RESEARCH CAPACITY BUILDING AND THE NRF

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PART I: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS ON THE RESEARCH CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME OF THE NRF

INTRODUCTION

The Community Agency for Social Enquiry (C A S E) has been approached by the Research Capacity Development (RCD) Directorate of the Division for Social Sciences and Humanities (DSSH) of the National Research Foundation (NRF), to conduct and analyse two focus group discussions. Both focus groups were held in February 2000. The first was conducted at the NRF offices in Pretoria, with representatives of different universities, while the second was held at the University of the Transkei (Unitra) in Umtata, with representatives of different units within the university.

The RCD's task is to facilitate the development of general research expertise among black and women members of the research community, particularly those working at historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs). It targets HDIs to address the lack of a vibrant research culture there, the difficulty in accessing research funding, inadequate research management and administrative infrastructure, and lack of appropriate methodologies and relevant expertise.

The focus groups discussion were held in order to receive feedback about the assumptions underlying the programme and its strengths and weaknesses from the perspectives of direct beneficiaries of the programme (though at the institutional, not personal level). These assumptions include the notion that funding is not the only or even the primary means to develop research capacity. Rather, capacity development requires exchanges and networking between institutions, and integrated programmes that work at the individual, institutional and national levels.

The report begins with the NRF focus group and proceeds to discuss the Unitra group. The conclusions pick on common themes and make recommendations on that basis. Participants in the groups were selected by the NRF (for the first group) and by a Unitra co-ordinator (for the second group). This means that the views expressed in the groups and the perceptions of the NRF programmes conveyed by them are not representative of the institutions whose members took part in the discussions. However, they are indicative of some of the broad views held by people and institutions affected by the RCD programme.

THE NRF GROUP

Participants in the group included members of different institutions, including the University of Durban–Westville, University of Pretoria, Technikon Northern Gauteng, University of Port Elizabeth, Eastern Seaboard Tertiary Institutions Association, Vista University (different campuses), University of Fort Hare, and University of Natal–Durban. They occupy different

positions within their respective institutions, all of which have to do with research and training, and were selected for the group because of their familiarity with a broad range of NRF programmes (without necessarily being direct beneficiaries themselves).

Underlying assumptions

Examining the assumptions that underlie the RCD approach, participants agreed that shortage of funds was not the only important issue that needed to be addressed. However, they wished to emphasise that funds were indeed crucial. This was especially the case for students, who were dependent on funding from their institutions for basic survival, and HDIs, which could not function without proper infrastructure – lack of infrastructure there meant that research training was not possible. In both cases funds was critical but more follow-up support was needed to allow individuals and institutions to make the most of the funding.

Participants made a distinction in this regard between the approaches of the two components of the NRF – the former FRD and CSD. The FRD provided more money but without other kinds of support (training and exchange), while the CSD provided useful training and follow-up support, which ultimately was more useful. Investment in training was seen as crucially important, for students as well as staff, not instead of funding but in addition to it.

The biggest obstacle to the development of research was seen to be **not** the availability of money in itself, but the way it is used. Many institutions, it was argued by some participants, have money but are not using it effectively, usually because of lack of administrative and supervision capacity. Scholarships for students cannot contribute to producing better researchers if the academic staff is not sufficiently trained to provide supervision. The supervisors themselves must receive proper training to develop their own research capacity and skill as well as allow them to assist their students.

Training and linkages

Participants urged the NRF to play a role in facilitating training, exchanges and linkages within and between institutions and to some extent, in a more interventionist vein, to supplement the capacity of individual institutions to plan research activities. Most people however do not expect the Foundation to provide training directly but rather to plan, co-ordinate, and make existing training efforts accessible to a wide variety of individuals and institutions.

While all participants were appreciative of the research training provided or facilitated by the NRF (through the medium of other institutions), it was felt that its impact was limited. This was the case because the choice of whether or not to take part in the training was left to individuals. Research supervisors or methodologists were not targeted, and the benefits were thus not disseminated beyond those who attend the training sessions. The absence of follow-up on training (through the provision of support for practical application of training and help in dealing with concrete problems on an on-going basis) also acted to limit its impact.

The focus on inter-institutional linkages was seen by participants as important in its own right – allowing different institutions to pull their resources – as well as a way for the NRF to facilitate training by co-ordinating efforts and encouraging the formation of links. It was pointed though, that examples of such co-operation are rare. Linkages are a particular problem in rural areas, where institutions are too distant and isolated. Even when they are located in proximity to each other, there is not a lot of co-operation between tertiary institutions, especially in the technikon sector. Frequently co-operation is easier with foreign institutions and the private sector than with academic institutions working in similar situations.

