

**NATIONAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FORUM (NSTF)
SUMMARY OF ISSUES ARISING FROM THE 37TH PLENARY MEETING
HELD ON 3 MAY 2010**

Scholarly publishing

- There was a generally positive response to the ASSAf study, which was commended for encouraging young scientists to publish and improving their writing skills.
- If publication is fundamental to the process of science and technology, then there might be a need to consider introducing incentives to business, science councils and state corporations to publish, since they do not qualify for the DHET subsidy for research publications. This becomes a complicating factor in the case of joint research between science councils, universities and businesses, because the drivers related to publication drivers are different for the various parties.
- Access to journals and international research information, which is costly, might form part of incentivising more cooperative relationships between academia, on the one hand and business, science councils and state corporations on the other.
- The issue of patentability should be considered together with the issue of publication, since publishing compromises the ability to register a patent.
- African journals should reflect African identity and issues. One of the ways of doing so might be to ensure that editorial boards of South African journals include some members from other countries in Africa.
- The need to guard against low quality scholarly publishing was emphasised. South African journals should not be regarded as the place to publish when a researcher is unable to have a paper published elsewhere.
- The view was expressed that ASSAf should further investigate the issue of high impact. There are many issues associated with what is meant by high impact, which must be the goal of South African journals if they are not eventually to die out.
- Clarity on the funding model for open access publishing is needed.
- Appropriate criteria for considering scholarly books for subsidy purposes must be developed.

Research on successful and unsuccessful examples of research collaboration projects between science councils, universities and state corporations

- The need for background research was suggested on successful and unsuccessful examples of research collaboration projects between science councils, universities and state corporations.

Translation of scientific ideas into everyday English

- There was support for the translation of scientific ideas into everyday English so that they may be readily understood by the general public. It was agreed that this is a difficult issue, and ASSAf was urged to explore the matter more fully.

ASSAf studies

- There is a need to market the findings of ASSAf studies to a wider audience.

Higher education

- The efforts of the DG in attending the NSTF meeting and greeting members was acknowledged with appreciation.
- Concern was expressed that in splitting the National Department of Education into the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training, two separate layers had been created in the education system, which ought to be considered in the context of a single pipeline.
- Concern was expressed that the DHET had not yet explained its mandate or proposed direction and activities to the people.
- Infrastructure at universities is in a poor state due to lack of earmarked funding.
- There was support for a centralised library for universities.
- The view was expressed that universities should take on more social responsibilities.
- The need for the recruitment and retention of quality research staff was acknowledged.

- There is a need to investigate whether affirmative action promotes research outputs in the higher education sector.
- The CHE plays a critical role in assessment and ensuring quality in institutions. There must therefore be closer engagement between the DHET and CHE, without leaving out other sectors such as the government in general or the science council sector.
- Plans to lower the drop-out rate at universities should be considered.
- The role of the DHET in encouraging students to continue to masters and doctoral studies must be considered.
- There is a need to clarify the way in which the challenge of HIV/AIDS will be dealt with in higher education sector.
- The extent to which hierarchical management structures in higher education institutions might constitute a barrier to effective decision-making, innovation and research outputs should be considered.
- The output of universities is still a matter for concern, particularly in light of the fact that universities are producing many graduates that are not able to find jobs (even in fields such as engineering, where there are reportedly insufficient professionals and many vacancies).
- There is a need to enhance programmes aimed at providing unemployed graduates with skills to make them employable and linking these programmes with industry and with masters and doctoral training.

Secondary education

- The product of the secondary school system, especially in rural areas, still seems inadequate for the tertiary education system. It was asked what the DBE is doing to address this situation.

NGO forum

- The need for NGOs to form consortia to attract funding from business social responsibility programmes was noted, and several suggestions were made for NSTF assistance and support in this regard:
 - It was suggested that the NSTF ask the DHET to establish a forum to facilitate relationships among NGOs.
 - The NSTF itself would give consideration to whether it was feasible to establish a forum for NGOs under the auspices of the NSTF.
 - *proSET* proposed that one of its roles should be to develop a database of NGOs and foster linkages to allow the formation of consortia that might win the favour of big business.

School support

- It was suggested that NSTF members be polled to establish which ones engage in school support activities and that information be disseminated to schools about the availability of such support.
- The need for appropriate support for rural schools was noted; for example, in the form of printed materials for schools that do not have ICT facilities.
- Professionals should be encouraged to speak at schools in order to motivate learners, and learners from privileged schools should visit rural schools and meet their peers.
- It should be explored whether professionals that visit rural schools on a voluntary basis could be considered as volunteers in terms of the National Youth Service programme.

NSTF workshops

- It was hoped that the DG: DHET would make a presentation on the DHET mandate and proposed direction at a future NSTF plenary meeting or workshop.
- All universities struggle with the problem of plagiarism, and it was suggested that the NSTF have a workshop on this topic in order to share best practices.

proSET

- *proSET* needs to define itself and its activities, particularly in light of the fact that it might soon have to consider the effective use of its own funds. Some suggestions included:

- *proSET* could perhaps develop a database of NGOs and ongoing learner support activities among members and disseminate this information.
- *proSET* could strive to foster linkages to allow the formation of consortia that might win the favour of big business. Pursuing this suggestion would require the support of the DBE and DST.
- Establishing a forum in which *proSET* members could be invited to participate physically or electronically might be an effective means of engagement and providing support.
- It was suggested that *proSET* should be restructured along the lines of interest groups, in order to accommodate the diverse interests, since there might not be sufficient common ground among the membership of *proSET*.