

Possible Partnership between Higher Education South Africa; South African Publishers Association and South African Booksellers Association: Some thoughts

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1 INTRODUCTION

I should start off by expressing my gratitude to Marian Griffin, Stephen Erasmus, Mpuka Randinku and Veronica Klipp for inviting me to this joint Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) and South African Booksellers Association (SABA) 2013 Conference. As you will appreciate, universities, on the one hand and publishers and booksellers on the other, are supposed to have a healthy “love-hate” relationship. The “love” part is informed by the reality that universities depend on publishers and booksellers for improving teaching, learning and research activities. By the same token, academic publishers and booksellers depend on universities for their market, and general publishers depend on universities to find credible authors of their books. It is not an exaggeration that without publishers and booksellers, a university core business will be affected adversely, and equally without universities, the entire academic publishing industry will find it difficult to survive. The “hate-part” comes from a perception from the universities that publishers and booksellers, unlike the universities, are involved in their business, driven largely by the profit maximisation motive, which can sometime marginalise a large cohort of students from poor backgrounds. It is often argued in the Higher Education circles that academic publishers, by exploiting university cheap labour, generally get their books for nothing and may pay very little to authors, editors and peer reviewers, who are in most attached to the universities. After such exploitation, the argument goes, the same publishers would come to sell books to the very universities that provide that cheap labour, in the first instance. As *The Economist* (2011) has aptly observed, “... academics are heroic complainers and not always well disposed to profit maximising businesses. So the gripes are likely to continue”.

On their part, the publishers and booksellers hate universities for often not appreciating fully the real costs involved in book production processes. Arguably, the publishers and booksellers have reinvented their business models over the years, in part to deal with this perceived legitimacy deficit, and have remained part of the lifeblood of the university business to this day.

At best, the relationship has been one characterised by what one may call “tolerance”. Universities need to tolerate the presence of booksellers and publishers in their space, and so should publishers and booksellers. As the hatred continues to this day, the spirit of my talk will focus on the love-part of the relationship, and will reserve the hate-part of the relationship to question time.

I have been asked to speak about *The strategic direction and intent of HESA in 2013 and beyond*. Before I engage fully on the topic chosen for me, I would like to begin with a brief historical overview of HESA as an organisation, what it was established for, and its reason for existence, so to speak.

2 MANDATE AND ROLE OF HESA

HESA was formed immediately after a radical transformation of the South African landscape occasioned by mergers in the early 2000s. It sought to be the voice of public universities in South Africa, as it represents all the 23 public universities. The key features of HESA are as follows:

- I. It is a membership organization providing public universities with a unified voice and a forum for collective action and decision-making.
- II. It fosters and promotes the interests of public universities in South Africa.
- III. It participates in the development of Higher Education public policy to find solutions to the economic and social challenges facing South Africa.
- IV. It works closely with governments, private sector and the public to raise the profile and relevance of higher education to South Africa's national development needs and priorities. To this end, our main membership activities are:
 - developing and advocating alternative public policies on issues affecting Higher Education;
 - developing leadership seminars for university leaders;
 - providing member institutions and the general public with information on Higher Education;
 - formulating and representing the joint policy positions of the member institutions;
 - implementing initiatives and programmes to support the core functions of the universities, i.e. teaching and learning, research and community engagement
 - managing scholarships;

HESA is the public voice of the public universities and serves as a forum for public universities to participate in a joint opinion-forming process. In order to carry-out this wide-ranging mandate, HESA has opted to have impact in the following five areas, and has established a strategy group chaired by a vice-chancellor for each:

- a. Funding
- b. Teaching and Learning
- c. Research and Innovation
- d. Transformation
- e. HIV and AIDS

