

Research at universities 'boosts case for four-year-long first degrees'

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Education Correspondent

RESEARCH shows a four-year undergraduate degree would allow the higher education sector to support students whose school education had not adequately prepared them for higher education, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) said yesterday.

Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande has made better success rates in SA's



Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande has made improving the student success rate at universities a priority

universities and colleges one of his priorities. Nzimande's department is still considering changing

the minimum number of years required to complete most South African first degrees from three to four, spokeswoman Ranjeni Munusamy said yesterday.

Research shows 40% of those who enrol at a higher education institution will never get a qualification, and 50% of that same group will take five years to graduate, said CHE advice and monitoring director Dr Judy Backhouse. Almost 40% (38,8%) study by correspondence, and many of

these would be studying part-time, she said.

The CHE research is to be published later this year, said Backhouse.

The research found that better results were achieved when students were given a wider range of opportunities to learn, such as challenging assignments, "peer-facilitated" learning, writing-intensive courses, and discussions with academic staff, she said. Institutions needed more time to

implement this type of learning intervention.

"We see it (the research report) as more than just an input to the (debate around) the four-year degree programme. It's also about how institutions can improve teaching and learning," she said.

"We are trying to encourage institutions to make use of valid data to improve teaching and learning, instead of 'a hunch'. Hopefully this will lead to an increase in student pass rates."

Black, Indian/Asian students reported significantly higher levels of academic challenge than white and coloured students, and the research shows that 54% of students had often worked "harder than they thought they could" to meet a lecturer's needs. A racial breakdown showed 59% of black, 49% of coloured, 45% of white and 40% of Indian/Asian students felt this way.

The research comes from a pilot study at the universities of

the Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch, the Free State, Fort Hare, Johannesburg and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and at two universities of technology, Tshwane and Cape Peninsula.

A second phase of the project, in which the higher education council hopes more institutions will participate, is being launched, with a kickoff workshop planned for the end of the month, Backhouse said.

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Broadcast technology 'not ideal' for state entities

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TELEVISION audience measurement firm AGB Nielsen yesterday said it was not ideal for state-owned entities to handle technology related to broadcasting, because their structures were not equipped to keep up with global trends.

Toni Petra, MD of AGB Nielsen Media Research Corporate Support Centre in Switzerland, said placing government-led companies in charge of this type of technology often saw countries being left behind when it came to broadcasting. "The problem is that technology changes so quickly that the government procurement process cannot keep up," she said.

A similar debate has evolved around state-owned signal distributor Sentech, which is considered crucial to public broadcasting as it has the most comprehensive infrastructure but which has failed to deliver on many of its mandates, one being the creation of a national wireless broadband network that would provide connectivity to schools, hospitals, clinics, community centres, post offices and government offices in under-served areas.

Petra, who is originally from SA, said she had not kept up with the issues surrounding Sentech but that her impression of SA was that broadcasters were "very jacked up and keen to learn from global trends". However, they were being held back by problems with infrastructure.

"Development is driven by infrastructure. Online, internet and broadband are still not that accessible here," she said.

AGB Nielsen will be engaged in measuring viewership of the 2010 Soccer World Cup. Its research will involve monitoring TV, internet and mobile coverage of the games for the South African Advertising Research Foundation.

"The big challenge in SA is to measure out-of-home viewing of the games where people gather at one home to watch a game, and we have equipped over 100 people with smart-phones who will be sent a survey five times a day to find out what they are doing or watching," Petra said.

Petra feels viewership of the World Cup games will differ from other sporting events overseas in that there will be less online coverage. "Again, SA does not have the infrastructure to support video streaming or mobile streaming," she said.

Measuring of viewership had become increasingly difficult, she said. This was because technology had increased, people's viewing habits were changing, there was greater media convergence and cross-media behaviour, and more use was being made of personal video recorders.

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Money no bar to applying new Child Justice Act

Departments make up shortfall

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THE Department of Justice has said the Child Justice Act will be implemented next month, despite initial funding problems.

The act aims to ensure children in conflict with the law are not exposed to adult offenders. It also provides that children be put into rehabilitation programmes immediately after being arrested, rather than after they have been tried. The act was signed last year by Kgalema Motlanthe when he was still acting president.

The department requested R58,1m from the Treasury, a budget it said would help to set up needed infrastructure for the 2010-11 financial year. Only R30m was approved.

Department of Justice spokesman Tlali Tlali said the three departments involved in the implementation of the act — police, social development and correctional services — would each contribute the remaining R27,1m to address the shortfall.

The department had budgeted R9m for the appointment of 111 dedicated child justice court clerks, R1m for the provision of training and support to the provinces, R10,6m to appoint 20 district court magistrates, and R10m for the appointment of 30 child justice prosecutors.

It also budgeted R10m for the appointment of 60 Legal Aid attorneys and R17,5m for the provision of rehabilitation services, especially in rural areas.

Ngoako Ramathodi, chairman of Parliament's portfolio committee on justice and constitutional development, said all relevant departments were working on adjusting their budgets to accommodate the act.