The potential role of the NRF in facilitating inter-institutional exchanges as well as linkages with national and international sources of funding was repeatedly emphasised in the course of the discussion. People were clear that the resources (financial and human) of the NRF were limited and they do not expect it to meet all their needs directly. Rather they expect the NRF to help them in making the arrangements needed for that purpose through making it possible for them to co-ordinate their efforts and gain access to funding.

While the idea of collaboration between and within institutions enjoys wide support it was felt that individual staff members at tertiary institutions are over-worked and too concerned with their own professional development to be able to spend much time and energy on linkages from a more long-term perspective. Intense competition for resources and 'fame' was also cited as an obstacle to greater co-operation between individuals and institutions.

Given that establishing links is an activity that requires time, energy and resources, it was suggested that the NRF should provide funding to help those institutions interested in collaboration to move in that direction.

When discussing collaboration between institutions, issues of race and gender may come up and the NRF should be sensitive to the matter. This is especially the case since institutions located in close proximity to each other frequently owe their separate existence to the divisive policies of apartheid, the legacy of which continues to affect their relations. Sometimes it is more difficult to form links with neighbouring institutions because of the threat of paternalistic attitudes and resentment.

This means that the discourse used to facilitate collaboration is crucial to the success of linkages. The NRF should play a role in fighting stereotypes and focus on facilitating links, selecting people with the right mixture of expertise and complementary skills, without making any assumptions on the superiority and inferiority of staff members at particular institutions. Overall it may be true that HDIs are less well endowed when it comes to research skill, expertise, track record and resources than the historically white universities. However, this is not necessarily true for particular departments, units and individuals within the respective institutions. There are pockets of excellence in most institutions, and these should be built upon and expanded to allow them to make a contribution to the research community.

Working with institutions

Participants in the focus group emphasised the importance of targeting managers at the level of the institution as a whole to ensure **intra**-institutional links. Although the focus of NRF activity may be on individual units within the institution, it is important that action be taken from a holistic perspective that takes into consideration the institutional context. Otherwise, there is a danger that some units within the institution would place obstacles in the way of NRF intervention if they are now aware of its scope and purposes.

Priority at the institutional level must be given to follow-up activities on training programmes (to ensure their impact does not dissipate as a one-off event). The support for research capacity must be focused and not be spread too thinly. It must be strategic and consider how the needs of the institution as a whole may be served by targeting specific units within it.

In targeting individuals and units consideration must be given to the expected return on the investment – are the individuals being trained going to stay in the targeted institution or even in the country? There may be a tension here between the needs of researchers and the needs of their institutions. When the training of individual researchers is successful, and they have acquired new skills or completed their degrees, they tend to move on and the investment in the institution (though not in the individual) is lost. This is especially a problem for HDIs, which have experienced a brain drain because of the tendency of more qualified individuals to look for jobs elsewhere after acquiring expertise.

The need for sustainability at the institutional level can be satisfied by putting in place a tracking system and by monitoring movement of individual trainees and scholarship beneficiaries. A related option mooted by some participants was that beneficiaries should be made to sign a contract in which they commit themselves to stay for a certain period in the same institution after receiving training or a grant or a scholarship through it. At the same time, it was recognised that people cannot be kept 'captive' forever, and ultimately should be free to look for jobs and positions elsewhere. The NRF cannot prevent this 'drain', but must be aware of it and seek to maintain a balance between individual and institutional needs.

In addition to one-off training sessions, other options suggested by participants included secondment of staff from other institutions (local and international) to work on a sustained basis with researchers at HDIs, mentorship programmes, and team research. The prevailing feeling is that there is sufficient local expertise in South Africa and there was no need to send people abroad for training. The crucial logistical question is how to mobilise the existing skill (within institutions and across them) and use it for training and capacity building.

In this context collaborative projects were seen as useful. It was suggested that the NRF could play a role in putting together funding from local and external sources, and directing it according to a research agenda determined in South Africa. Foreign funding is welcome, but it should not be used to impose an agenda (content and methodology) that is not suitable to local needs.

Another suggested role for the NRF is to push for and co-ordinate institutional audits to identify research needs. Planning at the institutional level is crucial and the NRF should help in ensuring that it takes place (though it is the responsibility of each institution to plan for itself). The NRF can condition its support to institutions on the existence of a clear and focused plan, which links the development of individual staff members and students to the needs of the institution as a whole.

To make the most of it, training must be focused, include follow-up, and address long-term needs. The people selected for training must be identified carefully. The NRF should direct the institutions to choose people who would be able to use the training to best effect and transmit the knowledge and skilled acquired in that way further (in a 'training the trainers' mode). Without wishing to curtail initiative, the decision whether or not to attend in training must not be left entirely to individual choice.

