

A DISCUSSION PAPER FROM THE ADAMASTOR TRUST

FACILITATING REGIONAL PROGRAMME COLLABORATION

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24 October, 2000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Attempts at systemic regional collaboration in the Western Cape have been fraught with difficulties. The Trustees of the Adamastor Trust commissioned this paper in order to seek ways to move to a new phase in regional collaboration where systemic co-operation in higher education will bolster the competitive edge of the Western Cape as an educational region.

In order to set a possible national context, the paper suggests practical ways that the Department of Education could encourage regional collaboration by reward, sanction and planning processes.

Moving to the Western Cape, the paper gives examples of difficulties in collaboration (which have to be recognised and tackled), but argues that, at a minimum, the following need to be in place if collaboration is to increase :

- overlapping **planning** processes,
- a strategy for **Quality Assurance** as a region (to reinforce the quality of programmes available in the Western Cape)
- **administrative systems** which can cope with joint programmes or cross-registration of students or joint appointments of staff
- overlapping **research** strategies (recognising that there is already collaboration in this area)
- overlapping **human resource** strategies.

Steps that could be taken for all of these are discussed in greater detail, but the most attention is given to collaboration around programmes because this is the most complicated.

Issues requiring attention in getting approval for joint academic programmes at institutional and national levels are identified and various solutions proposed. Some options discussed are cross-registration, joint programmes and a regional administrative entity. Ways of administering each of these options is explored, as are ways of sharing staff and of developing broader support at the institutional level.

Going beyond programmes, several other forms of practical collaboration are suggested.

Finally, the paper makes proposals for next steps, which the Trustees, in discussion with their institutions, can take.

DISCUSSION PAPER

FACILITATING REGIONAL PROGRAMME COLLABORATION

1. Context

The broader context of this paper began with the strategic planning workshop in April 1997 when the Trustees decided to move towards a more systemic approach to regional co-operation in higher education in the Western Cape. After considerable debate, the following strategic vision was adopted:

“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.”

In consultation with the Heads of Institutions, the Trustees identified systemic issues that required a regional approach. These included the future of the Colleges of Education and Nursing Colleges, the future of Allied Health Sciences (AHS), and the future of Postgraduate Training in Medical, Dental and AHS.

We are working on these matters. And we have discovered that trying to behave in a systemic way is fraught with difficulty: voluntary inter-institutional co-operation between competing institutions requires great skills in diplomacy and conflict resolution. At base, autonomous higher education institutions need to re-define their interests and take a long view in order to co-operate in such generic areas as library and information services, planning and co-ordination, staff development, programme delivery and technology mediated learning. We are only at the commencement of a process of learning to behave more systemically.

The jointly submitted *Regional Review Report : 1999* marked a significant step in developing a systemic approach to regional co-operation in higher education. Each institution's three year rolling plan was read and subjected to critique in the report. The Report lays the foundations for further work on higher education in the Western Cape as a sub-system of the national system.

This paper on facilitating regional programme collaboration was specifically commissioned by the Trustees as a result of discussions on systemic and practical constraints to programme co-operation arising out of the Regional Review Report. It represents a further phase in an evolving process of self-understanding and goes to the heart of academic co-operation itself.

The timing for this discussion is opportune, given that the CHE Size and Shape report presents the Western Cape with both defensive and offensive reasons for developing regional collaboration as a matter of urgency.

The CHE report noted the need for rationalisation in the Western Cape. There have also been adverse comments on the exclusion of the Western Cape from “examples” of mergers. While not advocating that criticisms on this level should be taken at face value, Western Cape institutions have an opportunity to demonstrate to the Minister, the Department of Education, CHE and other national players that they are ahead of the game in this respect.

The absence of discussion in the CHE report of mergers in the Western Cape also points to real strengths in the area. Institutions could build on these strengths in order to bolster the competitive edge of the Western Cape as an educational region.

2. How can the Department of Education encourage regional collaboration?

The Department of Education encourages regional collaboration, but it has not formalised regional consortia nor introduced sanctions or incentives. While the DoE does not want double negotiations i.e. with individual institutions as well as with a regional body, having to mediate between institutions or exceptions in funding arrangements, it could do more to facilitate regional collaboration. Some suggested steering mechanisms follow.

2.1 By reward

- The DoE could provide additional resources or incentives if an institution retains an expensive area that is important for the region or for the country. This could either be by contract for a certain period of time, or by agreement that a particular area would have to be funded adequately so that the institution can afford to retain it (maybe by pushing the area in to a higher funding bracket)
- The DoE could provide bridging resources for phasing in/phasing out areas agreed within the region and with the DoE
- The DoE could provide technical assistance (including human) to start important joint ventures
- The DoE could grant funding for particular programmes only if there is collaboration
- A funding formula could weight FTEs in joint courses at a higher level (this is the least likely because there would have to be too much negotiation and tracking and the solution is the most open to abuse).

