

HOW RESPONSIVE ARE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO REGIONAL NEEDS? THE CASE OF THE FREE STATE

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ABSTRACT

South Africa higher education institutions are faced with a dual imperative: they are expected to become globally competitive and to deliver programmes, research outputs and community services that are accepted by the global higher education community. On the other hand, they experience increasing demands from government and local communities to become responsive to the social, economical and political needs of mostly under-developed domestic societies. While the imperatives for transformation in higher education derive in large measure from South Africa's apartheid history, they also form part of a global quest for change as throughout the world higher education systems are being challenged to become more responsive to society's needs (Perold 1998:28-29). Obviously, this is even more so in developing countries where the nature of society, social, economic and educational needs are extensive.

The main purpose of this research was to establish whether and how higher institutions are responding to regional needs. For this purpose two higher education institutions in the Free State province were targeted and an analysis was done of their three year rolling plans as these plans indicates, amongst others, how institutions are positioning themselves in their regions.

1. POLICY INITIATIVES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

After the inauguration of the new South African government in 1994 various policy initiatives were put on the table to express the government's interest in transforming the country and to develop South Africa's human resources. This commitment of the government is reflected in a number of policies and related initiatives. According to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), published by the African National Congress in 1994 (ANC 1994), the South African economy is in a deep-seated structural crisis that urges fundamental reconstruction. The overarching goal of the reconstruction and development plan is to create a strong, dynamic and balanced economy, which will:

- "eliminate the poverty, low wages and extreme inequalities in wages and wealth generated by the apartheid system, meet basic needs, and thus ensure that every South African has a decent living standard and economic security" ;

- “create productive employment opportunities at a living wage for all South Africans” ; and
- “develop a prosperous and balanced regional economy in Southern Africa based on the principles of equity and mutual benefit” (ANC 1994:79).

Another initiative of the South African government to contribute to socio-economic development in South Africa, is the development of skills to improve the South African workforce and to build human capacity.

2. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The low level of skills in an environment that is increasingly experiencing a major change in the workplace that require more and different skills, is of great concern to the government (Bellis 2001:141-142).

In order to address the skills training and development in South Africa, the government passed various laws. These laws are the South African Qualifications Act (RSA DoE 1995), the Skills Development Act (RSA DoL 1998b) and the Skills Development Levies Act (RSA DoL 1999). These acts also aim to bring education and business more closely and productively together. Through these interactions, education and training providers have to adapt their learning programmes to be more in line with the needs of business and industries. The idea is to plan ahead and advise learners about labour market needs and the career opportunities offered by different learning programmes (*NBI Quick Brief of 23 June 2000:1*).

3. HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of the rather intense human resource development strategy that was published early in 2001, is to provide a plan to ensure that people are equipped to participate fully in society, to be able to find or create work, and to benefit fairly from it (RSA 2001:5). It is important here to clarify the concept of ‘work’. “It is not a narrow understanding of work, and must be understood as being the full range of activities that underpin human dignity by achieving self-sufficiency, freedom from hunger and poverty, self-expression and full citizenship. Nationhood and productive citizenship are inter-dependent, and it is in this sense that we speak of a nation at work for a better life” (RSA 2001:5).

As part of this strategy, various strategic objectives were formulated that is supposed to be attained by the year 2005/6. The following relates to higher education:

- Learning in areas of scarce skills at both higher and further education and training levels, especially in the field of science, technology and engineering.

- Participation of adults in further education and training (FET) programmes.
- Enrolments in higher education institutions to rise with active recruitment strategies for local and foreign students and bursary assistance.
- The distributions of learners across higher education institutions and between FET and higher education.
- Placement of FET and higher education graduates in employment.
- An increased employer participation in lifelong learning.

The process of the transformation of higher education started with the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in 1996 (NCHE Report 1996). Stemming from this commission, the White Paper on Higher Education Transformation (RSA DoE 1997) was drafted. This paper is viewed as one of, if not the most important paper dictating the way for the transformation of South African higher education.

4. WHITE PAPER 3 ON HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION (1997)

The lack of response of higher education in the previous political dispensation, is being addressed in the White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education (RSA DoE 1997) in South Africa. According to this paper the most important deficiencies that have to be addressed, amongst others are:

- The inequitable distribution of access to and opportunity in higher education.
- The inadequate response by higher education to the development needs of society.
- The failure of higher education to lay the foundations for a critical civil society.
- Inappropriate policies and practices in teaching and research (Perold 1998:27).