To facilitate all these activities, information dissemination and networking are crucial. The information must be targeted properly, however, and networking linked to concrete goals. In the absence of clear lines of information there is a danger many of the potential beneficiaries will not be given the opportunity to find out about their options. Research offices at institutions are an important link though some of them suffer from limited administrative capacity, and information from the NRF is not filtered through. Contact with institutions and researchers to find out how their needs can be met is essential for designing an effective dissemination strategy.

THE UNITRA GROUP

Participants in the group represented different units and departments within the institution, selected by the director of the university's research resource centre, which was established by the NRF. The dean of research at the university and staff attached to resource centre attended as well.

Participants agreed that funding was important but emphasised that it was insufficient in itself to guarantee good quality without proper infrastructure, support and interest on the part of members of the university community. Funds were particularly useful in covering expenses of travel, conference attendance and in this way facilitating contacts between individuals and institutions. The primary task, however, is to convince people that research is essential for academic life by creating a conducive climate for it. If researchers were not recognised and rewarded for their efforts they may not be motivated to engage in research activities.

The general problem with NRF identified by the participants was the drain of skilled personnel to other institutions. Students (and staff) acquire skill as a result of training and move on to greener pastures. Benefits to individuals and institutions must be reconciled in a way that does not curtail individual initiative and motivation, at the same time that it does not damage the

institution. Guaranteeing posts and on-going support to successful students is one way of ensuring they stay behind and share their benefits with the institution.

In this context, participants noted that the supervisor allocation grant was particularly useful. It allowed the supervisor to apply on behalf of Masters and doctoral students on a renewable basis, and ensured that the benefits will be shared between the student (who received funding for research), the supervisor (who received funding for work and gained expertise in supervision). It also allowed the institution as a whole to attract students with potential and ensure that they graduate.

Linkages

Team research, involving different disciplines and institutions, was supported as well for allowing the sharing of skills and benefits, though the current mode in which the leading institution is invariably a historically white university was challenged by participants. HDIs have their own areas of expertise, it was pointed out, and it must not be assumed that they should always play a secondary role in the collaboration.

Linkages between institutions were desirable but at the same time problematic. Even internally it was difficult to form effective research teams and the difficulties multiplied when inter-institutional collaboration was attempted. A lot of prior preparation is needed to ensure that collaboration is meaningful and that the team can actually work together. Bringing together researchers and institutions of different background and skill base merely for appearance sake – showing that collaboration is taking place – is not useful. The collaboration must be based on the substantive and unique contribution each partner makes to the team, as well as to each other.

The NRF can play a role in facilitating linkages and ensuring meaningful collaboration, but is not doing much in this vein according to participants in the group. The initiative must be taken directly by the institutions concerned themselves. At Unitra initiatives are taken by the research resource centre and other departments, and usually are not regional in nature. Because of geographical reasons there are no suitable partners in the Eastern Cape region. It is no more difficult to collaborate with institutions located far away (such as the University of Stellenbosch and Unisa) and even overseas, than it is to collaborate with institutions in the same province (such as Rhodes University).

Geographical clustering may be problematic in another respect and that is the actual or potential competition between institutions over limited resources. When government subsidies to the tertiary sector are allocated on the basis of student numbers (among other criteria) it is inevitable that institutions located in proximity to each other will target the same pool of applicants. This is not conducive to fruitful collaboration.

The Unitra people do not expect much from the NRF by way of actively organising research collaboration, though they do expect it to support their own efforts. The NRF can help in disseminating information about visits and other opportunities for collaboration. It was pointed out, for example, that a visit by a Canadian academic was organised by the Unitra resource centre after learning about it from contacts at Stellenbosch. Unitra could benefit from the visit 'cheaply' by paying travel expenses from Stellenbosch to Umtata, rather than having to bring the person all the way from Canada. Information about the visit was **not** circulated by the NRF, and as a result an opportunity that could have been taken by other institutions was missed. Helping institutions to find out about these opportunities and benefit from them must be a regular feature of NRF activities.

To help with planning of linkages, participants suggested, the NRF should establish a database of where useful skill is located and how it can be accessed. Each institution may have different strengths and can help in training researchers that are based elsewhere (for example Unitra specialises in SPSS), but currently there is no sufficient co-ordination between them. Information is not collected and disseminated on a systematic basis.

Training model

Training is useful even if it is done on a one-off basis and is abstract. However, to make the most of it follow-up efforts at the institutional level, including practical applications, must be emphasised. On-going support and backup is needed to allow the trainees to train others and cut costs. The research resource centre is playing this role at Unitra. It seeks to identify needs and resources at the level of the university as a whole (across departments and faculties) and match the two to the extent possible through careful planning. The financial and logistical support provided by the NRF for this purpose has been very useful.

