Marketing and Communication Units at FET colleges An appraisal

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MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION UNITS AT FET COLLEGES: AN APPRAISAL

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DoE	Department of Education
DANIDA	Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
FE	Further Education
FET	Further Education and Training
HRD	Human Resource Development
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IMC	Integrated Communications Marketing
IMO	Internal marketing orientation
KPA	Key performance areas
KZNDE	KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education
LPU	Linkages and Programmes Unit
MCU	Marketing and Communications Unit
SESD	Support to Education and Skills Development
SSU	Student Support Unit
VET	Vocational Education and Training

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was conducted to explore the effectiveness of marketing and communication units established at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges through the DANIDA-funded Support to Education and Skills Development (SESD) Programme. It identified the range of functions and activities associated with marketing function at colleges that have established dedicated units.

Marketing and communication units (MCUs) are designed within the context of the new college landscape and reflect a new 'responsiveness' agenda. They are intended to assist colleges to be responsive to their external environment by increasing student awareness, improving community awareness and identifying niche areas in the local and regional business environment.

The fieldwork comprised case studies of four FET colleges, located in a variety of metropolitan, urban and rural settings in two provinces, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. These case studies were conducted in the first quarter of 2006. Data was gathered through interviews with college staff and analysis of internal college documents.

FINDINGS

Findings in this study have been grouped into three broad categories: Organisation, Functioning and Impact. Key trends evident in relation to each of these are outlined below.

Organisation

There is **no single model for organising colleges**, and the place of MCUs within them. Rather, the range of approaches to locating the MCU reflects the strategic priorities of colleges, the provincial vision, as well as resources and leadership approaches in the former college campuses that represent the historical antecedents of current MCUs.

The evidence from this study (and the parallel report on the Linkages and Programmes unit [LPU]) suggests that **complementarity** between marketing and partnership units has not been well developed in practice. In all four colleges, there is a sense that locating these functions in distinct parts of the organisational structure has led to a silo mentality in which units are encouraged to go their own way.

There is a **tension regarding the appropriate balance between college and campus level** marketing and communications roles, responsibilities and activities that mirrors and adds to wider centre-campus tensions that are apparent in several of the SESD colleges (Human Sciences Research Council 2006a). There is a second tension between the subject-specific and generic elements of the marketing function.

Functioning

The current units are expected to do too much and may be **prioritising** certain activities without adequate reflection on strategic rationale for such choices.

There are widespread and seemingly well-founded concerns about the adequacy of the MCUs' current **resourcing** both in terms of staffing and other resources. At some of the colleges there were concerns about inadequate access to computers, printers and vehicles, all of which undermined the ability of units to do their job.

There is some awareness and support for the marketing theory which holds that institutional marketing success can be achieved only when **all staff** see marketing as part of their jobs, but this is not widespread.

Interaction with **college CEOs** is central to MCU performance but there is evidence that CEOs vary in the extent to which they champion MCUs and participate in marketing and communications.

Impact

It is difficult to discern hard evidence of the impact on the registered student population, on the quality and effectiveness of institutional marketing or other changes that can be directly attributable to the MCU. Yet at the same time, there are attitudes and activities that reflect successful collaboration of MCUs with other actors, and of MCUs creating the conditions conducive for their **success**. In many cases, these activities or attitudes need to be signicantly deepened or broadened to include a wider set of college actors. These include:

- There is a sense of an increasingly positive attitude towards the colleges amongst their local stakeholders that has been facilitated by the work of the MCUs. The very active recruitment drives of some of the colleges appear to be reflected in growing applications and enrolments at the start of the 2006 academic year. There is also a perception in colleges (but no real compelling evidence) that the MCUs are having a positive effect on recruitment from designated groups.
- There was some indication that academic staff recognised that they could and should play a role in marketing, although there was little evidence that these views were developed conceptually or effectively formalised. Certainly, the link between understanding academic staff as part time marketers and the implications for hiring academics with marketing competencies, or training of academics towards a marketing orientation was nowhere evident in HR approaches.
- The notion of catchment areas leads some colleges to adopt what appears to be a supply-side mentality towards reaching out to deprived and excluded communities. Whilst there are strong arguments for such an expansion of services into poor and remote rural communities, this is clearly a very different drive from the imperative to be more responsive to demand for skills from industry and the labour market.

Furthermore, being responsive to formerly excluded communities and/or being responsive to industry require particular approaches.

- In the process of considering how to leverage greater enrolments, there appears to be little sense among the MCUs of how market segmentation should be taken into account, or sufficient concern about what new or adapted programmes the market might demand. Rather, the drive is largely to sell better what colleges already offer. This seems to reflect processes of re-visioning rather than en-visioning, as described in the LPU report (Human Sciences Research Council 2006).
- In some cases, MCUs are seen as playing a vital role in helping build community embeddedness and a new college identity, positive observations that were very clearly expressed.
- There were mixed views about the future sustainability of MCUs after SESD funding ceases. While SESD funding had allowed activities and structures to develop further than would have otherwise been the case, there was a consensus that marketing and communications are core functions of a college and would have to be sustained through college budgets in the longer term. The adequacy of budgets, the scale of a sustainable marketing and communication function and its adequacy were matters for general pessimism.
- The major focus of marketing and communications within these colleges currently is on increased student enrolments. This has led to considerable activity in getting the college message out to schools and also in shopping malls, on telephone poles and on walls in the colleges' catchment areas. Nevertheless, there is little sense that colleges can attract students from outside their geographical zone, and thereby widen their impact.
- Whilst there is recognition of the needs of designated groups, especially in the Western Cape, there is only limited evidence of a focus on their particular needs and the specific challenges of marketing to these potential clients. Notwithstanding these observations, there is some evidence of an emerging college interest in niche markets.
- There appears to be little evidence that MCUs are engaging in more strategic analysis of local challenges and possibilities, in spite of Provincial Growth and Development Strategies and HRD Strategies There are encouraging signs that a link between the internal and external is understood by some in the MCUs and colleges.
- The notion of a desired brand was something that appeared relatively widespread across the colleges. The management of reputation and the undoing of past negative perceptions of particular colleges and the sector were commonly seen as crucial to the challenge of increasing enrolments.