According to this document insufficient attention is paid to the pressing local, regional and national needs of the South African society and to the problems and challenges of the broader African context. This policy document urges the reconstruction of domestic, social and economic relations to eradicate and redress the inequitable patterns of ownership, wealth and social and economic practices that were shaped by segregation and apartheid. Segregation and apartheid have created a sophisticated urban core economy with a relatively well-developed technological infrastructure and an increasingly highly educated skilled labour force. In contrast to this a peripheral rural and informal urban economy exists in which the majority of the population, previously denied access

to education and training and restricted to unskilled labour, contrive to make a living. Against this backdrop, higher education must provide education and training to develop the skills and innovations necessary for national development and successful participation in the global economy (RSA DoE 1997:3-4).

The principle of development means that conditions must be created to facilitate the transformation of the higher education system to enable it to contribute to the common good of society through the production, acquisition and application of knowledge, the building of human capacity, and the provision of lifelong learning opportunities (RSA DoE 1997:6).

The document also declares that the production, acquisition and application of new knowledge, national growth and competitiveness are dependent on continuous technological improvement and innovation, driven by a well-organised, vibrant research culture and development system which integrates the research and training capacity of higher education institutions with the needs of industry and of society (RSA DoE 1997:21).

Where teaching and learning are concerned, higher education has a definite role to play in the development of the country as well as specific regions. Conditions must be created to facilitate the transformation of the higher education system to enable it to contribute to the common good of society through the production, acquisition and application of knowledge, the building of human capacity, and the provision of lifelong learning opportunities. A further task is to promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students. Here community service programmes can be used to help in the social and economic development of regions (RSA DoE 1997:8).

It is still unclear how the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education, will develop a funding mechanism to support and promote institutional, regional and national initiatives. In this paper it is also proposed that regional collaboration should be supported with incentive funding that will be available on a selective basis to support the costs involved in regional collaboration among institutions which aim to consolidate, merge, share or otherwise collectively improve the efficient use of their facilities and resources for learning, teaching, research and/or community service.

In developed countries it seems much easier for higher education to be responsive to a much more homogeneous society where most of the population received good schooling and large proportions of society are enrolled for higher/post school education and training. The realities and complexities of developing countries such as South Africa differ, however, immensely.

Moving from the broader South African policy context, the unique problems of one of South Africa's nine provinces, the Free State, are addressed. After discussing the unique developmental problems of the province, the authors

analyse the three year rolling plans of two higher education institutions in the province in order to establish how responsive higher education institutions are to regional needs.

5. REGIONAL NEEDS IN THE FREE STATE

It is recognised that the Free State region has major development needs. This province contributes a small 6% towards the Gross Domestic Product (GPD) of South Africa and is regarded as the second poorest in the country, indicating the serious developmental challenges that the province are faced with (POS Newsletter of August/September 1999:8). The following statistics give a profile of some of the main components of this province in comparison to South Africa.

Table 1: Profile of the Free State Province

Profile of the Free State	Figures and/or Percentages	In comparison to South Africa
Population	2 782 470 (7% of national total)	43 586 097
Unemployment	Unemployment stands at 26% to 30%	Unemployment stands at 23%
Matriculation pass rates	53% in 2000	58% in 2000
Population growth	Estimated at 0,72% per annum	Estimated at 1,35% per annum
HIV/Aids	HIV/Aids – prevalence rate: 32,2% (2001)	HIV/Aids – prevalence rate: 24,5% (2000)
Life expectancy	56.29 years Figures for 1997	48.09 years Figures for 2001
Literacy	Estimated at 85% in 1999	Estimated at 81,8% in 1995
Poverty	Poverty profile of 66%, but rises to 75% in rural areas ¹	Nearly 50%

Sources: *PSP Newsletter*, August/September 1999:8; World Fact Book 2001:1; *PSP Newsletter*, August/September 1999:8; USAID South Africa 2001:1; Shindler, J. & Beard, S. 2001:3; Shindler, J. & Beard, S. 2001:3; BMR 2001:1; BMR 2001:1; *The Sowetan*, 2 October 2001:1; HIVinSite 2001:2; Free State Province 1998:10; World Factbook 2001:1; *PSP Newsletter*, August/September 1999:8; World Factbook 2001:2; Free State Province 1998:6; USAID South Africa 2001:1.