The model used by the resource centre, which can be 'exported' to other institutions, includes regular research workshops in which different individuals at the university (and some outsiders if needed and available) take responsibility for a range of topics (such as proposal and report writing, SPSS, questionnaire design, etc.). Research seminars allow people to present papers and work-in-progress and receive input on their work. The research resource centre is in charge of finding people across campus to help in the workshops. It is not the task of its personnel to run the workshop sessions themselves. In this way they play a useful co-ordinating role for the effective use of available resources.

In addition, the centre organised an annual winter and summer schools that allow a focused treatment of specific topics – such as writing for publication, or evaluation. The budget for it comes from the centre's general funds and is used to support the visit of a prominent expert in the chosen area. All staff, postgraduate students and staff in neighbouring institutions (colleges of education) are invited to these various activities. A postgraduate student seminar caters for the specific needs of this group.

The success of the centre was attributed by participants to a number of factors. These include the work of a dedicated team of people, the existence of a physical space (the resource centre) where people can congregate, work together and exchange ideas and experiences, and the help of NRF associates who provide assistance for staff members in specific departments. Planning at the level of the institution as a whole to co-ordinate efforts and mobilise resources was essential as well.

General comments made by the participants about the NRF included appreciation for the style of the former CSD as compared to the FRD. While the CSD does not have as much funds as the FRD, it is perceived to be operating with greater sensitivity to needs of particular institutions (especially HDIs), has simpler procedures and is more transparent and open. The FRD in contrast was perceived to be more bureaucratic, coercive in its approach, and focused on individual achievement without paying due attention to the role of institutions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The views expressed by participants in the two groups are compatible though not identical. The Unitra group put stronger emphasis on the need to rely on their own resources and approach the NRF only for logistical support (in the form of funds for specific tasks or information and co-ordination). In comparison, the NRF group had greater expectations of the NRF. This difference may be due to the more focused nature of the Unitra discussion (all participants were fully aware of the NRF-funded programme, knew each other and shared experience and understanding of what could and could not be done with the funding), rather than to substantial differences in opinions.

Several common themes that were raised in the discussions and that the NRF should take into consideration are indicated below. It must be borne in mind however, that many of the suggestions made by participants have already been taken up and implemented by the NRF. That the participants did not seem aware of that is an indication not of problems with the NRF's approach itself but rather of problems in communicating its activities clearly and making sure relevant information is accessible to affected members of the research community. This means that there is support in general for the conceptualisation of research capacity development by the NRF, but there are issues of scope, scale, and practical implementation that must be attended to make the programme more effective. The major points emerging from the discussion are:

- It is recognised by all that funds and resources for capacity development are limited and therefore the crucial task is to allocate them in the most effective way
- The NRF should continue to play a useful facilitating and co-ordinating role rather than play a direct role in training and planning
- The training mode must be driven by considerations of optimal use of resources and sustainability. This means that

- Trainers (for courses, workshops, etc.) should ideally be found from within the institutions (or clusters of institutions) targeted for the programme
- Training should not be a one-off event but be followed up and supported on an on-going basis to ensure it does not remain an abstract exercise
- The beneficiaries of training must be targeted carefully, not with a view to excluding anyone, but to ensure that people who can play a strategic role in their institutions (be trained and train others in return) are approached and encouraged to attend
- A mechanism to ensure that trainees (and beneficiaries of grants and scholarships) share the benefits with the institution that facilitated the training, to prevent a 'brain drain', should be found.

- It must be pointed out here in reference to these points that in the Women-in-Research project, training and support has been provided on an ongoing basis, on the assumption that trainees will disseminate their skills through the projects. The Internet initiative has adopted a 'train-the-trainer' model, and has tried to target participants who will be in a position to disseminate the skills they acquire more widely within their institutions. Participants were identified through the institutional structures.
- The NRF can help by pushing institutions to plan their research programmes, identify their needs and assets (without doing the institutions' work for them), pool their resources internally and look at areas in which they can collaborate with other institutions with similar and complementary resources. While some of this has been done already, progress has been slow, due to institutional dynamics and contexts. Linkages have been encouraged by the RCD through the research plans, and grants for team research, local exchanges, etc.
- With regard to the need for databases and more regular and structured dissemination of information expressed by participants, there are a number of online databases to promote information sharing, and to help people to identify others with particular research interests and skills, or those who can offer research-related training. The RCD is directly responsible for the Women-in-Research and Research Methodology courses databases, while the Nexus database system has a research networking database. Thought must be given, however, to making the existence of these databases more widely known and access to them possible through means other than the Internet (through e-mail, hard copies, CD-ROM, etc.).
- Finally, given that there is great support for the programme, but problems with its implementation or with the dissemination of information about it, contact with institutions and members of the research community must be maintained on a regular basis. This must be initiated by the RCD, to ensure it is kept informed of problems and concerns and is able to respond to practical needs as they are being raised.