2.2 By sanction

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas where the DoE will not fund more than one programme in a region, for example, music, microbiology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ask region for proposals. If there is a deadlock, DoE decides, probably after recommendation from an independent consultant (which could be the regional consortium).
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas that have very small enrolments, request a regional plan for rationalisation. Ultimate sanction is that the DoE will not fund programmes with enrolments below an agreed minimum without prior agreement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This is a more difficult area for the DoE to propose a solution if there is deadlock, as it could lead to the DoE having to micro-manage (if the issue is not simple and the area serves other areas, for example)
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2.3 By process

The DoE can require regional support for any institution's proposal to introduce new programmes, departments or faculties or to close programmes, departments or faculties. Proposals for new postgraduate programmes could require evidence of regional collaboration.

The DoE could continue to require a regional review of three-year rolling plans. Despite the modesty of the process, it appeared to have useful consequences. While regional consortia remain voluntary bodies representing contracting institutions, it is essential that sufficient time is given for overview of the plans as a region. The DoE could also consider whether the benefits from formalising regional consortia might outweigh the complications of adding another layer of management to the national system.

3. What can institutions do to facilitate regional collaboration?

Institutions in the Western Cape have many long-running, as well as ad hoc, examples of regional collaboration. The Adamastor Trust itself is jointly funded by the institutions.

While there are many good examples of collaboration, there has also been sufficient experience to be able to identify challenges or problems with regional collaboration. The following problems with regard to collaboration around academic programmes, for example, would have to be taken into account in future efforts :

- Competition for students – subsidy and fees as well as profile of institution
- Suspicion and resentment of the stronger institution/s and killer instinct of stronger institution/s
- Different approaches, for example UCT and US in Humanities areas
- The relative freedom of individual academics to design programmes can subvert institutional intention to co-operate
- Complexity of decision-making and registration – institution, DoE, SAQA - which further slows down the ability to act entrepreneurially
- Quality assurance of the programme
- Responsibility of an institution to a programme when their financial situation might worsen over the period of agreement
- Registration and graduation of students – single, double registration
- Different systems of enrolment management

- Different fee levels and, therefore, how to charge students enrolled for a programme offered by more than one institution
- No one way to share costs, subsidy and other income
- Sharing of staff – recruitment and selection, contract of employment, sharing of responsibility etc etc

The higher education environment is currently highly competitive. Even when collaboration is sought, it also has to be recognised that institutions do not want : too many administrative complications, revision of existing, or introduction of new, systems if this is not of long term benefit, too many compromises in what programmes an institution can offer or too many compromises in fees or admissions criteria.

There would, however, be many benefits from an increase in regional collaboration. Apart from the obvious ones, the Western Cape could niche itself as an educational region, providing a range of high quality programmes, thereby maintaining and building on its current strengths. It could also respond to socio-economic imperatives more explicitly so as to strengthen links with the broader Western Cape community.

At a minimum, the following need to be in place if collaboration is to increase :

- overlapping **planning** processes,
- a strategy for **Quality Assurance** as a region (to reinforce the quality of programmes available in the Western Cape)
- **administrative systems** which can cope with joint programmes or cross-registration of students or joint appointments of staff
- overlapping **research** strategies (recognising that there is already collaboration in this area)
- overlapping **human resource** strategies.

Within this minimum framework, there are other possibilities, including feeder colleges, joint recruitment drives, joint purchasing agreements etc. Some of these are discussed in greater detail, but the most attention is given to collaboration around programmes because this is the most complicated.

3.1 Establish regional planning processes

Several actions could be taken immediately by institutions to bring planning processes together. Some examples follow.

- Continue with annual review of each other's three-year rolling plans. This review could also identify areas of risk or potential areas for shared innovation. This is an important area where institutions in the region should attempt to pre-empt attention from the CHE or the DoE. Institutions in the region might grant more authority to the Adamastor Trust to make decisions.
- On a more informal level, Deans could meet regularly to identify areas for useful collaboration, particularly at postgraduate levels, for report to the Trustees.

