A New Contract between Higher Education and Society: Responsiveness through a Scholarship of Engagement

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1. Introduction

Firstly, I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to present this paper. I hope the paper will make some contribution to our thinking about civic engagement in higher education. Prior to the conference, I received a concept paper from the organizers setting the scene for this paper. I will endeavor to address the key questions raised in the concept paper in relation to the civic mission of higher education.

At the outset, it is important to make a clear distinction between community service in higher education as a philanthropic activity and community service as a scholarly activity. The latter integrates community service into mainstream academic programmes and is a vehicle for, and measure of, civic engagement in higher education. This paper will focus on community service as a scholarly activity. The term most frequently used to describe scholarly community service is “service-learning” (Stanton, Giles & Cruz, 1999).

The Education White Paper 3 of 1997 (DoE), a Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, makes specific references to the role of community service within the overarching task of transforming the higher education system in South Africa. It calls on institutions to “demonstrate social responsibility.... and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes”. It states that one of the goals of higher education is “to promote and develop social responsibility and awareness among students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes”. The White Paper shows receptiveness to “the growing interest in community service programmes” and gives, in principle, support for “feasibility studies and pilot programmes which explore the potential of community service in higher education” as a mechanism for engaging in the reconstruction and development of civil society and the transformation of higher education in relation to societal needs.

Taking its cue from the White Paper, the Joint Education Trust (JET), in partnership with the Ford and Kellogg Foundations, launched the Community – Higher Education – Service Partnerships (CHESP) initiative in 1998. The aim of CHESP is to contribute to the reconstruction and development of South African civil society through the development and promotion of socially responsive ‘models’ for higher education. Central to these ‘models’ is the development of partnerships between communities, higher education institutions, and the public, private, and NGO sectors. The purpose of these partnerships are: community empowerment and development; transformation of the higher education system in relation to community needs; and enhancing service delivery to previously underserved communities (JET, 1999).

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2 Community service as a scholarly activity is also referred to as community-based education (Schmidt, Magzoub, Feletti et. al. 2000); service-learning (Stanton, Giles & Cruz, 1999); academically based service-learning (Harkavy & Romer, 1999); and community-based learning (Driscoll, Strouse, & Longley, 1997).
Through the CHESP project, JET supports the development of the civic engagement agenda in higher education at a national, institutional, and programmatic level. At a national level, JET is currently working with the Department of Education on the drafting of a policy and implementation plan for community service in higher education. JET is also working with the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) on developing indicators and methods for quality assurance of community service. At the institutional level, JET is working with several higher education institutions on developing policies and strategies for civic engagement through community-based academic programmes. Seventy-six such programmes, across thirty-nine academic disciplines, involving more than three thousand students, are currently being monitored and evaluated by JET. The ideas presented in this paper are drawn from the literature and JET’s work in this field over the past three years.

2. Higher Education Policy and Civic Engagement

The first question raised in the concept paper is: “Do the existing policy instruments such as the national planning, the proposed new funding dispensation, and quality assurance help higher education to become more responsive” - to societal needs?

2.1 The National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, February 2001)

The purpose of the National Plan is to restructure the higher education system so as to render it more equitable and efficient to generate the desired outputs in terms of student diversity and numbers. The plan does not address the quality of these outputs in terms of values, attitudes and the ability to apply knowledge to South Africa’s social and economic problems, or the implications these qualities may have for the transformation of the higher education system. In the close to one hundred-page document, there is one reference in the National Plan that is relevant to the civic engagement of higher education. It is found under “Regional Collaboration Mechanisms” (point 6.3.3) and suggests that the functions of higher education regional consortia might include “facilitating dialogue and building relationships between higher education institutions and other organs of society, including business and labour, thereby ensuring greater responsiveness to changing social and economic needs”. In essence, the National Plan is concerned with the nuts and bolts of the system. It is about shape and size of the system not about the quality of the outputs produced by the system.