From above statistics it is clear that the Free State has serious developmental deficiencies. Poverty and unemployment goes hand in hand and with the raising

HIV/Aids prevalence rate that can give rise to further unemployment and poverty, dire development needs exist in the province.

In doing an environmental scan of the province the following strengths and weaknesses in the province surfaced:

- A strong farming and agric-business sector.
- A well-developed mining sector.
- Emphasise on service rendering.
- Continued diversification of the economy (Minnaar, Gillard, Nolte & Thoahlane 2000:97).
- Production and employment structures are too highly concentrated.
- There is an absence of a large industrial sector.
- A lack of an entrepreneurial culture and skills exists.
- The education and skills levels in the province are quite low in relation to the developmental requirements of the province. Almost 13% of the labour force have no formal schooling at all and the proportion of the labour force with matric and post-matric qualifications is a low 20% (Minnaar *et al.* 2000:98).

The province, is however, provided with the following opportunities:

- The central location of the province in South Africa and a relatively “crime free” environment.
- Development opportunities exist for small-scale mining industries, as well as small-scale farming.
- There is the production of downstream, high value chemical products in the Northern Free State.
- Areas of growth are identified to be in the construction and trade sectors, communications, business services, community and social services and in recreational and cultural service (Minnaar *et al.* 2000:98).

6. NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE BUSINESS SECTOR REGARDING HIGHER EDUCATION

According to the Executive Director of the Bloemfontein Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Minnaar *et al.* 2000:99-101) the needs and expectations of the business sector regarding higher education in the Free State are the following:

- The creation of employment and opportunities is mainly to be found in SMEs – which are very poorly developed due to the dominance of large mining houses and conglomerates’ major holding on the economy.
- Basic education is of a poor quality.

- The main priority is enhancing job creation and economic development.
- Globalisation is forcing bigger corporates in South Africa to become more competitive. This often leads to restructuring and mechanisation with comparative job losses.
- In the past only the Small Business Development Corporation assisted the development of SMEs.
- The Free State is in need of a culture of entrepreneurship where each individual accepts responsibility for him-/herself as well as the basic knowledge and skills to run a business.
- The Employment Equity Act (RSA DoL 1998a) is responsible for an economy in transformation. Fast tracking of a new generation of middle and senior managers is required.
- Transformation also requires from education systems to address specific new problems not present in other countries, for example:
 - Managers need knowledge of the differences between cultures and must be able to deal with transformation, for example equity and a culturally diverse workforce.
 - Young, bright black executives have the intellectual capacity but often lack first-hand experience.
- Information technology like the Internet will have a profound impact on commercial activity and a dire need exists for skills and expertise in this area.

Apart from the above expectations for higher education in the province, the Department of Labour (RSA DoL 2001:45) also recommends specifically for the Free State that “in the wake of a very slow moving provincial economy, great emphasis must be placed on skill development in the framework of the informal sector and specifically entrepreneurial development to alleviate poverty in the Province”.

7. RURAL DEVELOPMENT AS A SPECIFIC NEED IN THE FREE STATE

Rural areas are defined as the sparsely populated areas in which people farm or depend on natural resources, including the villages and small towns that are dispersed through these areas. In addition, they include the large settlements in the former homelands, created by the apartheid removals, which depend for their survival on migratory labour and remittances (RSA RDP 1997:9).

As large regions of the Free State province consists of rural areas, it is necessary to include rural development and rural needs in our discussion. Information specifically concerning rural areas in the Free State is difficult to obtain. For this reason information referring to rural development in South Africa in general are discussed.

Almost three-quarters of people below the poverty line in South Africa live in rural areas. Of these children less than five years, youths and the elderly are particularly vulnerable - women more so than men. In South Africa the poorest ten per cent of the population account for just one per cent of consumer spending. The highly skewed distribution of income in South Africa goes hand in hand with highly inequitable literacy levels, education, health and housing, and access to water and fuel (RSA RDP 1997:9). With the high rate of unemployment in South Africa and the low wages for those with jobs, nearly 50% of South Africans live below the poverty line. In the Free State this figure is as high as 75% in the rural areas (Free State Province 1998:6). Rural areas therefore have specific development needs.

Table 2 provides an overview of the development needs in rural areas.

