⁴Introduction to *Kagisano*, Issue 1, Summer, 2001.

education are occurring”.⁵ Therefore in higher education itself, strategic choices are needed which strive to engage simultaneously with the need for cost efficiency and “broader social development priorities” and make “social justice issues explicit and real within notions of higher education responsiveness and accountability”.⁶

The fit between higher education and the labour market, employability and the attributes of high-level personpower, research and intellectual property rights and the public good and private interests in relation to higher education responsiveness are part of different and divergent discourses. The contending positions on these issues are held by important constituencies, each of which seeks to influence in differing ways the definition and role of higher education in economy and society. One of the objectives of the CHE Colloquium was to be a platform for the discussion of these issues.

A book on the CHE’s commissioned research papers and the proceedings of the Colloquium will be published in the next two weeks. I urge you to obtain a copy for it an important contribution to thinking and other action on the issue of building partnerships between higher education and the public and private sectors.

Challenges of building partnerships

There are, as I have noted, clearly critical issues that must be kept in mind when addressing the issue of higher education responsiveness and the building of partnerships between higher education and the public and private sectors. However, these should not preclude the development of effective, robust and durable partnerships at local, regional and national levels.

In the time remaining, let me put in the form of propositions the key challenges we must confront, some of which were identified at the CHE Colloquium. It is vital that we use today to begin to grapple with these challenges so that our thinking and practices can progress beyond the colloquium.

⁵Singh, M. in *Kagisano*, Issue 1 Summer 2001 p. 8.

⁶*ibid* p. 20.

1. First, there needs to be recognition of the necessity for and a commitment to the creation of public and private sector and higher education partnerships at the local, regional and national levels and in different economic and social sectors.

Here it is vitally necessary to distinguish between individual partnerships and institutional and organisational partnerships. Certainly, there is a long history of relationships between institutions and organisations and individual academics and researchers or individual research and development units at higher education institutions. These are important and must continue to exist and be nurtured and promoted. Our principal concern, however, is not with partnerships that take the form of personal connections and individual commissions and consultancies. It is with building *institutional and organisational partnerships* between public and private sector institutions and organisations and higher education institutions.

The Minister of Education has addressed this issue. As a result of our deformed and distorted apartheid past we have a common calling - to address and become responsive to the development needs of a democratic South Africa. These needs are crystallised in the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* of 1994 as a fourfold commitment. 'meeting basic needs of people'; 'developing our human resources'; 'building the economy', and 'democratising the state and society' at all levels.

However, the recognition of the need for public and private sector and higher education partnerships and a commitment to them must not be assumed. It must be built and mobilised, often through dedicated individual champions within the public and private sectors and higher education.

2. Second, the purposes and aims of public-private sector and higher education partnerships at the local, regional and national levels and in different economic and social sectors must be clearly defined and their nature fully understood.

The challenge of the Municipality of the City of Johannesburg is, in accordance with its mandate, to define the vision, goals and strategies for economic reconstruction

and development, redistributive social policies aimed at equity and for political democratisation. This it has done admirably through its 2030 Plan.

Higher education institutions for their part need to harness their powerful intellectual and other resources to contribute proactively, critically and creatively, through their research and teaching and learning and service programmes, to the knowledge and personpower that will enable the city of Johannesburg to rigorously conceptualise its vision and challenges, realise its goals and implement its strategies effectively and efficiently.

However, being what they are, higher education institutions cannot be simply the instruments of the City's goals and strategies but must also critique and produce social commentaries on the city and its workings.

Conversely, higher education institutions today must produce and disseminate knowledge and graduates that are equipped with the knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes to contribute to economic growth and development, to the diverse social needs of South Africans and to building a vibrant civil society and consolidating democracy. To the extent that this is not the case, the City's leaders must not be shy to communicate this to its higher education partners.

It is unlikely that there will ever be congruence between the outputs of higher education in terms of graduates and the immediate and specific needs of public and private sector employers. In this regard, if higher education institutions must become more attuned with their environments and become better *learning* organisations, private businesses, public organisations and government departments need to become much better *mentoring* organisations or they will not retain personnel that are endowed with great potential or expertise.

3. Third, the nodes, modalities and mechanisms, instruments and processes of effective and meaningful collaboration have to be created and developed between higher education institutions and the public and private sectors at the local, regional and national levels and in different economic and social sectors.

Public and private sector and higher education actors may operate in quite different spaces, have distinct immediate preoccupations and work in divergent ways and in accordance with markedly different timeframes and rhythms. To gel these actors together and build strong, healthy and durable relationships could require considerable patience, wisdom, understanding and strong commitment from all sides.

Higher education institutions are accused of being 'ivory towers', the charge being that they closet themselves behind impenetrable walls and give short shrift to the economic and social needs of a democratic and changing South Africa. I don't accept this judgement.

No doubt there do exist individual academics that almost have an 'ivory tower' notion of a higher education institution. However, note that trade in ivory is forbidden and therefore the 'ivory tower' is a doomed institution since there is no prospect of its renewal and reproduction.