2.2 Funding of Public Higher Education: A New Framework (DoE, March 2001)

The proposed new funding dispensation takes its cue from the National Plan. It acts as a steering mechanism to achieve the outputs required from the higher education system in terms of diversity (e.g. undergraduate; graduate) and numbers of students. It is not concerned with the substantive quality of the outputs of the system, or the transformation requirements within the system to produce the desired outputs in terms of quality. As it stands, the proposed funding formula makes provision for “funds for teaching and support activities, including funds for academic development and foundation programmes, and funds for research”. The proposed formula makes no provision for community service as a separate funding category and therefore does not, in its current form, act as a steering mechanism to operationalise the civic mission of higher education in terms of the White Paper.

2.3 Founding Document of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) (Council on Higher Education, January 2001)

Unlike the National Plan and the proposed funding formula, the Founding Document of Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education is concerned essentially with the quality of the outputs produced by the higher education system and the transformation of the system to achieve the desired qualities. The HEQC emphasis its “commitment to a quality driven higher education system that contributes to the socio-
economic development, social justice, and innovative scholarship in South Africa.... The central objective of the HEQC is to ensure that providers effectively and efficiently deliver education, training, research and community service which is 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 HEQC specifically identifies academically based community service as an area for quality assurance along with teaching and research. Its Founding Document states: “The quality of knowledge-based community service programmes is assumed to be an integral part of the CHE and HEQC’s overall responsibility for quality assurance in higher education. Many countries have seen an increase in the inclusion of community service programmes in higher education curricula and in their assessment and certification as part of the formal learning process”.

2.4 Funding of Community-based Education

Of the policy documents identified above, the Founding Document of the HEQC is the only document that potentially serves as an instrument promoting the civic mission of higher education. However, the extent to which quality assurance policy is able to do is likely to depend on whether the proposed funding formula can be modified to act as a steering mechanism, not only for the diversity and number of students required from the higher education system, but also for the quality of students produced by the system. If higher education institutions are expected to produce graduates able to apply their knowledge to the social and economic ills of our land, they will require the resources to do so.

In June 2000 JET convened a meeting of University Vice Chancellors, Technikon Principals, and representatives from the DoE, the CHE and SAVCA to explore the direction of community service in South African higher education (JET, 2000). Although participants unanimously supported the integration of academically based community service in higher education, lack of resources was identified as the single most important prohibiting factor. Without assistance from government, the civic mission of higher education expressed in the White Paper will remain on the margins of our institutions, practiced by a handful of innovative academics, subject to the availability of grant funds. While lack of data on the cost implications of academically based community service may prohibit informed decisions about government funding, earmarked funds to build institutional capacity for community-based higher education could perhaps be considered in the interim. Under the funding of research the proposed funding formula makes provision for “earmarked funds for research development and capacity-building, as well as innovation”. Could this not also be done for academically based community service?

3. Indicators of Civic Engagement in Higher Education

Two further questions raised in the concept paper are: What conditions facilitate the civic engagement of higher education institutions? How can civic engagement be monitored, evaluated and reviewed? I will endeavour to respond to both these questions in this section.

Reflecting on the work of Campus Compact (www.compact.org), an organisation dedicated to extending and deepening the civic engagement of American higher education institutions over the past fifteen years, Hollander, Saltmarsh and Zlotkowski (in press) identifies several indicators of engagement for higher education institutions. With some modifications, these indicators confirm JET’s experience over the past three years. The indicators may serve both as conditions facilitating the civic engagement of higher education institutions and as indicators to monitor, evaluate and review the extent to which a higher education institution, faculty, academic department, or academic programme is engaged. Before proceeding to the proposed indicators, I would like to introduce a possible method for monitoring and evaluating the extent to which they have been achieved.
Table 1: Level of Higher Education Institution Civic Engagement