- Notify each other of proposed new programmes, departments, or plans to disestablish departments, or programmes. The DoE might, in any case, require support from other institutions in the region before a new programme is approved for funding purposes. This need not be an onerous process. Intentions could be raised at the time of drafting three-year rolling plans. Other intentions could be circulated by paper and only if there are objections need the issue be discussed at an Adamastor Board meeting.
- Schedule regular reviews of joint ventures, to monitor quality as well as any problems. Identify people (at all levels of the institutions) with responsibility for reporting on and managing these various layers. (The Registrars of the Five Colleges, Incorporated in the USA¹ meet to review administration of cross-registrations and staff swaps or buy-outs. They also meet to discuss, and resolve, any inequities that might arise.)
- If the DoE were to require rationalisation in particular areas, a process for decision making should be agreed. Each institution would have to manage possible retrenchments or other consequences.
- Develop a vision for co-operation and collaboration (see Annexure 1).

3.2 Develop a joint strategy for Quality Assurance

If the Western Cape higher education institutions want to be taken seriously as a “quality” region, they would have to be able to demonstrate a holistic approach to the management of quality across the full spectrum of their activities.

A range of strategies could be introduced to link quality management systems, to monitor quality assurance processes and to integrate Western Cape activities with national requirements and processes.

3.3 Set systems in place for programme sharing or cross-registration

North American examples of programme sharing range from joint programmes to cross registration of students. Joint programmes are the most difficult and less common; cross registration the easiest. Cross-registration can be limited to particular programmes and places, may leave it to student initiative or provide shuttle transport between institutions. What must be in place are agreed systems for registration and cost sharing or allocation. Western Cape institutions might also want to give thought to co-ordinating starting times and lengths of terms so that collaboration is more feasible.

There is already a fair amount of programme collaboration in the Western Cape, especially around postgraduate and specialist areas. Despite this, collaboration around

¹ Five Colleges, Incorporated has existed in Massachusetts as a formal consortial enterprise since 1965, although a joint department – Astronomy – and joint area studies programmes date to the 1950s. Its members are Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Hampshire College, which was founded in 1970 with the co-operation of the other four colleges.

programmes is likely to be the most complicated type of collaboration, with the most vested interests. Institutions seek collaboration mainly when it has demonstrable benefits for them. Even in these cases, other problems can prevent successful resolution. An exploration of lessons from the past follows, before suggesting ways forward.

3.3.1 Process for approving new joint programmes : what needs attention?

Senate and council approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions criteria • Curriculum requirements • Fees
SAQA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outcomes • number of credits • assessment
HEQC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consistent Quality Assurance for programme across institutions • acceptable variations in institutional Quality Assurance
DoE for funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formula for counting FTEs • name/s on certificate
Administrative questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are students registered, fees collected, records maintained, qualifications awarded? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both/all institutions? • One institution? • Rotating institutions? • Do students get access to all facilities at all participating institutions? How? • Where does responsibility for Quality Assurance reside? • How are teaching responsibilities distributed fairly? • How are subsidy and fees distributed?

3.3.2 Identify areas where compromises are likely to be required

Careful planning and discussion can take care of most of the issues in the above list. Compromises are likely to be required around

- Fees
- Admission requirements and course pre-requisites
- Access to broader facilities of the institution.

Each proposal will have to be dealt with in its own right. There should, however, be agreement at Trustee level that collaborative efforts will have to allow exceptions from the norm at an institutional level. Joint qualifications will have to be seen as “special cases” with broader benefits than to a single institution. This might make approvals through separate Senates and Councils easier since deviations from average fees, for example, are likely to be required. Staff of the institution would be bound to abide by the institution's support for the principle of collaboration.

3.3.3 Agree on process for registration, administration and FTE allocation

There are many options along a continuum of each institution retaining responsibility for its own programmes to creating a virtual institution for joint programmes. The region could have several variations running at once.

1. Cross registration

- Students register for a programme and graduate from institution of their own choice. “Home” institution administers the enrolments and maintains quality.
- Collaboration consists of students having access to a wider range of options for their qualification through courses available at other institutions.
- Fees are set and collected by institution of student's enrolment.
- FTEs are counted through individual courses, thus all institutions receive subsidy depending on which particular courses/options students register for across all the institutions.
- Headcounts are counted through “home” institution.
- There is no sharing of staff costs

If, over a few years, there appear to be imbalances (for instance students register with one institution, but do most of their courses with another), participating institutions would have to find ways to address these. This could be done by limiting numbers in particular courses, or by payment for imbalances. Payment could either be done by formula or be negotiated annually by Registrars who could consider the balance across all programmes.

This type of cross-registration is relatively easy to implement. The Five Institutions, Incorporated uses cross-registration as a way to attract students to all five institutions. Cross-registration is advertised widely. Students fill in a request form for cross-registration and give this to their own Registrar who contacts the other institution. If the cross-registration is accepted, different colour forms are given to the student, the receiving institution, the receiving course and the home institution retains its own copy. In this way, cross-registrations can be monitored.