"We have already dealt with (most) elements in the act. We are ready to implement it next month," Ramathodi said.

The act was meant to apply to child offenders aged between 10 and 18 years, Ramathodi said.

Jacqui Gallinetti, senior lecturer in law at the University of the Western Cape, said: "With the current justice system, children who are in conflict with the law are treated the same way as adults. They are prosecuted at adult courts without proper assessments by probation officers."

Gallinetti, who is also a member of a Cape Town-based Child Justice Alliance, said: "With the new act, every child who is alleged to have committed an offence while under 18 years of age, will be required to appear at a preliminary inquiry in respect of that offence where he or she must be assessed by a probation officer."

She said the act would ensure that children were imprisoned only as a last resort.

Legal Aid SA said it had been training its practitioners to be ready for when the new act came into operation.

An executive at Legal Aid SA, Patrick Hundermark, said the organisation — which provides legal assistance to about 500 000 people a year who cannot afford private legal representation — assisted about 39 000 children in conflict with the law in its 2008-09 financial year.

"We are training our practitioners on the new aspects of the act. Because every single court in the country is a child justice centre, we will be using the same coverage plan to cater for children in conflict with the law in all courts," Hundermark said. *With Ernest Mabuza*

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Corporate gifts should be about giving back as well as handing out, writes Katy Chance

Branding that brings a new awareness

THE culture of gift giving is a universal one and, increasingly, a corporate one. But as mass-produced branded pens, key rings, flash sticks and card holders are all hopelessly 10 minutes ago, companies are having to think laterally about gifts that come bearing their name. And they're starting to think about the story behind the gift.

"We are experiencing a big demand for gifts that make a difference to a community," says Marion Pearce, deputy CEO of The Hope Factory. "Why buy AIDS ribbons from a factory in China when you could buy from a South African company that works within communities affected by AIDS?"

Started by Pearce and CEO Elizabeth Zamboni nine years ago in a garage with a couple of sewing machines in Cape Town, The Hope Factory trains 128 people a year at a single factory in Port Elizabeth. The two were already friends; Zamboni has a background in fashion. Pearce in corporate communications.

"We wanted to help transform SA in some way. With Liz's background in fashion, we looked at the clothing industry and decided we could help with skills and help people learn to support themselves."

They were assisted by the Department of Labour until 2008, but then the department changed the tendering process and the proposal had to be resubmitted. They're still waiting for an answer.

"In the meantime, we had to continue and position ourselves correctly for the private sector," says Pearce. The Hope Factory is now the enterprise development initiative of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants and is run from its offices.

Major corporate funders are DRA Mineral Projects, who came on board last year through a deal facilitated by Tshikululu Social Investments, Nedbank, and Actichem.

As companies cut budgets in the downturn, Pearce saw gifts that were less expensive "but had more meaning".

The Hope Factory has a three-phase model for enterprise development. Phase one offers two 15-week training pro-



MAKING A DIFFERENCE: The Hope Factory's Khosi Ngqinambi, CEO Liz Zamboni, Vuyo Mvinjelwa, board chairman Ernest Carelse, deputy CEO Marion Pearce and Ntomboxolo Mliho contribute to enterprise development in SA. Picture: SAM MAJELA

grammes in technical, life and business skills. The technical skills comprise aspects of craftsmanship such as sewing, beading, wirework, box and paper making.

As their development approach is holistic, the programme also looks at HIV education, early childhood development within the community they train and business skills.

"If they want to," says Pearce, "they can move into phase two, which most do, or they can move into the formal sector or the entrepreneurial side."

Even those who are involved in making corporate gifts — phase two — tend to "moonlight" in their communities using skills learnt from The Hope Factory.

"From the start we had to find a way we could make money from these entrepreneurial activities and corporate gifts seemed obvious. One of our first clients was Old Mutual. We pitched the idea of hand-crafted invitations for their annual dinner to them, and they were very open to it."

Among their most popular gifts are beaded cutlery and beaded and boxed wine glasses. "We change ranges each year for Women's Day and the Christmas season, and we've just launched a range specifically for the FIFA World Cup including fridge magnets and clocks."

Another long-time buyer of their gifts is Ernst & Young. Princess Andries, their senior

manager of diversity and inclusiveness, raves about the handbag holders which clip onto tables at restaurants and pews at churches. They used them as their Women's Day gifts last year.

"Ernst & Young has major strategies around developing women and giving back to the community, so The Hope Factory's work speaks directly to this."

Andries maintains that buying a quality gift for clients or staff from which a percentage goes back to the community is the way corporations, and even individuals, are moving when it comes to gifting.

"We always tell our clients about the story behind the gift

and often they start using The Hope Factory too."

Phase three of the enterprise development initiative is encouraging the now skilled and business-savvy workers to move into their own business.

"Throughout all the phases we offer mentorship and counselling," says Pearce. "And buying local products produced by empowered companies or NGOs is a way companies can earn BEE (black economic empowerment) points."

While some insist it's better to give than receive, buying as well as giving gifts with an empowered social provenance seems like a way to receive and still feel good about it.

