

# **Report on consultative meeting held on 23 April 2014 between the 2014 HELTASA Executive Committee and past members of the HELTASA Executive**

Present: Amanda Hlengwa (Chair); Siyabulela Sabata; Mosimaneotsile Mohlake; Melanie Skead; Azwi Tshivhase; Francois Strydom (UFS); Masebala Tjabane; Delysia Timm; Pieter duToit; Kasturi Behari-Leak; Brenda Leibowitz; Ian Scott; Matete Madiba; James Garraway; Clever Ndebele

## **1. Welcome and introductions**

The chairperson opened the meeting and welcomed everybody.

## **2. A brief history of HELTASA – In discussion with Ian Scott**

The first body to be established was for those involved in Academic Support Programmes in 1980. When it became apparent that a bigger national movement was needed, this led to the formation of the South African Association for Academic Development (this organisation was for those involved in both student and staff development). SAAD was supported by external funding. This funding enabled the establishment of IHEDSA (Institute for Higher Education Development in Southern Africa). However, IHEDSA never functioned as it was shut down because of accusations of fraud against its director. At same time, there was a weakening of AD in the country as donor funding was withdrawn and AD posts in many institutions annulled. SAAD continued to shape organization, however for a brief period no annual conference was held. The body was renamed SAADA in 2002. HELTASA was established in 2005.

## **3. HELTASA achievements and future directions - In discussion with Matete Madiba**

HELTASA's constitution was finalised in 2005. In 2006 the first conference under the HELTASA banner was held. Mainstream academics were able to join HELTASA and thus its focus became broader than Academic Development. A highlight was the establishment of the CHE-HELTASA National Excellence in Teaching Awards for mainstream academics. These Awards enabled the development of a common language about excellence in teaching and learning. The emergence of a number of institutional

Teaching Excellence awards followed the establishment of the National Excellence in Teaching Awards.

HELTASA developed a productive affiliation with ICED and the first-ever ICED conference on African soil will be held in Cape Town in 2016. The establishment of SIGs was an important initiative to strengthen the work of HELTASA amongst members independent of the annual conferences. HELTASA merged with SAARDE in 2008. Over the last few years, there have been several special editions of SAJHE in which articles from papers presented at HELTASA were published. In 2013, the first peer-reviewed conference proceedings were published under the editorship of Nomathamsanqa Tisani.

AD currently plays a major role in higher education in South Africa. HELTASA is in the process of formalising a relationship with the DHET, while HELTASA members serve on the review panel for the Teaching Development Grants. HELTASA is in a position to contribute to strengthen and support Teaching and Learning Scholarship through, *inter alia*, twice yearly writing-for-publication workshops. However, to achieve this aim, funding is required. Matete Madiba offered to assist the organisation with fundraising for capacity building initiatives.

SAJHE and CriSTaL, two journals dedicated to publishing scholarship on Higher Education, have strong associations with HELTASA. It is imperative that the Special Issues for publication of articles emerging from HELTASA conference papers continue.

HELTASA now needs to develop links with DVCs of Teaching and Learning. This can be done through establishing a relationship with the DVC forum of the CHE's Quality Enhancement Programme. HELTASA can also contribute to the enhancement of capacity for the utilization of the Teaching Development Grants as these have arguably been under-utilized to date.

## **4. Initiatives shaping HELTASA – In discussion with Brenda Leibowitz**

### **4.1 National presence**

HELTASA is developing an increasing national presence and has to strengthen this process. The organisation's membership has increased markedly over the last few years. The publication of the SAJHE Special Edition as well as HELTASA's association with CriSTaL are critical in enhancing its national profile. Furthermore, it is imperative that HELTASA responds to policy and other national HE-related initiatives. To this end the HELTASA Executive Committee needs to keep abreast of developments and consult its membership to construct responses to policy, etc.

The **SIGs** represent a very important mechanism for capacity development and for forging relationships between members. It is therefore important to ensure that SIGs function optimally.

The CHE-HELTASA National Excellence in Teaching Awards celebrate excellence. Other mechanisms need to be found for addressing weak and average practice.

### **4.2 Teaching Development Grants**

Teaching Development Grant funding has recently been secured to establish **Teaching Fellowships**. The funding will make it possible for five participants to join the fellowship programme per year. It would be important for HELTASA to support any projects that may emerge from the Fellowship Programme.

#### **Use of HELTASA website as repository for TDG related resources**

James Garraway, who is the director of this **Collaborative Projects TDG**, suggested that the HELTASA website be used as the repository for all resources that emerge from this project. The Cape University of Technology is the recipient of the TDG and will manage the funding, however, James suggested that it might be better for future TDG grants linked to HELTASA to use a HELTASA bank account to process its funds.

### **4.3 ICED**

South Africa will be the first African country to host an ICED conference in 2016. The ICED-HELTASA conference will be organised by the four universities in the Western Cape. ICED supported a proposal to set up a network for Teaching and Learning in Southern Africa. The network is known as the Southern African Universities Teaching and Learning (SAULT) forum. The South African members of the reference group for this forum include Ian Scott, Nomathamsanqa Tisani, Brenda Liebowitz, and Amanda Hlengwa. Representatives from other southern African countries are also part of the reference group involved in setting up the SAULT forum. The first task of the forum is to research the needs in the region and it is envisaged that a number of bi-lateral networks will develop. Southern African representatives participating in the SAULT forum will attend HELTASA conferences and will receive short term support from HELTASA to enable teaching and learning development work in their countries.

## **5. Critical Discussion**

### **5.1 Teaching Awards**

The issue of teaching awards needs to be discussed critically by the sector. The national awards help to stimulate debate on the subject of awards for teaching and the nature of teaching excellence.

