

## STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION:

# Outcomes of HERESA study on Learning and Teaching, and Leadership Capacities within South African Universities of Technology

The strategic plan of the South African (SA) Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) indicates that due to its political history, the Higher Education (HE) sector has for the last two decades been dealing with three major challenges: 1) Transformation, 2) Massification, 3) Low PhD output. Furthermore, the HE system is seen as medium knowledge producing and differentiated, exhibiting high attrition rates and low levels of participation, together with insufficient capacity for adequate skills production and a small crisis-prone sub-sector. In addition, graduate unemployment is a pressing national concern and recommendations to remedy this focus on curriculum transformation to improve the preparedness of graduates for the world of work, to meet the needs of industry as well as produce graduates who are job creators. However, a lack of adequately skilled educators to inform curriculum development and leaders to drive this persists, particularly within Universities of Technology (UoTs).

This motivated the Higher Education Reform Experts South Africa (HERESA; funded by Erasmus+ Capacity Building for Higher Education programme) to partner with several institutions in Europe to facilitate the development and revision of learning and teaching strategies within South African UoTs with respect to work-integrated learning (WIL), Entrepreneurship Education (EE), competency-based learning and teaching (CBLT) and curriculum development for the 4IR. To inform this process, a study was carried out to assess the status quo at five UoTs in the country with respect to learning and teaching, and leadership capacities in WIL, EE, CBLT and curriculum development for the 4IR. The findings informed recommendations with respect to capacity building (overseen over the last three years by the Project Training Team) and strategy interventions that can be facilitated by HERESA in these areas going into the future.

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, that integrated surveys, interviews and focus group discussions. Five thematically designed online surveys were administered to staff actively involved in teaching and learning and/or leadership at each of the HERESA member UoTs. The findings of the study suggest that there is a need to review WIL, EE, CBLT and curriculum development for the 4IR in terms of how they are currently delivered at these universities. For instance, for WIL, we found that most of the challenges reported by participants were related to students' lack of devices and poor connectivity during online activities. In terms of EE, we found that UoTs have mechanisms to support entrepreneurial

endeavours but outcomes from the students' start-ups are limited and often not tangible. In terms of CBLT, there is a need to measure aspects such as *self-confidence and competencies*. When it comes to curriculum development for the 4IR, we found that UoTs are making use of several technological systems to aid learning and teaching but limitations/weaknesses in both infrastructure and lecturer skills are prevalent and need to be addressed; this process has subsequently begun as part of the project through the installation of equipment and delivery of training at these institutions. Lastly, our assessment of leadership training at the five institutions, showed that all UoTs offer leadership training. However, this is generally offered at the management level only.

We, therefore, recommend that communities of practice (CoPs) set up and hosted by HERESA and its partners facilitate capacity building within UoTs through the following interventions:

- Looking at possible ways in which WIL can be integrated better across disciplines at UoTs;
- Identifying ways in which UoTs can assist spinoffs and start-ups from staff and students to enter the market and establish;
- Explore and implement ways in which innovation can be captured within curricula in the reality of the 4IR and supported through investment in infrastructure and staff upskilling;
- Identify ways in which leadership training can be extended to the wider university community within UoTs in South Africa.

The findings also motivate for ongoing systematic appraisal of learning and teaching, and leadership capacities within UoTs to enable benchmarking of practices and to ensure that capacity development initiatives address key challenges at the institutional and sectoral levels.

A full report on the findings and recommendations has been made available to all institutions that participated in the study.

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