While the Western Cape institutions include both technikons and universities and campuses are sometimes a fair distance from each other, the strengths of each

contributing institution could be emphasised to promote cross-registration in all, or some, areas. Cross-registration could require students to organise their own transport, or, in cases chosen by the contributing institutions, transport could be provided or could follow demand. Information technology could also be used more widely to offer specialist courses from one institution to complement programme offerings in other institutions. Cross-registration would certainly give the region as a whole an edge on other regions in South Africa.

2. Joint programmes

- One institution takes responsibility for registration and administration of joint programme with staff/course contributions from all.
- There is a formula for cost, fee and subsidy sharing. The cost of administering the programme could be included in this, or institutions could rotate responsibility for this annually.
- A simple formula could be based on enrolments in separate courses contributing to the programme. Imbalances and other matters would have to be monitored by the Registrars of the contributing institutions.
- The names of all participating institutions appear on the certificate.
- There would have to be agreement on a compromise fee, possibly also admission criteria.

There are variations on this arrangement. In programmes with low postgraduate enrolments, all contributing institutions could offer undergraduate courses, but rotate responsibility for postgraduate qualifications. This would allow academic staff access to more postgraduate students, even if not every academic year.

Even in long-standing regional consortia, joint programmes are not commonplace. They are most likely in new areas or areas that would not exist without support from more than one institution. In all cases, they appear to require more than average goodwill and energy.

3. A regional administrative entity

- An administrative structure or entity is created to administer the programme. (This would work in much the same way as the bandwidth proposal.)
- The administrative entity would act as a contractor providing a service to the institutions for which they would pay. The entity would hire time from staff in the institutions by contract.
- All contributing institutions' names would appear on the certificate.
- Subsidy would be channelled to the entity.
- The administrative entity would be owned by contributing institutions which would have to monitor quality.

This is a complicated solution which creates another player and additional expense in the region. Unlike the provision of bandwidth, for example, the new player is involved in core academic business of the institutions and would have to be "owned" by participating institutions.

This solution might, however, be considered if the area is contested, but is important to retain in the region. In the case of some areas it could also be advantageous for the region to have a separate identity (for example a Western Cape Conservatory of Music or a Western Cape College of the Performing Arts). In South Africa this solution has already been used by esATI, which was used as a convenient entity to apply for a joint Graduate Programme in Public Health.²

3.3.4 Shared staff

Shared staff could be employed by ratio with each institution taking responsibility for managing their particular part of the contract (although some compatibility in appraisal systems would be advantageous). Alternatively, a post could be located in one institution, but have defined responsibilities towards another/s (see released time exchange later). The contract of appointment would have to specify what would happen to the academic if the programme were discontinued. Each case would probably have to be decided on its own merits, but the options vary from high risk (retrenchment if the programme is discontinued) to reabsorption into one of the institutions.

Staff could also be employed by a specially created administrative entity. This would allow joint appointments to have different circumstances from contracts of employment in any individual institution. Although this is complicated, it could be an option in clearly defined areas, or further down the line when there might be more cases of collaboration.

3.3.5 Support at institutional level

One of the most contentious issues about programme co-operation is around academic autonomy. Academics already feel that the requirements of the NQF and parts of the requirements of three-year rolling plans, often replicated in internal planning, have reduced their autonomy.

Any attempts to promote voluntary co-operation at programme level would have to promote buy-in at the level of the individual academic. This could be done at a formal level such as meetings between people at functional levels (Deans, HR Directors etc). Faculties could include this topic as a regular item on agendas and have it as an objective against which they are measured (as could academics in annual appraisals).

Co-operation could also be promoted in ways which benefit academic staff. Shared seminars or research projects could promote contact. The Five Colleges, Incorporated provides annual funding for collaborative proposals for conferences and visiting scholars.

² Each of the esATI members will be the registering institution on a six-year rotating cycle. Names of all institutions appear on the certificate. Each module is the responsibility of the convening department or institution. There is an Academic Steering Committee and a Registrars' Committee to monitor the programme. Presumably the facilitating role of esATI will fall away in due course and the programme will continue as a joint programme.

A fund has existed for twenty years to support one-time events, provided that these are planned and administered by at least three institutions.

However minor, small examples of successful collaboration are likely to result in other initiatives.

