

**Report on the NBI / CHEC Business breakfast on**  
**STUDENT BURSARY AND LOAN PROGRAMMES:**  
**ENHANCING STUDENT SUCCESS**  
**AND FOSTERING SOCIAL COHESION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

**23 July 2010**  
**Cape Town International Convention Centre**

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**1. INTRODUCTIONS: Ms Gillian Hutchings and Mr Natie Maphanga**

Ms Gillian Hutchings, NBI Acting CEO, opened proceedings by welcoming all delegates including Mr Natie Maphanga, Engen General Manager Corporate Affairs and sponsor of the breakfast meeting; senior executives from the four Western Cape universities and from Provincial Government; and Ms Nasima Badsha, CEO of CHEC. Mr Maphanga endorsed the importance of the topic for discussion highlighting Engen's support for initiatives in education.

**2. THE TOPIC AND ITS CONTEXT: Professor Crain Soudien**

In providing the context for the topic for the meeting, Professor Crain Soudien, CHEC Board representative and Deputy Vice Chancellor at UCT, drew on statistics that illustrate a "national crisis": he explained that in South Africa only 12% of black Grade 12 learners gain access to higher education and, of these, only 5% are successful. While acknowledging that the school system may not adequately prepare learners for university, he also suggested that universities often "misrecognise" many of their learners and, therefore, do not fully understand the problems they face. Although the issue is not new to the NBI, to universities and to government – all of whom have had this on their agenda for some time – the breakfast meeting aimed to address the question "How do we create synergies between these partners to improve student success?"

**3. SHOWCASING GOOD PRACTICE**

**The Rural Education Access Programme (REAP): Ms Glenda Glover**

Glenda Glover, Programme Development Manager at REAP, opened her presentation by explaining that REAP assists under-prepared students to gain access to and succeed in institutions of higher learning. She agreed with Professor Soudien's suggestion that many universities are indeed under-prepared when it comes to dealing with their diverse student intake.

In outlining REAP's approach, Ms Glover explained that the organisation works with approximately 350 students enrolled at between 14 – 15 institutions and offers integrated, holistic support. In addition to receiving financial support for registration, tuition and residence fees, students are given monthly allowances that cover their basic needs. They receive this, however, only after speaking to their student advisor and giving an account of their progress. Over time, this developmental relationship builds accountability and responsibility.

REAP's relationship with institutions of higher learning extends beyond those with staff in the Financial Aid Office to those in students affairs, counselling services and academic support. It was emphasized that it is not REAP's intention to try anything new in the institutions – but to assist its students to be aware of the existing facilities and to make good use of them. Very often, Ms Glover explained, REAP's students come from environments where there are few such facilities and students may be unaware of their existence and / or lack the confidence to approach them. REAP students attend skills development workshops, network with each other and engage in community service during the vacation. In closing, REAP's 75% success rate was highlighted.

#### **Masakh'iSizwe Bursary Programme: Dr Sidney Luckett**

Dr Sidney Luckett began his presentation by outlining the guiding code for the Masakh'iSizwe Bursary Programme: to provide sufficient support for financially disadvantaged learners to enable them to make a meaningful contribution to building our country. He explained that the work of the programme involved awarding bursaries in the fields of Engineering and the Built Environment (EBE), prioritizing financially disadvantaged learners especially women and those from rural communities. In addition, the programme aims to develop an attitude of service in learners by involving them in voluntary work in under-resourced communities, and to develop both professional and collective identities. Between 2006 and 2010, the number of bursary holders has grown from 127 (34 % women) to 275 (40% women).

Dr Luckett went on to outline the unique key ingredients of the programme: a full bursary "for however long it takes", learner enrichment and partnerships. A full bursary is one that covers the costs of tuition and learning resources, residence and meals, and transport where necessary.

Learner enrichment provides for skills development programmes and leadership camps, mentoring arrangements and volunteer work in schools. The Bursary Collaboration Venture with private sector companies ensures cost sharing and has led to the development of a shared database. Very importantly, this also ensures experiential learning and graduate employment opportunities.

The Advisory Board for the Masakh'iSizwe Bursary Programme includes Dr Mamphela Ramphele (Chair), the Deans of the Faculties of Engineering in the three universities in the Western Cape, representatives from industry, professional bodies, municipalities and state owned enterprises.

Student testimonials highlighting the way in which the programme includes "a whole package" and "a personal relationship" were read in closing this presentation.

#### **4. CURRENT CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE: Mr Anton Groenewald**

In his presentation, Mr Anton Groenewald, Acting DDG, Office of the Premier, shared insights gained from a study of the statistical data collected by his Office. He highlighted the close correlation between the GDP and the education levels of the labour force. Data relating to enrolment, throughput and drop-out rates of learners between ages 6 and 25 in Grades 1 – 12 indicate that for the years 1995 – 2006, throughput ranged between 41 – 53%. While the total pass rate for Grade 12 learners in

the Province in 2009 was 75.8%, that for African learners was 57.4% and for Coloured learners 76.6%.

In comparing learners' rates of access to and, later, their graduation with Bachelor degrees from higher education institutions, Mr Groenewald pointed to the poor graduation rates for African and Coloured candidates and, importantly for this Province, the disproportionately lower figures for Coloured graduates.

Additional statistics referred to the lower pass rates for Physical Science and Mathematics, and course enrolments and graduation rates across the four higher education institutions in the Province. A proxy of 21.9% was given as the graduation rate for those completing undergraduate certificates, diplomas and degrees in 2008. Mr Groenewald also compared these statistics with those from regions in Singapore, New South Wales and Barcelona.

In conclusion, Mr Groenewald proposed the concept of a reformed region wide Student support strategy – that of striving to provide 100% funding to a reduced number of students. The assumption underlying the proposal is that graduation rates will double or triple in three to five years. It was acknowledged that this proposal gives rise to questions about the likely consequences of a reduced student intake and the possibility of an alternate percentage of funding support that might deliver improvements in throughput and graduation rates.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND PROPOSALS FOR THE WAY FORWARD**

After Professor Soudien opened the floor for questions and comments several delegates indicated their support for 100% funding, while others suggested a reduction in this figure. Further comments highlighted the need for partnerships between universities, government, business and civil society in implementing this strategy and the potential value of a regional association or network to take forward these deliberations. It was suggested that this be facilitated by the four Vice Chancellors through CHEC and that a study of a small sample of learners be included in the first stages of implementation.

Other comments:

- Confirmed the importance of integrating student support so that affective factors are addressed in addition to financial factors;
- Cautioned against direct comparisons of results from universities in different contexts;
- Confirmed the lack of systematic institutional preparedness in recognizing and dealing with diverse student bodies;
- Highlighted the importance of careers counselling and the careful selection of students for programmes;
- Pointed to the need for support programmes that focus on refugees;
- Suggested that a future breakfast focus on workplace learning / internships.

## **6. CLOSURE: Laura Nel**

Laura Nel, Chairman NBI Advisory Board Western Cape thanked both the speakers and delegates for their input in the morning's important discussions and closed the meeting.