The strategy groups advise the Board on any issue falling within the remit of these areas, and enable the HESA Board to take positions on some of these issues. As you can imagine, funding strategy group deals with matters relating to funding of higher education in South Africa, and engages largely with the state and its agencies to ensure that funding policies and instruments are continuously (re)examined to address the funding inadequacies in the system. Such engagements include, in the main, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), Department of Science and Technology, National Research Foundation. With regard to Teaching and Learning, HESA seeks to address the debilitating teaching and learning challenges in the sector including high drop-out rate, low throughput rate and the quality of undergraduate education in the sector, including foundation provisioning. Research and Innovation issues are equally important for HESA, as it strives to improve research and innovation performance outputs in the sector. The strategy group deals with such issues as research infrastructure provision,

supporting early career researchers, and strengthening coherence across the state's the policy making machinery in the funding and incentivising research and innovation activities in the sector. With regard to transformation, HESA sees its role as that of forging a common understanding of transformation within the sector in the context of national development imperatives. The scourge of HIV and AIDS and its impact in South African society and the sector in particular, has promoted HESA to take stand against this pandemic. To this end, a massive mobilisation campaign in the sector is underway to respond to the challenges posed by this epidemic.

3 WHAT THEN ARE HESA'S PRIORITIES?

Before one outlines some of the priorities of HESA in the current period, it is important to highlight some of the challenges facing the Higher Education sector. The National Development Plan (2012) has identified the following as key challenges:

- a. **Increase participation rate to more than 30%:** This would entail an increase of gross enrolments from 950,000 in 2010 to 1 620,000 in 2030, a 70% increase¹. This sounds rather steep, considering that the current rate of increase is just short of 5%. In addition, there would be the enrolment increases from the envisaged two new higher education institutions – two new universities in Mpumalanga and Northern Cape.
- b. **Increase university science and mathematics entrants to 450,000:** The Plan simply notes that numbers 'should be' at least three times the current levels, but no concrete figures are given, although it is notable that this would make up 25% of all enrolments if the target enrolment figure for 2030 is met.
- c. **Increase graduation rates to more than 25%:** This would increase the total number of graduates from 167,469 to 425,000 by 2030, including private institution graduations. This is not going to be so easy to achieve, desirable as it is. The graduation rate has changed very slowly over the last decade. In addition, a major brake on the national graduation rate is the low graduation rate of the University of South Africa, the large distance education provider, which had a graduation rate of 9% in 2008 (Badsha & Cloete, 2011, pg. 11). Without some specific intervention, this target will not be easily achievable.
- d. **Produce more than 100 doctoral graduates per million of the population:** This is an awkward way of saying that the system would need to increase the annual production of doctoral graduates from 1,420 per annum (in 2010) to 5,000 per annum in 2030. The doctoral graduation rate has been all but static over the last decade, so this will require a major policy and financial intervention to get even close to this target. Something dramatic and extraordinary – like extending the retirement age for certain academics as recommended by the Green Paper, or re-hiring retirees on contract, will have to be considered. It is highly probable that with the current 34% of academics with PhDs that the system simply does not currently possess the supervisory capacity to produce the rate of increase that would be required. Given the small size and undergraduate nature of our system of higher education, reaching this target will also require a deliberate strategy for internationalising our system. As the World Bank report states, 'in most cases, universities [need] students and [academics] who are not exclusively from the country where the university operates. This will enable them to attract the most talented people, no matter where they come from, and open themselves to new ideas and approaches' (Salmi, 2009).

¹ The Green Paper (2012) sets the figure at a comparable 1 500,000, following the Human Resource Development Strategy (2009).

In summary, one can boldly say that South Africa's higher education system is confronted with three major priorities:

- a. to produce a highly qualified human resource base which is needed for national development,
- b. (to develop the next generation of academics to sustain and transform the system; and
- c. to produce high-quality research and innovation outputs that can enhance the country's global competitiveness.

All three priorities are absolutely dependent on access to scholarly works published by other scholars, local and international, in leading journals, books, monographs and so on. Many of these publications are high-cost, commercial titles published by large multi-national corporations. As part of a set of initiatives to respond to these challenges, our annual operational plan has identified a number of priorities that we should focus our attention on in 2013 and beyond.

The following projects are worth reflecting on:

Building the next generation of academics: As an initiative to address the current aging generation of productive academics and researchers in the system, HESA would like to launch the development of a 300-strong next generation of academics, over a three-year period, at a cost of approximately R500 million. To that end, in 2011, HESA developed a proposal, *Proposal for a National Programme to Develop the Next Generation of Academics for South African Higher Education*, which is now being discussed with the Ministries of Higher Education and Training and Science and Technology.