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Low level of tender compliance shocks MPs

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Political Correspondent

CAPE TOWN — MPs were shocked yesterday by the findings of a Public Service Commission (PSC) investigation that identified low levels of compliance by the housing and public works departments with supply-chain management procedures for transactions of up to R200 000.

Tenders for transactions of up to R200 000 — the threshold has since been raised by the Treasury to R500 000 — do not have to be advertised but do require a spec-

ified number of written quotations. This type of tender entails more discretion by government officials and therefore carries higher risk.

PSC officials briefed Parliament's public service and administration committee yesterday on the study, conducted on transactions undertaken by these departments at national and provincial level between 2004 and 2007. The report was tabled last year.

The two departments were chosen because of the large amounts of funds they disburse through tenders.

The commission found compliance was low regarding regulations for the invitation of tenders, for obtaining the required number of quotations, and in evaluating quotations. It recommended that forensic audits should continue.

Congress of the People MP Leonard Ramatlakane said if the findings on a limited sample were so worrying, the results of a wider study could be "quite shocking".

The PSC found that an average of 54% of transactions did not comply with the rules for evaluating quotations. This was

"unacceptably low" and indicated that the requirements for awarding tenders for goods and services were not well controlled and monitored, and prone to abuse.

Departments also failed to give specific instructions relating to their orders, leaving the way open for irregularities, incorrect deliveries and the receipt of inferior goods and services.

Only 19% of the transactions examined in Gauteng departments complied with the rule requiring that a specified number of quotations be obtained.

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Manuel warns on lending bodies' demands

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COUNTRIES risked losing part of their sovereignty in exchange for international development funding, Minister in the Presidency Trevor Manuel warned in an interview yesterday.

Manuel, who is responsible for national planning, was appointed this week to the high-level advisory group on climate change finance, an international body set up by United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban-ki Moon.

This follows the nomination of Tourism Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk as SA's candidate for the top UN climate job, and further boosts SA's international profile. Yvo de Boer, head of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which oversees climate negotiations, will step down at the end of June.

"It's important that decisions (on Eskom and energy planning) are taken within SA. If we transfer responsibility to the international finance institutions, we will be handing over important parts of our sovereignty," Manuel said, noting that the US held veto power in the World Bank.

This was in reference to Eskom, which has applied for a \$3,75bn loan from the World



RISK: Minister in the Presidency Trevor Manuel says it is important that decisions on Eskom and energy be taken within SA.

Bank. The US and UK have threatened to oppose the loan, saying institutions such as the World Bank should finance renewable energy, rather than the construction of coal-fired power stations.

The furor has brought a larger debate, on the role these institutions should be playing, into sharp focus. Many nongovern-

ment organisations argue that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other development finance institutions should be funding low-carbon projects and taking account of the risks of climate change.

Others argue that an entirely new financial mechanism is needed to disburse the funds, given the

undemocratic nature of these institutions and lack of trust on the part of developing countries.

Manuel said the group's focus on unlocking finance — needed for developing countries to adapt to the risks of climate change and mitigate their emissions — would help negotiators deal with the "nitty-gritty" of a proposed new agreement on climate change.

But he acknowledged global finance institutions are flawed and countries had sometimes made commitments they did not keep.

"In the past it has been easy for countries to make commitments they have no intention to see through," Manuel said, referring to finance and emissions.

"Unless we ensure the principle of responsibility finds its way back into the discourse, the world will be a lousy place. There have been a number of propositions, such as a levy on airline tickets, but they haven't found much traction. I think it will be important to look at all the issues anew."

But raising money in a recession will be a task in itself.

"One of the biggest challenges is that the world's largest economies are running huge deficits," he said.

It is far from clear how the estimated \$100bn a year needed by 2020 will be found.

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Fan park delays frustrate health department

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CAPE TOWN — Delays in determining the location of public viewing areas in cities not hosting Soccer World Cup matches were the "Achilles heel" in the Department of Health's preparations for the big event, Parliament heard yesterday.

These are sites where fans who do not have tickets will be able to watch World Cup games on big

screens. There will be nine official FIFA fan parks in the host cities and dozens of public viewing areas around the country, which are the responsibility of municipalities.

"We still have no idea where any public viewing areas will be in non-host cities," the department's head of 2010 planning, Peter Fuhri, told members of Parliament's health committee.

Public viewing areas would need to be manned by healthcare personnel from 10am to midnight,

Fuhri said, and the delay in designating sites for locations made it difficult to assign resources.

It was up to city managers to decide where to locate public viewing areas. The department and the police had recommended to the provinces that such sites be limited to one per district.

Another challenge was ensuring healthcare personnel did not go on strike during the World Cup, Fuhri said. "If emergency services (staff) go on strike, we will be hard

pressed to cover our responsibilities." Negotiations were under way with unions to ensure staff did not take leave during the month-long World Cup, he said.

Responding to questions from MPs regarding plans for limiting the spread of HIV, Fuhri said there would be a prevention campaign during the World Cup. Free condoms would be provided in dispensers in public toilets, including those in stadiums.

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