### **5.2 Teaching Fellowships**

The Teaching Fellowship will provide an opportunity for a broader group of people to gain the space to do research into teaching and learning, thus enabling them to become resources for their institutions.

It is envisaged that fellows will attend a three-week workshop on various teaching and learning related issues. It is not the intention of the fellowship to duplicate the work done by PG Dip (HE) programmes.

There is ongoing debate about the different ways in which teaching and research are funded. The Teaching Fellowship is one way of funding teaching and to support the integration of the research and teaching roles of participants.

A concern was raised that UNISA applicants would be unlikely to be considered for Fellowships given the nature of institutional differentiation in the country.

### **5.3 HELTASA's voice in national policy**

Ian Scott noted that HELTASA's voice on teaching and learning matters was absent in the national policy arena. This is a serious absence given that teaching and learning seems to be an "add-on" for policy makers. HELTASA needs to develop the capacity to make strong contributions to policy debates, especially where our goals for teaching and learning seem to be constrained by policy.

At present, there is intense focus on policy-making and implementation in the form of the National Development Plan, the White Paper on Post School Education and Training; the Funding Taskteam Report; various CHE initiatives, including the Quality Enhancement Project and the Proposal for a Flexible Undergraduate Curriculum, expansion plans, and so on. The majority of HELTASA members are not involved in these processes; it is also conceivable that most members do not read the various published reports, policies and proposals. It is imperative that HELTASA's voice is heard in relation to the various national higher education developments.

Two things are crucial in this regard:

- HELTASA needs to be very careful of submitting superficial responses that will not be taken seriously by DoHET experts. It is important for the organisation to critically analyse policy documents and to do the work necessary so that HELTASA can offer meaningful and effective responses.
- HELTASA should provide robust critiques and should be able to provide alternatives to policy developments. The HELTASA community should grow from one that critiques to one that can do something about the critique.

One way of strengthening HELTASA's voice in national policy debates would be to establish and fund the work of "Think Tanks" or Reference Groups which can deliberate on and engage the membership effectively on national developments and produce critical and robust responses and alternatives on behalf of the organisation.

## **5.4 HELTASA over the next 3-5 years**

### **5.4.1 Policy Voice**

It was noted that HELTASA needs a strategy to develop its capacity to contribute to national debates on higher education.

### **5.4.2 Publishing**

Matete Madiba argued that strengthening the publications of HELTASA members could serve as a mediator between policy and providing support for policy implementation or critique. It is important for HELTASA to pursue the notion of publishing for professional growth and part of the process of developing the academic identities of members.

Writing retreats to develop papers presented at the annual conference constitute a fruitful avenue to advance the scholarship of members.

### **5.4.3 HELTASA's Development and Support role**

HELTASA aims to develop teaching and learning capacity amongst academic developers, but also mainstream academics who are interested in enhancing their practice. Its main activities in this regard are the annual conferences and the activities of SIGs. The possibility of working more closely with DVCs Academic to enhance our efforts to develop teaching and learning at all institutions should be explored in earnest.

HELTASA also needs to develop and nurture the capacity to grow the next generation of academic developers. One initiative currently underway is a PG Dip (HE) aimed at academic developers currently offered by Rhodes University. The impact of the course in performing this role needs to be investigated.

### **5.4.4. HELTASA's role in the HE landscape**

The HELTASA Executive needs to interact with and take account of the range of bodies concerned with Higher Education development in the country. These include: The CHE, HESA, SAAIR (in relation to HEMIS data), QEP (DVCs' Teaching and Learning Group); SAIDE, NADESA, DHET, SAASSAP and SAFSA (the student voice – this would be important given that student success is an important issue for HELTASA). It may be useful to engage in collaborative projects with some of the above-mentioned bodies.

HELTASA needs to use realistic ways to make an impact, such as developing an active listserv, informing members about issues and developments via the website and various

mailing lists. Furthermore, we need to examine the way in which various learning communities may be established and grown.

The HELTASA community needs to be informed of commissioned projects such as the research into large classes that has recently taken place. The HELTASA AGM was a forum for reporting on the various projects HELTASA members are involved in. The SIGs may be instrumental in generating themes for projects, etc.

### **Summary of major discussion points**

- It is imperative to find practical ways to build a scholarly AD community; existing collaborations need to be used to achieve this end.
- How can the SIGs be used more strategically to build capacity and scholarship?
- Teaching Awards – what are the advantages of such awards and how might these best be leveraged?
- How can HELTASA harness the Teaching Development Grant to promote its vision? One example of this is the Teaching Fellowships Grant linked to the Chair: Teaching and Learning at UJ.
- The ICED-HELTASA Southern African Universities Teaching and Learning (SAULT) project for building capacity for the enhancement of teaching and learning in Southern Africa can be linked to the Chair: Teaching and Learning at UJ.
- SADC involvement in HELTASA needs to be nurtured through the ICED-HELTASA SAULT project.
- Retired AD practitioners can be approached to support future HELTASA projects.
- Develop a proposal to raise funds from the KRESGE Foundation for HELTASA development and support activities.

### **6. Development and support priorities for the Executive Committee**

- Support for TDG projects – the Teaching Fellowships based at UJ and the Collaborative Project based at CPUT
- Grow the scholarly output emerging from commissioned work; set up a consultation forum to examine practical ways of achieving this end.
- Pay attention to development and support of academic developers.
- Establish and grow networks with other bodies in the HE landscape that can collaborate with HELTASA to enhance teaching and learning.

- Consider whether HELTASA should include the FET sector in its mission.
- Improve communication with the membership through the website and the SIGs.
- Find ways of ensuring sustainable funding for HELTASA; investigate the possibility of top-slicing TDG funds?
- Create opportunities to hold consultations with key HELTASA members when necessary.