

Inyathelo-Kresge Input

Reflecting Forward: Creating and Maintaining Opportunities to Engage with Key Stakeholders

6 November 2013

This input is an opportunity to reflect on the past two days, raise some challenges and hopefully also provide a compass.

1. This conversation about higher education and the corporate sector has as a subtext the issue of Advancement.

- To begin with it is perhaps useful to emphasise that Advancement is not about chasing the money; it's about building among the corporate sector the *valuing* of higher education and a university and building a commitment to the university which translates into practical support (not just financially but also in other ways)
- As far as universities are concerned it's about having explicit and *clear goals* related to teaching and learning, research and community engagement, working out what their implications are for staffing, infrastructural and overall finances; and then chasing the money.

My own experience is that exciting, compelling proposals that demonstrate how society will ultimately be served always find funding eventually. But I liked the comment yesterday from the colleague from DUT – please show me the door; and this is an issue for some universities.

2. Listening carefully to the presentations and discussions, two thoughts came to occupy me.

First, if, as it seems, we know so much – about university-corporate partnerships and access-success - how come we don't do better either as universities or corporates or as universities and corporates working together?

Now someone said in relation to access-success that we don't know enough. But at any point when we have to act, we may never know enough; and yet not acting may be a serious failure. We act on the basis of what we do know and exercise the best judgement we can at that point in time.

The stock answers seem to be lack of political will (read institutional will or leadership), lack of resources, lack of capabilities among academics, lack of capabilities among students, and the like. Now some or all of the above may be true.

But all these 'lacks' can be addressed. And so what are the key obstacles and constraints; and how do we overcome them or learn to manage them better, acting individually and collectively?

We heard from the First Rand CEO that big business does not discuss the issue of corporates and universities. We heard from Brian O' Connell questioning whether our universities constitute a 'system' – which may also be another way of asking whether we act in concert, can we act in concert, are we willing to act in concert. We heard from some presenters that we are not very good at building on and extending what works and on our successes.

So, the question remains: how come we don't do better either as universities or corporates or as universities and corporates working together? (You, of course, cannot leave out the state; you have to bring in the state. But given our concerns here I am ignoring that issue).

3. The second thought that has occupied me is that the unambiguous mantra over the past two days was: we need to talk more; we need to share more, we need to cooperate more, collaborate more, we need more partnerships, if we work together we can change things...

Perhaps we do need to talk more and share more – so why don't we?

Even if there is nothing wrong with healthy rivalry and competition, who can be against cooperating, collaborating, partnerships and working together? But the theme seemed to be that there is no or little or not enough cooperating, collaborating, partnerships and working together. Why not?

Back to lack of political will (again read institutional will or leadership)? Or lack of a sense of obligation or responsibility or lack of incentives or....?

4. So *What is to be Done?*

- 'How do we catalyse an ongoing platform to facilitate ongoing cooperation and collaboration?'
- 'Need an exchange between CEOs and VCs'
- 'Need a fit between what universities seek and what corporates seek'
- 'We need to address all the challenges (of access and success) at the same time – then we will succeed'; 'all of this must be done simultaneously'

5. Possible next steps

- HESA needs to discuss the value of an engagement between universities and corporates and develop an agenda and process in this regard
- Such an engagement must
 - Clarify and get agreement on what universities are for and are not for and what universities can and cannot do (instrumentalist employability, employment, skills, etc.)
 - Establish mutual and reciprocal expectations (need for trust and long-term thinking and strategies) and responsibilities (social imperatives, institutional cultures etc.) and
 - Create mechanisms and instruments for continuous discussion on issues of mutual concern.