PART II: REPORT ON QUESTIONNAIRES DISTRIBUTED TO GRANT HOLDERS BY THE DSSH OF THE NRF

INTRODUCTION

The Community Agency for Social Enquiry (C A S E) has been approached by the Division for Social Sciences and Humanities (DSSH) of the National Research Foundation (NRF) to conduct and analyse the results of a survey administered to beneficiaries of DSSH/former CSD funding in the years 1997-99.[1] Of the approximately 1500 questionnaires sent out by the DSSH, 358 were returned on time, about 24% of the total.

Given the self-selecting nature of the methodology it is not clear whether the sample is indeed representative of the population of funding beneficiaries (grants and scholarships). While the characteristics of respondents seem to be similar to those of the population from which they come, we must keep in mind that the sample was not drawn at random. It is possible that people with strong negative or positive views of the DSSH chose to respond, and others ignored the questionnaire. The responses may thus be skewed (technically this is called a 'selection bias'), though still indicative of general trends.

Most returned questionnaires came from grant recipients at universities (81%) and the rest from technikons (16%), with 3% from other institutions. Staff and students from 35 institutions responded to the questionnaire, led by the University of Natal (37 responses), Stellenbosch University (36), University of Cape Town (31), University of Pretoria (26) and Rhodes University (21). Other universities with a large number of responses were University of South Africa (19), University of the Western Cape (16) and University of the Witwatersrand (15).

The largest group of respondents was that of whites (82%), followed by Africans (9%), Indians (5%) and coloureds (3%). Men responded in greater numbers than women (61% as compared to 39%). The three types of grants that clearly dominated among the respondents were international exchange grant (65 recipients in 1999), research grants (40 recipients in 1999) and supervisor allocation (35 recipients in 1999). For all three years of study these were the leading categories.

REASONS FOR NOT APPLYING

The questions in this section were administered only to respondents in the university programme.[2] When asked for the possible reasons only 20% of those eligible to apply for grants did apply, 51% of respondents thought that many academics were not doing research, and 48%

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[1] To avoid cumbersome language, all references to the 'DSSH/former CSD' in the questionnaire were changed to the 'DSSH' in this report.

[2] The routing of questions is sometime confusing and whenever this confusion seems to have given rise to inconsistent results this has been pointed out in the report.

thought that insufficient information about DSSH funding was given by institutions to potential applicants. Other reasons given were that the application procedure was too difficult (42%), that not enough marketing of funding opportunities was done by the DSSH (42%), that the value of grants and scholarship was too low (26%), and that the evaluation system was too strict (19%).

Relatively small numbers listed racial bias as a possible reason for not applying, with 14% saying that the DSSH mainly funds previously disadvantaged individuals and 7% saying that white academics were the main beneficiaries of funding.

Other reasons for not applying mentioned by respondents were that the deadlines are too strict, especially for conferences (four months in advance), that the process is too cumbersome and takes far too long, thus not allowing for proper planning, and that new and inexperienced researchers are not encouraged to apply.[3]

To encourage more people to apply, the majority of respondents recommended that the DSSH adopt more active marketing strategies (57%), and make the application procedure easier (55%). Other suggestions were that the value of grants should be increased (38%), that the range of grants be enlarged (33%) and that the evaluation procedure be made less rigorous (22%). None of these suggestions address the main problem identified above, namely that many academics do not engage in research activities.

Respondents also suggested opening the process up to researchers not based at universities (in NGOs and independent researchers) and allow salary items and overheads in the budget, freedom to re-allocate the budget within the project once it is approved, and generally speeding up the processing of applications.

OTHER AVENUES OF FUNDING

About 70% of respondents are aware of other organisations in South Africa and abroad that provide funding for research in the social sciences and humanities, and 56% of them have applied for funding from these sources, with a high rate of success (61%).[4] Among those who have applied for funding from other sources, 49% claimed that application procedures for other funding organisations were simpler than those used by the DSSH, 15% that they were more difficult, and 36% that they were about the same.

The majority of applicants asserted that the evaluation criteria used by other organisations are as rigorous as those used by the DSSH, 23% that they are less rigorous and 12% that they are more

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[3] Here and in all other places in the report where responses to open-ended questions are recorded, we must keep in mind that the majority of respondents did not bother to fill in their response. This may mean that at times the open-ended responses reflect the views of a few individuals only.