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<td>Level One Low Engagement</td>
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<td>Epistemology</td>
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<td>Pedagogy</td>
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<td>Health Sciences only</td>
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<td>Academic Staff Development</td>
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With reference to Holland’s (1997) use of a matrix as a diagnostic tool for analyzing institutional commitment to service, a similar method may begin to shape our thinking about monitoring and evaluating civic engagement in South African higher education institutions. Table 1 provides a matrix linking the potential indicators of engagement to be discussed in this paper with low, moderate, high and full levels of engagement. With reference to this matrix, descriptive characteristics for each cell would give meaning and value to each indicator at each level of engagement. For example: Low engagement on the “Disciplines and Interdisciplinary” indicator might be indicative of limited participation by only a few disciplines (e.g. Health Sciences); moderate engagement might mean participation by several disciplines (e.g. Health Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts, Law, etc.); high engagement might mean participation by most disciplines with some interdisciplinary activity; and full engagement might mean participation by just about every discipline with extensive interdisciplinary work. The interpretive strength of a given cell is likely to be enhanced by the
specificity and multiplicity of characteristics assigned to it. Different characteristics may be assigned to a cell for institutional, faculty, departmental, and programme evaluations. In addition to using the matrix as a diagnostic tool for monitoring and evaluation, it could also be used as a tool for setting goals and developing strategies for civic engagement.

As we go through these indicators in the far left column of the matrix, it might be interesting to contemplate what characteristics you might assign to the low, moderate, high, and full engagement cells corresponding with each indicator. It might also be interesting to do a mental self-assessment of your own institution and its level of engagement in terms of these indicators. It must be emphasized however, that neither the proposed indicators, nor the proposed method of monitoring and evaluation, are intended to be prescriptive; their potential value lies in the possibilities they suggest. Now let’s proceed with the indicators.

3.1 Epistemology (The notion of scholarship)

Does the institution perceive, value, encourage and support knowledge gained through experience of community service as an academically credible method of creating meaning and understanding?

Higher education institutions have a longstanding tradition of teaching, research and service. Of these, service remains the least defined and least considered as a scholarly activity. However, in recent years, the spotlight has fallen increasingly on the role of service in terms of its contribution to the development of civil society and its enrichment of scholarly activity (Bringle, 1999; Boyer, 1990; Ehrlich, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 1996; Stanton, 1999; Subotsky, 2000).

In his renowned book “Scholarship Reconsidered” Ernest Boyer (1990) proposes four necessary and interrelated forms of scholarship which together amounts to what is increasingly referred to as a 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 service, viewed and practiced 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 service, 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.
3.2 Pedagogy

Does the institution have accredited academic programmes that address the development priorities of local communities and enhance the acquisition of disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge (service-learning courses)?

The term “service-learning” refers to a pedagogy that gives expression to and acts as a catalyst for Boyer’s notion of a scholarship of engagement. The American Association for Higher Education defines service-learning as “a method under which students learn and develop through thoughtfully-organised service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with an institution of higher education, and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students; and includes structured time for students to reflect on the service experience” (AAHE, 1997).

“At the core of wider institutional engagement lies an academic commitment to the kind of teaching, learning, and knowledge creation that fosters civic engagement. Courses with a service-learning or community-based component signify adoption of an engaged pedagogy. Embedded within such a curriculum is a reflective teaching methodology that de-centers the instructor, and in so doing, recognizes that the authority of knowledge in the classroom is shared among faculty members, students, and partners in the community” (Hollander, Saltmarsh and Zlotkowski, in press).

3.3 Disciplines and interdisciplinarity

Is service-learning relegated to a small number of health and social science disciplines, or is it embedded in all disciplines within the institution and in interdisciplinary programmes?

Community development cannot happen effectively within the narrow confines of traditional academic disciplines. The development priorities of communities inevitably demand the application of a wide range of disciplinary knowledge to a variety of social issues. The community context acts as a catalyst pushing the traditional boundaries of the discipline encouraging interdisciplinarity and a scholarship of integration. It encourages reflection on knowledge, new interpretations, and in so doing enriches and contributes to the discovery of knowledge within and between disciplines. This is a scholarship of engagement at work.