Table 2: Development needs in rural areas

AREA	DESCRIPTION
Institutional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Helping rural people set the priorities in their own communities through effective and democratic bodies. ❑ Providing access to funds to plan and implement local economic development.
Investment in basic infrastructure and social services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ The provision of physical infrastructure (e.g. housing, water and power supplies, transport) and social services (e.g. basic health care and schools).
Improving income and employment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Broadening access to natural resources (e.g. arable and grazing land, irrigation water, woodland and forests).
Restoration of basic economic rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Establishing periodic markets as the organizing spatial and temporal framework for development.
Resource conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Investing efforts in the sustainable use of natural resources.
Justice, equity and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Dealing with the injustices of the past and ensuring the safety and security of the rural population, especially that of women.

(RSA Rural Development Task Team and the Department of Land Affairs 1997:10)

In an attempt to introduce stability to the currently transforming higher education system and to achieve parity through unity of purpose within the higher education sector, the National Department of Education spelled out a set of planning guidelines which were to be followed by every higher education institution in the country. The first phase (1999-2001) has already lapsed and the institutions are grappling to actualise their plans for the second phase's (2000-2001) three-year rolling plans. The broad aims of these plans are to indicate how individual institutions have planned to respond to and aid achievement of national policy priorities (Maharasoja 2001:133).

In the Free State the Central University of Technology and the University of the Free State also submitted their three-year rolling plans. These are public documents. The authors were particularly interested to investigate if and how responsive these two institutions are towards addressing the region's needs. In the following paragraphs a summary is presented of the role each of these two higher education institutions foresee to play in the development of the Free State.

8. THE RESPONSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO REGIONAL NEEDS IN THE FREE STATE

8.1 Central University of Technology (CUT)

As its vision, the CUT proposes to progress through Science, Engineering and Technology. Part of their marketing strategy is their logo of "The entrepreneurial technology university of the future". As its mission states, the institution wishes to improve the quality of life of all people in its region. As one of the main goals of the CUT, the university's mission states that they will provide staff, facilities and consulting services to enhance economic development in the community, including co-operative and lifelong learning opportunities. The CUT will also contribute towards the provision of an educated labour force.

As to access of marginalised students, the CUT proposes to provide better financial aid to as many needy students as possible. Admission policies are geared towards a spectrum of tests that help to measure the academic potential of all students. Postgraduate studies amongst non-traditional students are also encouraged. Increased enrolments in science, engineering and technology programmes are envisioned. Student development mentions plans that entrepreneurship will be improved. No detail is provided on how this will or could be achieved. Collaboration with other organisations to establish ongoing achievements in other fields than academic work is also mentioned.

The CUT is not only expanding its formal instructional programmes, but it is also paying attention to short cycle programmes. The short cycle programmes straddles both non-qualification and academic development programmes

The Centre of Continuing and Distance Education is therefore concentrating on the following:

- Providing short cycle programmes.
- Facilitating lifelong and continuous learning.
- Providing increased access to higher education institutions.

The nature of these programmes is, however, not stipulated.

Distance learning may be made available during the period under discussion at Bethlehem, Harrismith, Goldfield, Bothaville, Ficksburg, Kroonstad, Thaba Nchu, Winburg, Senekal, Koffiefontein and Zastron. The provision of access programmes to bridge into the CUT at the places mentioned will greatly enhance access. Public and private sector facilities will be utilised to present specific off-campus modules according to community needs and where the learner is evaluated and accredited according to NQF learning unit standards (Technikon Free State 1998: 2-9).

Research development plans are aimed “to advance, transmit and sustain knowledge and understanding, through the conduct of career teaching, research and scholarship, and community capacity building and services at the highest international standards, for the benefit of regional, national and international communities” (Technikon Free State 1998:53).

The CUT is committed to address the socio-economic development problems of the Free State through various methods, but detailed descriptions of these methods are not included in their plans. The CUT appears to fill a specific niche in especially the disciplines of science, engineering and technology and through this can fulfill one of the main aims for development in the Free State as well as South Africa.

8.2 The University of the Free State

In the vision declaration of the University of the Free State, it is stated that the university should contribute to the solving of national and international social problems and should take the whole spectrum of development needs of the region and country into account. It is the university’s intention to be relevant to the Free State, South Africa and Africa in its contribution to promote sustainable human development.

In the mission statement, the university declares that one of the missions of the university is to perform community services through its core functions of education and research, as well as through special development programmes and projects.