[4] Since some respondents who did not apply for funding seem to have answered this question in the negative (although they should have refrained from answering it at all), the actual figure of those who have been successful among those who *did* apply is 83%.

rigorous. 60% said that grants provided by other organisations are larger, 29% that are generally similar in size to those provided by the DSSH, and 12% that they are generally smaller.

The majority of respondents then, believe that other funding agencies use procedures that are the same or easier than those used by the DSSH, that the evaluation criteria are the same or less rigorous, and that the grants are the same or higher than those provided by the DSSH. In other words, compared to funding by the DSSH, research funding offered by other organisations is more plentiful and easier to come by. If this is indeed the case, there is little wonder why many academics choose this route, though we must keep in mind that they do it in addition to rather than instead of applying for DSSH funding. All those who reported applying for research funds from other organisations (whether they received funding or not) were recipients of DSSH grants as well.

MARKETING

Respondents have received information about DSSH funding opportunities mostly through their institutions' research offices (82% reported receiving information through this channel), DSSH brochures (37%), colleagues (35%), DSSH staff (24%), NRF web site (13%) and mailing lists (11%).

Just over half of respondents (52%) reported having attended a DSSH workshop at their institution or region. Of those who attended such workshops, the majority found them very informative (51%) or somewhat informative (43%). The majority of those who did not attend these workshops knew about them (53%). Their reasons for not attending were that they already had enough information about the DSSH (40%), and various problems related to timing. Only 7% said they were not interested in the topic.

REPORTING

Half of the respondents have had access to the DSSH annual reports, and most of those who have seen them read one or more of the reports. About 11% of those who read a report, thoroughly read whole of it, 52% read parts of it thoroughly, and 37% merely glanced at it.

The topics on which readers requested more information in the reports were performance of individual disciplines (74%), individual grant categories (66%) and individual universities' performances (63%). There was relatively little interest in more information on expenditure (34%) and on the technikon programme (32%). It is clearly the case that a long list of names of individuals and the amount of funding they received is not enough and people want the information broken down by meaningful categories.
Generally, opinions about the annual report were mixed. About 4 in 10 respondents agreed that the report assisted institutions with research planning, and 45% agreed that information about

how institutions ranked in terms of access to DSSH funding generated healthy competition (16% disagreed with this statement and 13% thought that the competition was unhealthy). However, close to half of respondents did not know what the impact of the report was.

EQUITY, REDRESS AND TARGETING

When asked about the DSSH commitment to equity and redress through the use of a quota system (the specific example given referred to honours scholarships), a range of views was expressed. Very few people supported an indefinite quota system (2%), and under half of respondents (44%) wanted to abolish it altogether. The majority supported its continuation for five more years (60%) and fewer respondents supported its continuation for a longer period (27%).

In a similar vein, respondents were asked about targeted constituency grants, and 79% of them supported such grants in principle (17% opposed such grants, mostly on the grounds that race is not an appropriate criterion and that redress should not be achieved by wasting scarce research funds). Support was stronger for all first time researchers (88% of those supporting targeted constituency grants agreed that this particular constituency should be targeted), then for all black researchers (63%) all black first time researchers (59%), all women researchers (58%), and all black women researchers (51%)

About 20% of respondents supported additional targeted constituencies, such as disabled academics, researchers working in non-academic institutions such as NGOs, and older students.

Although support for researchers in targeted institutions was lower, a small majority (54%) thought it was appropriate for the DSSH to have a grant category for historically black university and 53% supported a special programme for technikons.

DIFFERENT GRANT TYPES

When presented with the different grant categories (scholarships, open grants, directed grants and support grants), and the proportion of funds allocated to each of them, 76% of respondents approved of the way money is currently allocated between categories. Of those who did not approve of the current allocation, 73% wanted a higher proportion of funds to be allocated to open research, and just over a third of respondents wanted more funds to be spent on scholarships, directed research and support grants. Conversely, 28% wanted direct research to receive a smaller proportion of funds and 22% wanted scholarships to receive a smaller proportion of funds.

Generally there was support for scholarships, especially at higher levels. Only 2% of respondents opposed doctoral scholarships and 3% opposed Masters scholarships, though 27% opposed

honours scholarships. Clearly support for students at lower levels is seen as less of a priority (though even in this regard, 66% support honours scholarships).

A large majority of respondents (86%) feel that the range of grant types addresses their particular needs, and 63% feel that this range addresses adequately the different research and training needs in South Africa (only 11% disagree and the rest do not know). A few respondents suggested that the categories were too restrictive, not allowing enough flexibility, preventing people to cross between or combine categories. It was also pointed out that the different categories do not cater for researchers who are not university-based.