The sixty-seven service-learning courses currently researched by JET includes thirty-nine academic disciplines in the following faculties: agriculture (6); architecture and town planning (5); management and economical sciences (7); education (9); engineering (2); health sciences (12); arts, social sciences and humanities (26); law (3); and natural sciences (6). An engaged institution will have a good spread of service-learning courses across all faculties and disciplines. The American Association of Higher Educations (1997-2000) eighteen volume series on service-learning in the disciplines (1997-2000) provides a useful guide to service-learning courses in a variety disciplines.

3.4 Academic Staff Development

Are there opportunities for academics to develop their skills in service-learning curricula design and reflective teaching methodologies that integrate community development objectives and student learning objectives. Are academics provided with incentives and do they get support to develop service-learning courses?
For service-learning to take hold within a higher education institution academics must have access to opportunities to develop new skills in course design and instruction. Unlike traditional courses, service-learning courses cannot be designed in isolation from the community context in which they will be delivered. The best service-learning courses are designed in partnership with community and service agencies that are likely to participate in the course ensuring both relevance to the community and sustainability through the service agencies. For academics to confidently incorporate service-learning into their courses, they are likely to require incentives in the form of curriculum development grants, reductions in teaching loads, and would need to participate in on-campus, regional, national and international seminars, workshops, and conferences that will help them gain the skills they need to employ an engaged pedagogy. Faculty development must be taken seriously as a component of institutional engagement (Holland, 1999; Zlotkowski, 1998).

3.5 Academic Staff Promotion

_Do the promotion guidelines for academic staff recognize, include and reward academically based community service as scholarly activity on par with teaching and research?_

Academic staff promotion and reward guidelines are perhaps the single most important factor determining the roles that academics assume and the activities they engage in. Promotion and reward guidelines tell academics what the institution perceives and values as important in terms of their roles, responsibilities, and activities as academics. If an institution is serious about its contribution to the reconstruction and development of local communities through a scholarship of engagement, this commitment must be reflected in its academic staff promotion and reward guidelines. If the guidelines do not reflect this commitment, the institutions civic engagement agenda is likely to remain on the margins, driven essentially by a handful of innovative academics and students inspired largely by altruistic motives.

The development of a new and expanded notion of scholarship initiated by Boyer (1996; 1990) has lead to many higher education institutions revising their academic staff promotion and reward guidelines to make provision for the scholarship of discovery (research), the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application (service-learning) and the scholarship of teaching.

3.6 Institutional Leadership

_Do the top leadership of the institution visibly support a scholarship of engagement with neighbouring communities, in both word and deed? To what extent has the Vice Chancellor/Principal been in the forefront of institutional transformation that supports civic engagement? To what extent is the institution known for its contribution in local community development efforts? (Hollander, Saltmarsh, Zlotkowski, in press)._

Leadership from the top is essential for accomplishing most of the conditions that facilitate civic engagement in a meaningful and sustained manner. In JET’s experience, institutions that have made the most progress towards civic engagement have had the most involvement from their top leadership. In some institutions, the top leadership has taken direct responsibility for steering the institution towards the development of an institution-wide policy and strategy for engagement and setting the stage for the development of service-learning courses. At several institutions the top leadership convenes meetings with Deans to discuss the development of service-learning courses within their Faculty. The University of the Free State has created a full time post, at executive level, dedicated to managing the engagement of the university in the reconstruction and development of communities within the region.
3.7 Enabling mechanisms

*Are there committee structures, or persons serving on existing committees, designated to facilitate the passage of civic engagement through institutional decision-making bodies? Does the institution have a visible, strategically located, and easily accessible structure on campus that function both to assist academics with community-based education and to broker relationships with community and service agency partners?*

It is essential that the leadership at the top is supported by appropriate committee structures, or persons sitting on existing committee structures, that represent and promote civic engagement in the affairs of the institution especially in terms of policy, strategic objectives, business plans, and the allocation of resources. Several South African higher education institutions have established committee structures representing the civic engagement agenda. Generally these structures are considerably more successful if plugged into mainstream decision-making structures and processes within the institution. In some institutions “loose” forum type structures have been created. While these are useful for the purpose of stimulating discussion and debate, their impact on decision-making within the institution is limited.