Regarding access, the university envisages that the participation rate of black and white student will change to a ration of 64% blacks to 36% whites in the years up to 2001. "The UFS is broadening the base of undergraduate studies in partnerships with other higher and further education institutions, not only to serve learners efficiently and effectively in especially rural areas, but also to emphasis post-graduate studies and research at the UFS" (University of the Free State 1998:8). The university therefore already provides access and bridging programmes to redress the imbalances in the society by enlarging and improving access to adult and post-compulsory education.

The university is of opinion that short-cycle teaching programmes will encourage entrepreneurial responses by the institution; demonstrate to the community the university's relevance contribute to economic and community development; open up research possibilities and encourage partnerships across the university and off campus (University of the Free State 1998:113).

The university, by adapting a policy of entrepreneurship for financial sustainability, as well as through the development and offering of relevant programmes offers teaching/learning programmes of quality. This is done in an effort to establish a fit between the university's programme mix and the regional and national needs (University of the Free State 1998:1-40).

9. REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

According to the planning documents on the three-year rolling plans, the following prescription was issued concerning regional co-operation:

- Regional planning and collaboration are necessary to ensure greater co-ordination. At regional level there is currently little direct capacity, but some of the Consortia are beginning to analyse institutional plans in their regions. Once greater clarity is achieved about the exact role of Regional Consortia in planning, capacity plans will have to be developed (RSA DoE 1999:19).

In response to the above demand, a Trust consisting of 29 different higher and further education institutions was formed in the Free State. This consists of higher education institutions, the further education and training sector institutions as well as several NGOs working in the education and training area. This Trust – The Free State Higher and Further Education and Training Trust (FSHFETT) – has a dual function: to receive fees and grants and to utilise these funds for academic and related development issues. The Trust has an additional number of 20 members from business/industry and the community who advise the Board of Trustees on practical educational initiatives and projects (University of the Free State 1998:30-31).

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Neither the University of the Free State, nor the Central University of Technology mention specific measures to be taken to fulfill their developmental or service role in the Free State. Both recognise that they must contribute to the development needs of the Free State, but more detail is required in order to analyse how this will be achieved. In light of this, the following recommendations can be made to ensure that these two institutions increase their regional responsiveness:

- The establishment of a regional office at one of the higher education institutions is highly recommended. Such an office can monitor on a regular basis the needs of a region and stakeholders and advise the institutions in this regard. Working through such an established office, unnecessary overlapping and duplicating of services can be eliminated.
- The contribution and value of a regional consortium, such as the FSHFETT, is still unrecognised.

Regarding the economic development needs of the region, the following seems applicable:

- In light of the government policies as well as the dire needs of the region, the capacity-building of human capital are of the utmost importance to answer to regional needs. Highly qualified manpower is needed both in the region as well as in the rest of South Africa. Personal transferable skills or generic core skills that can be readily applied from one work situation to the next are of the utmost importance. Especially in the Free State region with high unemployment figures, the building of human capital to generate employment, are important.
- Graduate retention can be increased through various scholarships, bursaries and learnerships to keep graduates and their skills in the region. In this regard the mining industry, tourism and the agricultural-business sectors have potential. Initiatives such as scholarships, learnerships, community service projects or work-related partnerships, have great potential to contribute to particularly rural areas.
- Research done in both institutions can be applied to create wealth in the region, as well as alleviate dire needs of the region like unemployment, illiteracy, poverty and the HIV/Aids pandemic and its impact. Research partnerships with industries and SMEs can also contribute to the development of the region.
- Membership of professional associations can help academics in both institutions to keep abreast of developments in their various fields and assist

them to apply newly gained knowledge in the region. This will ensure that they are informed on global trends.

- With the already established needs of SMEs such as the lack of basic knowledge and skills to run a business and the lack of entrepreneurial skills, higher education institutions can fulfill a dire need in building the capacity of this sector.
- In the Free State region both the higher education institutions can create stakeholder co-ordination through various means to help in the development of the region. Examples are partnerships, collaboration and consultancies with both industry and the local government. Through policy initiatives and co-operation the economic development needs of the region could be positively addressed.
- Especially with its vast rural areas, networking as a hybrid form of knowledge can contribute to the development of the region. Pooling of competencies and the sharing of equipment can lead to diversified partnerships, especially in the mining and agri-business sectors.
- Technology and technological networks are still underdeveloped in the region as higher education institutions in the region should be better linked with local as well as global enterprises. Especially the poor rural areas can benefit with innovative technological networks. The training of both users and information technologists to run such systems are of great importance.