Researchers' preference for open grants over direct grants – expressed in the number of applications for each category – can be primarily attributed to their unwillingness to be told what to research (according to 67% of respondents) and the uninteresting nature of directed research themes (19%). The failure of directed themes to address national priorities was also cited by 10% of respondents as a reason.

At the same time, 66% of respondents thought it was appropriate for the DSSH to have a directed grant category (and only 17% disagreed, mostly on the grounds that research can flourish only when there is freedom to pursue projects without external interference). Those who thought so were particularly supportive of themes of social transformation (80%), postgraduate education (68%) and curriculum restructuring in higher education (64%). Just under half of them agreed that there should be additional directed topics. Some of the suggestions included disability, AIDS, poverty alleviation, health education, globalisation, cultural studies and comparative analysis of social systems.

Over half of respondents though it was appropriate for the DSSH to have directed modality grants (21% disagreed), and of these 79% supported the team research modality, 42% the secondary data analysis modality, and 40% supported additional modalities, such as collaborative research between HBUs and HWUs, and participatory action research.

When asked about dissemination grants (for conferences and publications), 66% of respondents thought that they satisfied the main need for funding in the social sciences and humanities, and therefore more people applied for them then for other research grants. Just under half (47%) thought that the reason for the popularity of dissemination grants was that they were easier to get. Yet, only 38% said that the value of grants to attend international conference was adequate and 51% thought it was not adequate.

Most respondents favour the continued funding of exchange visits of local academics (79%) and even a higher percentage favour funding for exchange visits by foreign academics (92%), with substantial support for longer visits (about 40% thought the current period for visits was inadequate and only 35% thought it was adequate). Of those 40%, the vast majority thought visits should be for one month or more.

	Yes	No	Don't know
Honours scholarships	66%	27%	7%
Masters scholarships	95%	3%	2%
Doctoral scholarships	97%	2%	1%
Directed topic grants	66%	17%	18%
Directed modality grants	56%	21%	23%
Targeted constituency grants	79%	17%	4%
Targeted institution grants	54%	39%	7%
Local exchange grants	79%	13%	7%
Foreign exchange grants	92%	4%	4%

Table 1: Levels of support for different types of grants

ADMINISTRATION OF GRANTS

Over three-quarters of respondents (78%) believe it is appropriate for the DSSH to disburse funds to researchers through the research office of their institution, though there were complaints that this increases red tape and make the process more cumbersome, as well as allows internal politics to dominate the agenda. In addition, this procedure discriminates against researchers based in non-academic institutions, such as museums and NGOs.

When discussing what items should be considered as permissible expenditure for grants, the vast majority think that research assistance should be allowed (97%) as well as transport (96%), photocopying (94%), translating (89%), software (80%) and editing (75%). Somewhat less support was given to administrative support salaries (70%), computer time (69%), training (66%), computer hardware (56%) and consultancies (44%).

Other items suggested by respondents were specialised equipment (especially for audio-visual research and production), fieldwork, and salaries for core staff or for staff not employed by the university or by the state and have to cover all their expenses from the research budget (contract staff, NGO researchers).

EVALUATION

Respondents were asked what they thought about the requirement that universities' research committees screen proposals before the are submitted to the DSSH. A large majority of 82% supported this procedure (14% opposed it, mainly on grounds of bias due to internal politics). Three-quarters of the respondents also expressed support for the peer reviews evaluation system as practised by the DSSH (with the proviso that the process should be expedited and that the same people do not sit on panels for consecutive years due to vested interests).

In deciding on the relative importance of the track record of applicants and their proposals, the majority (74%) thought both were equally important. The notion that the proposal was more important received more support than the notion that the track record was more important, but both notions were rejected by the majority of respondents.

The criteria used for evaluating proposals (identification, approach, significance, feasibility, impact inside and outside the academic community) are seen as appropriate by 88% of respondents. The first four criteria are seen as important by over 90% of respondents. Slightly smaller majorities consider the impact of the proposal within and outside the academic community as important (86% and 77% respectively).

A large majority of 91% think the DSSH should provide detailed feedback on proposals to applicants, and 75% believe such feedback helps improve the quality of proposals (though some respondents were sceptical about the practicality of such role). A majority of respondents (87%) think that in addition to individual feedback the DSSH should report back to institutions on the outcomes of the evaluation of different grant categories.

TECHNIKON PROGRAMME

Only past and current holders of scholarship and grants within the technikon programme answered the following questions. The small number of respondents together with the number of 'don't know' answers to some questions means that the data should be treated with some caution.

Two-thirds of respondents did not think that the number of applications from technikons reflects their new role within the higher education system (only 20% thought it did). The main reasons for the small number of applications from the sector are seen as not having enough information about the DSSH (45% gave that reason), not enough marketing of the technikon programme (41%), the difficult nature of the application procedure (29%), and the strictness of the evaluation system (15%). Other reasons provided by respondents included lack of time because of a heavy teaching load, absence of research culture and no recognition of existing research efforts which leads to lack of motivation.