I believe that institutions *are* attempting, under challenging conditions, to undertake a comprehensive transformation agenda, including becoming more responsive to economic and social needs. In these circumstances, it may be less a question of political will and commitment as much as the internal demands of transformation and especially the way in which institutions, faculties, departments and academics are organised, and rewarded, that may be major constraints to responsiveness.

No institution is likely to be wittingly unresponsive. If it does seek such a path, it is unlikely to be innovative, dynamic and capable of attracting the best teachers, researchers and students, and unlikely to thrive. This would also inhibit its ability to make a powerful and critical contribution to the economic, social, cultural and intellectual development of South Africa, be it locally, regionally or nationally. If higher education institutions are not responsive, other knowledge-producing institutions will increasingly undertake their functions. If public higher education institutions are not responsive, private institutions will increasingly undertake their functions.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, we simply must not take our young democracy for granted for there is much yet to be done to make it work for all our fellow citizens, particularly that majority segment that has been denied for so long and has been promised by government a better life for all.

We must recall that our higher education policy goals *require* us to develop well-planned and co-ordinated teaching, learning and research programmes to address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, Southern African and African contexts. As higher education leaders, managers and academics we must be able to respond, heads held high if asked by the inhabitants of the city of Johannesburg:

Where are the scholars, researchers and academics and the professionals, the learned intellectuals of our society?

Where is the intellectual *engagement* with the imperative of equity and redress; the building of a substantive democracy, including a vibrant and intellectually and culturally rich civil society; the need for economic development, job creation and the reduction of poverty; the development of personpower and the effective delivery of social services; the development of a rich, varied and inclusive national culture and identity, the threat of HIV/AIDS, with the pathologies of racism, sexism and homophobia and the stresses and strains of our society?

Where is the intellectual *critique* of globalisation and its effects on the city (and on the African city) and its inhabitants, of well meaning but poorly implemented reconstruction and development policies, and the unintended consequences of social policies and of continuing social inequities?

Where is the intellectual *vision*?

And where, above all, is the intellectual *contribution* to the development of an equitable, just and humane democracy?

I have no doubts that the people of the city of Johannesburg have a deep interest in the answers to these questions. It is our responsibility to ensure that we have adequate answers.

Since we are being honest about the challenges of higher education institutions, let us also acknowledge that the private and public sectors have their own transformation challenges. These include the present pattern of ownership of productive assets, the racial and gender composition of high- and middle-level occupations, job creation, reduction and elimination of inequalities and poverty, effective and efficient delivery of services, social security and the creation of better living standards and social, educational and cultural conditions for all, and especially working people and the urban and rural poor.

If the legacy of the past continues to manifest itself in higher education institutions, it also does so in the private and public sectors. If there are concerns about the institutional cultures of various higher education institutions, concerns can equally be raised about the institutional cultures of private and public sector organisations.

The challenges are often strikingly familiar and similar. All the more reason, then, for effective partnerships to address general and specific challenges in the interests of a better life for all South Africans, and especially those historically disadvantaged and marginalised by virtue of 'race', class, gender, age, disability and geography.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we were thrilled to be approached by the City and the Technikon Witwatersrand to help in organising this Summit, seeing it as a wonderful opportunity to fashion partnership and responsiveness at the local level as was proposed by the CHE colloquium. My congratulations to Technikon Witwatersrand for taking the initiative and a great thanks to its representatives, those of the City and to the CHE personnel and all who have worked hard to gather us here today.

I am therefore extremely pleased that this Summit is occurring. To the best of my knowledge this may be a historic gathering, probably the first time that a City has come together with its higher education institutions to explore a partnership in the interest of all the inhabitants of the city. We must seize this opportunity to begin to

- Cogently define the purposes and aims of a partnership between the City and higher education institutions and its nature, which must be respectful of the varied purposes of higher education
- Identify the specific issues around which relations need to be forged
- Explore the mechanisms, instruments and processes through which effective, robust and lasting relationships can be built.

There is no reason why, in due course, the partnership between the City, with a clear vision of what it wishes to achieve for itself, and its higher education institutions, responsive and profoundly committed to the realisation of this vision, cannot become a public social contract. Such a social compact could become a model for other localities and higher education institutions.

The CHE itself has no implementation mandate outside of quality assurance and therefore no role to play beyond this Summit, though it happy to lend assistance where it can. The CHE seeks only to be a facilitator, a catalyst, for initiating relationships between higher education institutions and local, regional and national private and public sector actors. It seeks to draw on these encounters for providing informed and considered advice to the Minister of Education. The cultivation and hopefully blossoming of a relationship between the City and higher education institutions is the responsibility principally of these institutions. The CHE, through its responsibility for monitoring the achievement of higher education policy goals, will monitor future developments with great interest.

In closing, on behalf of the CHE I wish to thank the City and higher education institutions for making possible this important gathering and for inviting others to share in this enterprise. I look forward to positive and productive outcomes flowing from this Summit.