As to the service needs of the region, the following are recommended:

- Access to higher education institutions in the region can be broadened to give especially local inhabitants the opportunity to develop their talents and potential. This can indirectly lead to address identified needs like employment equity, unemployment and poverty. Both institutions aim to broaden their access to students and especially so in the fields of science and technology. This can only benefit the region if these students can be kept through retention programmes to help with the development of the region. The financial burden of higher education also needs to be addressed especially to lessen the burden on students from poor and disadvantaged areas.
- The teaching of a variety of relevant and innovative courses and programmes can also contribute to the capacity building of people in the region. The development needs of the region must be addressed with a programme mix that accommodates the various needs of both rural and high-density areas. Care must be taken to eliminate duplication of programmes offered by the two institutions. Each institution must develop its own niches to teach a variety of programmes and courses to a great variety of students. Needs that can be

especially addressed are the lack of entrepreneurial skills in the Free State as well as the poor basic education. Through the teaching and development of entrepreneurs a dire existing economical need can be addressed. The training of better educators can improve the current poor basic education system - ensuring that potential students of higher education are better equipped. Obviously much more science, technology and engineering students have to be attracted and trained.

- The Central University of Technology seems serious in their attempts to address backlogs in rural areas by means of distance education. In the Free State with its concentrated production and employment structures, distance education can reach and help in the development of especially the rural areas of the region. Here again both higher education institutions can create a niche for themselves. Currently higher education institutions outside the province with already well-established distance education infrastructure draw a lot of students.
- Service to the vast group of illiterate adults in especially the rural areas of the region, can help create employment and alleviate poverty in these areas. Adult education can be considered as an important service role of higher education institutions in the Free State. Through the RDP and the White Paper on Higher Education transformation the government also address this issue to alleviate the higher rate of illiteracy in especially also the Free State. Of cognisance is the fact that both higher education institutions in the Free State do not mention the developmental need of adult education in their rolling plans.
- Lifelong learning via technology and direct programmes and courses in the higher education institutions of the Free State region can contribute directly to the services rendered to the region, as well as address a recognised world trend of employment needs. Here again both higher education institutions can create a niche for themselves. Through lifelong learning programmes income can be generated for institutions and employment can be created both for the persons delivering the services as well as for those receiving lifelong learning.
- Community service is recognised as an established service role of higher education institutions in the Free State, especially for the University of the Free State. This is also an area where the needs of the region can be directly and successfully addressed via applied research and programmes to alleviate poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and HIV/Aids in the region. Especially in the social and medical sciences valuable contributions can be made to different communities through service learning.
- In the development initiatives of the government, NGOs and partnerships with them, are recognised for the service work that they are doing in South Africa.

Through partnerships with them, higher education institutions can contribute to respond to regional needs.

- The service role of higher education institutions in the Free State to build a civil society is pivotal. Contact sessions, information and the education of students can contribute directly and indirectly to the building of a civil society in the region. In the Free State that are still a relatively “crime free” area, higher education institutions can be developed as centres of peace and harmony where people of different cultures live and work together in peace and harmony.
- Higher education institutions in the Free State also have to play a cultural role. Through productions, art festivals and concerts the service role of the institutions can be enhanced, especially if these activities can reach out to touch the lives of people in the rural areas of the region. This is one way of crossing the diversity of different race groups and to promote cultural tolerance and to create a civil society.

11. CONCLUSION

For many higher education institutions, regional engagement is becoming the crucible as a matter of survival in a changing economic and competitive corporate world. For the survival of higher education, regional responsiveness may be the best-kept secret of the decade. Collaboration in the new enterprise environment; working across the borders of institutions in effective discourse with other organisations and their different organisational cultures; working with partners from many traditions and persuasions as more learning organisations emerge, can all contribute to enrich their various overlapping learning sectors.

To conclude this research, the words of Van der Sijde and Schutte (2000:13) can be quoted as they declare: “... that there is no single formula for a university to interact with its region. Universities respond to their regions in a way the regions want them to”.

Higher education institutions in the Free State cannot afford to be ivory towers but must address the ‘dark side’ of their mission and vision, their developmental and service role to the Free State with vigour and enthusiasm. The scope of the work to be done is vast and the service and developmental role of the institutions can contribute to their own survival, as well as to the survival of a poor region of the country.

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