The majority of successful applications in the technikon sector were for postgraduate scholarships (65%), and only 18% were for research. Over half of respondents (54%) think this is not an appropriate allocation of funds. Most of them (85%) think that research grants should form a larger proportion of funding, while a small majority (53%) thinks that scholarships should form a smaller proportion of funding.

To increase the number of applications for research projects respondents' mainly suggested that there should be more support (training and advice) for potential applicants (75%) and that the DSSH use more active marketing strategies (68%). Other suggestions were for a larger range of grants (46%) and easier application procedures (45%).

When asked about grant types, 81% of respondents confirmed that the existing range of grants covers their needs, and 64% thought that the range adequately covers the research and training needs in the sector. Suggestions for additional grant types included commerce, community health, and art production. With regard to the monetary value of grants, respondents were equally divided between those who thought it was adequate and those who thought it was not (43%).

A large majority of 82% supported the peer system of evaluation, and 60% thought that the track record of applicants and their proposals were equally important (though 57% of respondents also said that the proposal was more important). Respondents approved of the criteria used for evaluating proposals (87%), that detailed feedback should be given to applicants by the DSSH (93%), and that the practice of not having closing dates for application is beneficial (88%).

RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The final section of the questionnaire allowed respondents to raise any issues they wished and bring problems and concerns to the attention of the DSSH. Obviously, the tone of these comments is largely critical, despite the overall positive evaluation found in the responses. While not all the complaints may be representative, some of them have appeared repeatedly and should be taken as indicative or existing problems that must be addressed. The main issues raised can be collapsed into the following:

- Application procedures involve a lot of unnecessary red tape, cumbersome applications and reporting forms, long waiting time for decisions (sometimes resulting in projects becoming irrelevant or in missing deadlines for conferences). This is especially problematic because there is not much money involved and it becomes more cost effective to approach other funding organisations.
- The evaluation procedures and decisions are not always transparent, the criteria are not always clear and decisions may sometime be motivated by bias or professional jealousy (both at the internal university stage and at the DSSH peer review stage). Lack of feedback makes it difficult to understand decisions and take corrective measures in the future
- DSSH funding is based on the assumption that researchers are employed full time at an institution which pays their salary. This is not applicable to research NGOs, free-lance

researchers and other non-university agencies, which have to cover all their expenses from funding. The model of funding should accommodate their needs as well since frequently they are more productive and relevant than researchers working for universities or the state.

- The issue of quotas and targeted constituencies should be thought out carefully. While recognising the need to build capacity among disadvantaged sectors of society, it must also be recognised that research funds are scarce and should not be wasted. Without proper evaluation and support structures there is danger that money will not be used optimally and that quality will be compromised.

- Because of the limited funds available, there is need for the DSSH to facilitate links with other potential sources of funding nationally and internationally.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The emerging picture is that the academic research community is fairly satisfied with the procedures for application, evaluation and administration of funds, despite complaints about practical issues such as excessive formality, cumbersome procedures, and restrictions on topics, methods, and items that cannot be budgeted for. The majority of researchers seem to understand that research funds are limited and the DSSH is faced with the question how to distribute them optimally while working under different (and frequently conflicting) imperatives.

The responses provided in the questionnaires can be summarised in the following points:

- The various grant types should cater for the diverse needs of the research community. These include basic and applied research, redress and capacity development, open and directed themes, local and international collaboration, research development and support, dissemination of research findings and sharing of expertise and infrastructure.

- There needs to be a balance between the funds spent on directed and on open research. Individuals should pursue their own interests through open research grants, while directed research should focus on addressing societal problems.

- Grant applications must be evaluated principally through peer review, guided equally by the quality of research proposals and the track record of researchers and institutions. The evaluation should be transparent and provide specific feedback to individual applicants as well as general feedback to the research community.

- There is a need to cater for redress and research capacity development needs, but grants need to be underpinned by considerations of quality.

- Scholarships should be provided primarily at Masters and doctoral levels. Quotas should be applied for redress purposes for a limited time period, emphasising quality.

- The administrative requirements and procedures need to be streamlined and simplified in order to shorten the turn around time in processing grant applications.

- Grant categories should be marketed extensively, targeting specific constituencies as needed, and support should be provided to assist the development of applications.

- Grants must be made accessible to a wider group of researchers, including those based in NGOs. The grant sizes and criteria should take into consideration the specific needs of individuals and organisations operating beyond the boundaries of academic institutions (such as the need of NGOs to pay salaries out of research funds).