3.4 Future or unexplored areas

Going beyond programmes briefly, the following areas are feasible (some additions have been made to existing Adamastor documents) :

- Establish a feeder college such as the National Access Consortium Western Cape. The primary institution/s would develop and assure quality of the curricula. Qualifications/ courses would be registered on the NQF under the name of the primary institution/s. A formula would have to be agreed to maintain the feeder college. If students were registered with one or other of the primary institutions, then the whole, or part, of the subsidy could be passed on to the feeder college. (This proposal has taken account of soon-to-be-released regulations from the DoE for private providers of higher education; the regulations aim to avoid some of the current abuses.)
- Regional IT strategy (provided a pragmatic approach takes into account the problems and expense of making existing systems compatible).
- Use of IT to offer specialist courses available in one institution more broadly. This would enrich other programmes in the region as well as distribute best practice.
- Development of human resources in the region
 - Training in identified areas
 - Sharing expertise wherever possible, for example :
 - Planning – institutions could have own staff in some areas, but call on regional staff in other areas, for example physical planning
 - Staff training
 - Curriculum development
 - Distance education
 - Shared strategies with respect to retaining Black staff, for example agreements with business and industry to support salaries for set periods after which the staff member might have a secured job outside of the institution if the staff member so desires
 - The Five Colleges, Incorporated also has various forms of using staff from one institution in another

- overtime borrowing (by arrangement with home institution and by agreed payment to the member of staff),
 - straight exchanges (by arrangement between the two Deans concerned) and
 - released time exchange (when the giving department is compensated in some way, either immediately or in the future).
- Purchasing agreements
 - Regional resource centre for distance education (but this would have to take the lead from national direction and be regionally interpreted and agreed)
 - Joint recruitment drives. This could include visits to schools or regional “fairs” where all institutions are represented. While recognising that the institutions in the region are all in competition with each other for recruiting students, they should all benefit, at different times, from having access to students who might not otherwise have considered their own institution.

The following might be feasible, but would depend on what happens with national initiatives :

- Regional applications clearing house
- Regional admissions tests

4. **Next steps**

1. As a first step, institutions could establish processes for formal collaboration. This might include a vision statement and principles for regional planning and co-ordination.
2. The second, and most important step, is to establish joint planning processes. A separate task within this is to identify areas for attention in the next months (not only to demonstrate commitment to the principles of the Size and Shape exercise).

The exercise can begin modestly in areas (probably small or specialist) where:

- ✓ there is compatibility in academic approach
- ✓ there is more likely to be goodwill
- ✓ any technical difficulties can be dealt with through separate procedures if necessary
- ✓ complicated contracts of employment can be more easily monitored
- ✓ joint planning and QA are easier.

Notwithstanding the above, institutions should give consideration to programmes where cross-registration can be advertised.

3. As a third step, institutions could design a systemic way to manage quality in the region.
4. Trustees should come to their next meeting with some suggestions of practical steps to be taken, priorities to be addressed, or areas to investigate.

Erica Gillard and Jim Leatt
24 October, 2000

Sample vision and principles for co-operation, compact for behaviour and priorities for action

Vision :

The 1997 strategic vision may need to be revised in the light of experience. A revised strategic vision will still be systemic but will need to incorporate the following ideas:

- Co-operation will allow the region to maintain its strength as a national educational centre providing a spread of excellent programmes which will attract diverse and well qualified students
- Strengthening each institution will benefit all the others
- Strengthening all institutions will benefit the region as a whole
- Co-operation will provide a way of taking advantage of opportunities too expensive for one institution

Principles :

- In the absence of real threats to survival, a constantly nurtured climate of co-operation must be provided by leadership and fed into each institution
- Institutions of the Western Cape support the principle of regional collaboration and have taken steps to implement this
- Identity of each institution must be agreed and maintained and core business of each institution must be preserved
- Areas of co-operation and of conflict must be identified in annual agreed processes
- Decision-making processes must be established and agreed
- Important, but sub-critical programmes must be identified so that a regional perspective can be discussed
- Institutions must come to the table honestly about the costs incurred in an area or programme (and have the management information available to do so)
- Strategies for sharing costs and income must be agreed
- Expertise in agreed and critical areas should be shared

Compact for behaviour :

Regional co-operation in the Western Cape has evolved to the point where a written compact between participating institutions is probably required. The library, copyright and expensive equipment projects are long-term infra-structural projects that require on-going commitment on the part of member institutions. Academic Programme co-operation also requires long term commitment. A written compact will spell out a vision and enable participating institutions to craft the rules and conventions for co-operation in a context that is increasingly competitive. We need discussion on this at institutional level.

Priorities for action:

We need to identify practical steps to take matters forward and we need to specify how we wish to proceed to facilitate academic programme co-operation.

24/10/00