Early Career Researchers Programme: Alongside growing the next generation of academics, the higher education sector wishes to prioritise enhancing the development of early career researchers, by training newly qualified doctoral graduates by preparing them for an academic career particularly in areas such as networking, writing for academic publications; and applying and managing research grants and so on.

National Benchmark Tests (NBTs): The NBTs were designed in 2009/10 to determine the competency level of university-registered first year students. The objective was to assess the degree of preparedness for higher education studies, with intent to devise and implement appropriate interventions strategies quite early post-admission, to enhance their success and improve overall throughput rates in universities.

Rural Campuses Connection Project: This is a R28 million project – initiated by the Minister of Higher Education and Training in 2011, to extend the South African National Research Network's (SANReN) broadband infrastructure (last mile connection) to rural university campuses. By June 2013, the main campuses of four universities had been connected to access wider bandwidth. Nine additional projects were also underway at five other universities - planned for implementation during 2013 and beyond.

Study on Valuing Internationalisation of SA Higher Education Sector: In the quest to respond decisively, and factually to public perceptions in South Africa, that our Higher Education system prioritises international students over our domestic students in view of the latter's ability to pay student fees, and that our HEIs prioritise academics from other countries of the world to the exclusion of our own home-grown crop, HESA decided in 2012, to allocate a budget to commission a study in this regard. The study seeks to:

- create public awareness about the value and benefits of international students and academics to our system of Higher Education and society in general;
- demonstrate, the direct socio-economic contribution of international students and academics to our universities, cities and communities within which they are located;
- make a case for the state to create a favourable regulatory for our Higher Education system to attract and support both international students and foreign academics, and
- to internationalise our system of Higher Education, and spearhead the development of a Higher Education Internationalisation Policy Framework.

It is anticipated that the study will be completed in 2014.

Infrastructure Study: Buildings and Equipment: In 2012, HESA completed a study on Infrastructure (Buildings and Equipment) in higher education institutions, as part as of assembling commentary to influence higher education funding framework. HESA engaged the Ministerial Committee on Review of the Funding Framework for Universities, and the DHET on the findings and recommendations of this report in June 2012. Of particular interest to HESA was the recommendation for the development of specific guidelines for higher education policy regarding state funding of new buildings and equipment for teaching and research purpose.

HIV and AIDS Programme: The Higher Education HIV/AIDS Programme (HEAIDS) develops and supports HIV mitigation programmes at South Africa's public higher education and training institutions. HEAIDS supports institutions in responding to the pandemic through their core functions of teaching and learning, research and innovation and community engagement. The programme is rooted in a concept of the responsibility of institutions to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic on a human rights basis on at least five fronts, including: a) Developing HIV prevention programmes for students and staff, and facilities for the treatment, care and support of students and staff living with HIV; b) Providing a comprehensive workplace HIV/AIDS programme that caters to the needs of staff; and c) Educating and equipping students to make a contribution to the national HIV/AIDS response in their future career fields. HEAIDS is an initiative of the DHET that is undertaken by HESA.

Due to heightened awareness resulting from programme activities over the years, the HEAIDS programme has grown in leaps and bounds, and attracted phenomenal funding from both our DHET and the global community. Outcomes of this programme will soon be reported on, as a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework begins to bear fruit.

National Information Service for Higher Education: This project provides a service to prospective Higher Education students with information on career options, and minimum entry requirements for degree studies in our universities. The programme targets learners from Grade 9 to 12.

Higher Education Leadership and Management Programme: HESA is committed to the promotion of strategically planned leadership and management development for middle managers and aspiring leaders in the higher education sector. In order to build capacity within the system and support individual and institutional leadership, HESA developed and implemented the Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) Programme in 2003. The programme's underlying aim is to facilitate learning for the middle and senior managers in higher education institutions and to equip them with the skills to successfully grow into leadership and managerial positions, and while there, tackle the challenges confronting their institutions.

There are two components to the HELM programme, **a)** the *HESA Fellows Exchange programme*, whose aim is to strengthen management and leadership capacity in the higher

education sector through experiential learning. HESA places participants in host institutions for a period of six weeks, under the tutelage of an experienced mentor. Three cohorts have since gone through the programme, and their experiences and programme outcomes are discussed in two publications, the last of which is being developed as we speak.