Reflecting on their extensive experience in the United States, Campus Compact unequivocally states that: “the single most important enabling mechanism for community-based education is a centralized office that performs a wide variety of functions. Indeed, so important is this particular mechanism that there are few, if any, genuinely engaged campuses that do not have one” (Hollander, Saltmarsh, Zlotkowski, in press).

Several higher education institutions (e.g. UFS; UND; US; UNITRA; UWC; WITS) in South Africa have established a centre dedicated to supporting academics with community-based education and brokering relationships with community and service agency partners. It is important that these centres are strategically located, that they are visible and accessible, and that they have the capacity to support academics appropriately. Reflecting on the work of JET over the past few years, we would recommend that, as a starting point, the minimum effective staffing requirements of such a centre is a full time Director, at senior lecturer or preferably professorial level, a Community Liaison Officer, and an Administrative Assistant. These requirements are likely to expand as the civic engagement of the institution expands and deepens. Within the United States the centres that have been most successful as a scholarly endeavour are directly accountable to or at least have strong ties to the equivalent of our Deputy Vice Chancellor: Academic thus linking the activities of the centre directly with the mainstream academic business of the institution.

3.8 Partnerships

*Are there structured partnerships between the higher education institution and its neighbouring communities and service agencies?*

Engagement involves a partnership between the higher education institution and elements of society in which there is a mutual determination of goals and objectives designed to address societal problems (Byrne, 2000). Partnerships are the vehicle for engagement. It is in partnership, when confronted with the different realities and forms of knowledge each partner brings, that new realities and new forms of knowledge emerge. It is within the context of effective partnership that the voice of the community, and its reality, is heard. Not much is written on partnerships between communities, higher education institutions, and service agencies and that which is written tends to address the dynamics of partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, in press; Campus Compact, 2000; Harkavy & Wiewel, 1995; Holland & Gelmon, 1998) and not their form or structure. However, there are several examples of partnerships between these constituencies here in South Africa and abroad. The level of commitment to these partnerships, their purpose, scope, functionality, and the degree to which they are formalized differ significantly.
Reflecting on these partnerships, consideration should be given to the formation of strategic partnerships between civic organisations, higher education institutions, and the public, private and NGO sectors within a given geographic region for the purpose of reconstruction and development in the region. In the Free State, discussions are well underway to formalize a partnership between the University, the Technikon, the Departments of Agriculture, Economic Affairs, Education, Health, Labour, and Welfare, the local Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the local authority, and appropriate ward councillors. Within the framework of this overarching strategic partnership, we propose the formation of instrumental partnerships around the development priorities within the region. These may include issues such as: early childhood development; nutrition; HIV/AIDS; literacy; school development; crime and violence; housing; job creation; and teenage pregnancy; to name just a few of our most pressing social problems. Within the context of these development priorities, a wide range of service-learning courses could be developed giving substance to the partnership, and serving the educational objectives of the institution, the service objectives of service agencies, and the development objectives of the community.

3.9 Resource Allocation

What percentage of its annual budget does the higher education institution allocate towards its engagement in the reconstruction and development of its region through scholarly work? Are incentives made available for academics to direct their scholarly activity towards the development of the region?

Clearly “resource allocation” is the ultimate test of an institutions commitment to any endeavour including its civic engagement. In the final analysis, it is not the institutions mission, policy or strategic statements that determine its priorities. It is what the institution allocates its resources too that makes the strongest statement about its priorities. While civic engagement is one of the key areas attracting soft money, all too often the institutions civic engagement is left dependent on soft money. “Nothing is more common than for a higher education institution to recognize the benefits of engagement.....and to try to capitalize on those benefits....without making any substantive investment in the resources such engagement requires. Many potentially fine programs have been initiated with the help of grants, only to crumble away once their external source of funding has dried up” (Hollander, Saltmarsh, Zlotkowski, in press). In addition to financial resources “space” is an important resource.

