



CHEC

Cape Higher Education Consortium

A COMPACT TO FACILITATE REGIONAL CO-OPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE WESTERN CAPE

Section One: Historical Context

1. The Western Cape Tertiary Institutions Trust, now operating as the Cape Higher Education Consortium¹, was formed in September 1993 by the Councils of the Universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, and the Western Cape and the Cape and Peninsula Technikons. These universities and technikons are “beneficiaries” of the Trust. The Trust was established to “facilitate and expand co-operation between the beneficiaries with regard to the sharing of infrastructure, such as libraries, information technology, training of personnel, as well as any other form of co-operation which may be beneficial to any of the parties...”². This was a response to the twin challenges facing our universities and technikons; meeting increasing demands with decreasing resources and levelling the playing fields between us. The Trust has since established infrastructural projects such as CALICO, INFOLIT and the Publishing Liaison Office that are managed by the Board of Trustees.
2. In 1997 the Trustees agreed to pursue a more *systemic approach* to co-operation and to move beyond co-operation on infrastructural projects. In doing so, the Trustees had in mind national policy on higher education as well as the strategic advantage to be gained for the region from a systemic approach. This shift is captured in the following strategic vision, adopted at the time:

“Through the establishment of a co-ordinated, cost-effective regional system, to promote quality higher education in the Western Cape which is responsive to historical realities and challenges, with an extended influence beyond the region.”
3. We have come to see that voluntary, regional, inter-institutional organisations such as the Trust are inherently fragile, precarious and hostage to the veto of one. They depend for their success on crafting rules and conventions for co-operation that bind the competing and competitive institutions. In short, we have to learn by trial and error to balance constituency interests, resolve conflicts and find diplomatic solutions to intractable problems. We build legitimacy through agreements, compacts and by developing best practices.

Section Two: Public Interest and Social Capital

4. We agree that “higher education simultaneously improves individual lives and enriches wider society, indicating a substantial overlap between private and public interests”.³ But the manner in which higher education serves the public interest will depend on its responsiveness to the challenges of our time, including globalisation and the revolution in information and communication technology.
5. The report quoted above goes on to say that by promoting income growth, producing enlightened leaders, expanding choices and increasing relevant skills, quality higher education is a necessary if not sufficient condition for development. We believe that the national and international investment in the universities and technikons of the Western Cape constitute a major developmental resource for the region and the country. But we need to act with vision and responsible management to realise this potential fully.
6. The experience we have gained in regional co-operation in higher education in the Western Cape also constitutes a resource of a another kind, namely, *social capital* – that set of informal values or norms shared among us that permits co-operation between us.⁴ This social capital comprises levels of trust, reciprocity and commitment to agreed obligations that are the very stuff of co-operation.
7. Indeed, what we are seeing in higher education in the Western Cape is a new institutional formation in process where the sum is more than the parts. Co-operation between us emerged in the late Eighties because it conferred benefits on the participating institutions. Subsequent experience has taught us that by co-operating, the Western Cape has a competitive advantage. If we can build on this co-operative base, we can niche the Western Cape as a higher education resource, both nationally and globally. We can, in other words, co-operate for the sake of being competitive without in any way detracting from diversities of mission and institutional competitiveness within the region.
8. There is a new imperative that makes our co-operation even more compelling, namely, the globalisation of knowledge associated with the revolution in information and communication technology. Knowledge fuels the new informational international economy and higher education institutions are the sources upon which new developments rely. With our Wide Area Network and Shared Library Information System we have the infrastructure in place for a regional information strategy.
9. This regional information strategy fits well with the Western Cape Provincial Government’s recently published White Paper, *Preparing the Western Cape for the Knowledge Economy of the 21st Century* (May 2001). It argues that the ability to maximise the use of knowledge is now considered to be the single most important factor in determining the competitiveness of countries. It wants to increase the global competitiveness of the Western Cape whilst at the same time alleviating poverty. It envisages a “learning Cape” in which our universities and technikons play a major role in giving effect to this vision. Part of our compact must be to play a leadership role in the region whilst at the same time continuing to be national higher education institutions.

Section Three: Our Principles of Co-operation

Principle 1. Commitment to our Strategic Vision

We have revised our strategic vision in the light of recent experience. It now reads:

“To establish the Western Cape as a strong higher education region in a restructured national system which, through systemic inter-institutional co-operation and academic programme collaboration, will be

- **Distinctively responsive to regional, national and international developments in the knowledge economy of the 21st century**
- **Sensitive to historical realities in promoting equity across its institutions**
- **Cost effective and of high quality.”**

By means of this compact we commit ourselves to working to realise this vision. This commitment includes giving leadership from the top and attempting to obtain commitment to this vision at grass roots within our respective institutions. It also involves providing continuing support for the Trustees and the Secretariat of the Trust.

Principle 2. Our Institutional Behaviour

By means of this compact, we agree that candour, transparency, willingness to meet agreed obligations, and reciprocity should characterise our behaviour toward each other within the Trust and in the public domain.

Principle 3. Respect for Rules

We agree to abide by the ‘rules of the game’, protocols and conventions we evolve from time to time, as well as any written agreements we have entered into. We agree that we shall settle disputes and resolve conflicts constructively and timeously.

Principle 4. Facilitating Regional Higher Education Co-operation

It is in our interests and in the national interest to facilitate regional co-operation between us. This co-operation can take the form of infrastructural co-operation, such as CALICO or our expensive teaching/research equipment project. It can take the form of academic programme co-operation which can enhance existing, and develop new, forms of collaboration. It can take the form of collaboration in research or human resource development or planning.

We undertake to set up and support the necessary planning, quality assurance and administrative systems necessary to give effect to specific co-operative ventures.

Principle 5. Co-operating with Government and Business in the Western Cape

We accept that it is incumbent upon us to give leadership in establishing government/business/higher education ‘round tables’ where our respective roles and policies can be co-ordinated and advanced in the interests of regional economic and social development.

Principle 6. Co-operation in the Rest of South Africa and Internationally

Each of our institutions is a national resource contributing to the national higher education system and beyond. We believe that by virtue of our co-operation within the region we strengthen the national system itself whilst at the same time gaining a competitive edge for our region. We undertake to use this competitive edge to provide quality teaching and research.

¹ The Trust operated as the Adamastor Trust from mid 1997 to November 2001

² See Western Cape Tertiary Institutions Trust Memorandum of Agreement between the Trustees and the Councils, 14 September 1993 (Reg.No. T1256/93)

³ World Bank Report, Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril or Promise, 2000, p37

⁴ On social capital see Francis Fukuyama, The Great Disruption (London, Profile Books 2000)