The second leg is **b) HELM Lead**, conceptualised in 2012 to target individuals with exceptional leadership and management potential in their institutions and profession, and expose them to informal development interventions (i.e. roundtable debates, networking, public lectures, mentoring and coaching) to enable the participants to reflect on what they learn in real-life situations and apply their learning to their own environments. HESA designed modules and secured funding from the Education, Training and Development Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP-SETA). We awarded 32 fellowships to candidates drawn from our 23 member institutions.

As can be imagined, all these projects are meant to contribute to the strengthening of our Higher Education system in the areas of teaching and learning; research and innovation and governance and management of our institutions.

3 POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN HESA, PASA AND SABA

It seems to me that there exist possibilities for a partnership between HESA and the two organisations in the following areas, subject to further discussion on modalities:

- 3.1 **Strengthening the capacity of the existing University Presses:** As you are aware, some of our universities have established university presses including University of Cape Town, University of Kwazulu Natal, University of the Witwatersrand, and University of South Africa. A fundamental question is how best publishing houses and booksellers can strengthen the capabilities of these university presses, thereby collaborating with them to ensure that the wider needs of the researchers and scholarly communities are better served. As they struggle to evolve their business models to include digital scholarly publishing, commercial publishers and booksellers are called upon to partner with university presses with a view to building their sustainable business models and funding innovative digital scholarly publishing in diverse arenas.
- 3.2 **Facilitating online access and scholarly e book material:** It has become common knowledge that there are new approaches underway at scholarly presses including the following: publishing open digital editions of books combined with paid print editions for sale using short run or print-on-demand (POD) methods; publishing primarily via open access; issuing e-books for sale, either singly or in collections; and Experimenting with digital publishing projects that do not fit into the standard book and journal formats. A fundamental question we would like to pose for our own context is: are there possibilities and opportunities for both PASA and SABA to facilitate online access of scholarly material.
- 3.3 **Engaging with our strategy groups:** I submit that the PASA and SABA should find creative ways of engaging with our strategy groups, particularly the Teaching and Learning and Research and Innovation ones, to find better ways of supporting the agenda of HESA, particularly in relation to access to scholarly material. The modalities of implementing such a partnership could be spelt out at the coming meetings between the three bodies, i.e. HESA, PASA and SABA.
- 3.4 **Conducting joint research projects to understand the evolution of scholarly publishing in South Africa:** At an appropriate time, HESA; PASA and SABA need

to conduct a study to understand how the scholarly publishing industry has evolved over time from the perspective of opportunities, prospects, emerging technology platforms, and challenges. In such a study, I submit, factors bedeviling the thriving of the industry would be identified, and growth opportunities discovered, with a view to developing a joint action plan between HESA, PASA and SABA on how to address the challenges identified earlier.

- 3.5 **Strengthening new publishing models in the electronic environment:** With the emergence of digital technology, HESA, PASA and SABA should discuss better ways through which this technology can support the production of knowledge in our universities and its dissemination amongst scholarly communities in a cost-effective manner. A meeting with an association of university librarians
- 3.6 **Zero-rating VAT on academic and scholarly books:** It is common knowledge that universities are obliged to pay VAT at the full standard rate, currently 14%, when purchasing academic books for their libraries, in spite of the fact that academic books are zero-rated in some parts of the world. This VAT burden means that our university libraries have less to spend on academic publications. Against this background, we urge both PASA and SABA to engage with the National Treasury and South African Revenue Service to add academic books to the zero-rated goods list. This will not only increase the amount of money available to be spend on academics books, but will also significantly reduce the purchasing costs borne by universities and students alike.

4 CONCLUSION

In lieu of conclusion, let me end by again expressing my sincere gratitude to both PASA and SABA for inviting HESA to address your conference. HESA would very much wish to continue the conversation with you on some of the issues I have a raised in this input. In this way, we will be ensuring that our educational transformation consolidates our collective commitment to research-led teaching, and that students and academics at our universities continue to be exposed to the power of ideas found in scholarly books, journals and monographs.

I wish you success in your deliberations, and look forward to a more productive conversation with both PASA and SABA beyond this Conference.

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