One of the higher education institutions JET is working with currently contributed 1.7 million rand from its central budget to civic engagement activities during 2001 year and is considering allocating 3 million in 2002. Civic engagement is now a standard line item on the central budget of this institution. All posts dedicated to operationalising the university’s civic mission, including a university executive member, operational Director, five Community Liaison Officers and three support staff are funded from the central budget of the institution. If the higher education institution can fund the infrastructure (i.e. space and staffing) required to operationalise its civic mission it will be in a stronger position to leverage additional funding for programmatic activities such as service-learning courses.

3.10 Mission, policies and strategies

Does the mission statement of the institution include the notion of civic engagement and, if so, is this dimension articulated in the institutions policies, strategies and business plans?

This indicator was left to last since its substance is likely to be shaped by the issues raised in the previous indicators. During 1997 (Perold & Omar) and 1998 (Perold) JET conducted a survey of community service in South African higher education institutions. One of the
findings of this research was that most higher education institutions included the notion of civic engagement in their mission statements but that few had articulated policies, strategies and business plans to operationalise this dimension. In the 1998/99 submission of three year rolling plans to the Department of Education, only one higher education institution included civic engagement, in the form of service-learning, in its strategic objectives. Although most of the higher education institutions surveyed by JET had community service programmes, few of these programmes were linked to scholarly activity and most were initiated by innovative students and academics rather than being part of a cohesive and purposeful institution-wide policy and strategy for civic engagement. Clearly, if an institution is to give meaningful, coherent, and sustained expression to its civic mission the articulation and approval of policies, strategies, and business plans to operationalise this mission are as essential as it is for teaching and research.

4. What are the roles of different constituencies in ensuring higher education responsiveness to societal needs?

Not much attention is given to this question in this paper. Suffice it to say that higher education constituencies include the Department of Education in terms of funding, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in terms of accreditation of community-based academic programmes, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) in terms of setting standards and quality assurance of institutions and programmes, and higher education institutions, academics and students in terms of operationalising the civic mission of higher education. Other constituencies are likely to include several public sector departments (e.g. Agriculture, Arts Culture Science & Technology, Correctional Services, Economic Affairs, Education, Environmental Affairs & Tourism, Health, Housing, Justice, Labour, Police Services, Public Works, Sport & Recreation, Water Affairs & Forestry, Welfare & Population Development) the private sector, and the NGO sector. The roles and responsibilities of each constituency are likely to be negotiated in planning regional strategies for reconstruction and development.

5. Conclusion

Reflecting on the work of JET over the past three years there is a groundswell of support for scholarly community service in higher education. However, without the necessary policy guidelines, resources, and capacity building within our higher education institutions there can be little doubt that the civic mission of higher education expressed in the White Paper will remain on the margins of our institutions driven by a handful of innovative and socially concerned academics.

Appropriate policy guidelines can significantly influence the civic engagement of higher education institutions. Policies of particular importance is the criteria for the accreditation of academic programmes, the standards used for quality assurance, and the extent to which the funding formula acts as a steering mechanism for the civic engagement of higher education institutions. These three policy areas – accreditation of programmes, quality assurance, and funding must be aligned to produce the desired qualities from the higher education system.

In addition to appropriate policy guidelines and resources there is little doubt that higher education institutions will need support to build their capacity to embrace a scholarship of engagement at an institutional, faculty, departmental and academic programme level. JET's current research through the CHESP project will illuminate the kind of support required to build the capacity of higher education institutions to fully embrace the civic mission of the White Paper. However, mechanisms may need to be established to support higher education institutions to be responsive to societal needs through a scholarship of engagement.
References