MAIN CHALLENGES

There is a wide range of challenges to be overcome if the MCUs are to be effective and efficient contributors to the repositioning of South African FET colleges in order to deliver on national, regional and local development in a balanced way. The most significant are:

- The drive for rapidly increasing enrolments may lead to tensions about quality and outcomes. As with other systems internationally, it seems unlikely that South African colleges can simultaneously meet goals of improved enrolments, throughput and labour market insertion.
- In the drive to rapidly increase enrolments through conventional marketing strategies, it needs to be remembered that many of the learners and communities who are to be served by colleges are impoverished. In such an environment, marketing cannot on its own play a major role in the solution to the enrolments challenge, but a range of other resources are also required.
- MCUs lack the capacity to understand and explain the curriculum effectively to potential students. There are likely to be even greater challenges in responding effectively and efficiently to the current re-curricularisation process. The major challenge is to increase the in-depth knowledge that MCUs have about curriculum and curriculum development processes.
- The centre-satellite campus tension is visible inside of the MCUs in several colleges. The challenge is to develop greater sensitivity to local conditions at different campuses: whether urban- as opposed to township-located or in different towns and areas.
- MCUs have limited and uneven support from non-management rank and file college staff. There is serious concern amongst academic staff that marketers are overselling institutions and generating unrealisable expectations amongst students. The challenge is to bring academic staff into discussion with management over the strategic marketing approach and its potential effects on the infrastructure and capacity to handle more students.
- MCUs have not yet developed a sufficiently important role in helping develop college strategies through the collection and analysis of market information and its communication to those involved in the strategy development process. Sometimes the sheer scale of the day-to-day administrative tasks of MCUs is preventing strategic thinking.
- Student enrolments are seen as the central challenge and focus for MCUs. This reflects a strong national, provincial and college policy message. There are, however, severe concerns about the ability of current staff and infrastructure to absorb the kind of radical overall increase in student numbers and equity targets envisaged, particularly if this includes, as intended, concomitant growth in numbers of students with disabilities.

- Issues of location do appear to be important in the marketing domain. Metropolitan, urban and rural locations produce particular dynamics for marketing, but there has not been enough attention to these dynamics as yet.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The key policy implications of this study relate to the strategy for marketing adopted by FET colleges, the position, size and scope of dedicated units, the role of the national Department of Education and of MCUs. These are listed in the sections below.

Policy on Marketing units and their functioning in each college

- There is a need to better **align MCU budgets within FET colleges' strategic goals.** This implies a focus on adequate funding for marketing, given its close functional alignment to the achievement of strategic priorities across the system.
- Although MCUs have not yet demonstrated compelling evidence of impact, greater college **responsiveness to national development imperatives** requires that colleges should both better understand the environment in which they are operating and better communicate their quality and vision to others. Indeed, there appears to be a synergistic relationship between improved marketing and communications and improved responsiveness. Thus, there is a role for marketing and communications across the sector.
- Marketing and communications, like any other college function, **needs to be championed by CEOs, senior management teams and councils,** to be effective.
- **Locally grounded understandings** of client and stakeholder needs and practices of improved customer orientation need to be created that are balanced with responses to national development imperatives and strategies.

Positioning of marketing and communications

- It is debatable whether marketing necessarily needs to be **located in the same unit as communications.** Whatever structure is to be adopted, there is a need to think clearly about what the focus of marketing and communications within colleges should be at the present time and how best to deliver upon it. There can be no policy which dictates the exact location of an MCU. However, the recommendation is for the MCU to be placed preferably as close to the CEO as possible and in close institutional contact with other units such as the LPUs.

Size and scope

- The size and scope of the plan for marketing and communications and of institutional expectations must be realistically related to resourcing. If there is not to be a significant increase in funding for these functions, then it is necessary to rein back the expectations placed upon marketing and communications and the wide range of activities included within units' remit.

- The role of MCUs in the re-curricularisation process needs to be addressed at the national level as well as within colleges. MCUs need to convince potential clients of the attractiveness of the colleges' new curriculum offer.

Role of the national Department of Education

- National leadership is required on the issues of staff contracts.
- The national Department of Education could facilitate a greater focus on the development of **internal college market information collection** and analysis capacities.
- National leadership is required to improve learning from the theory and international practice of marketing and communications in education.

Functionality and role of marketing units

- Marketing unit staff should communicate the vision that all employees are marketers to colleagues and should encourage staff to accept their role as co-marketers and support them in this marketing role.
- Marketing units need to be familiar with the re-curricularisation process and to communicate the new curriculum to all relevant external stakeholders and potential customers.
- Marketing units and colleges should develop a more comprehensive and coherent analysis of the complexity of market segmentation. They should also think beyond current definitions of catchment areas whilst remaining committed to local responsiveness.
- In order to develop a new model of marketing and communications grounded in the realities of the South African public FET college sector, it is vital to understand how learner choice is already bounded by factors such as cost, culture and epistemological access.
- It is crucial to remember that the sector is not intended to operate purely according to market principles. Rather, the state has a strong and legitimate interest in the creation of tastes when it comes to participation in FET and should be prepared to intervene.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted to explore the effectiveness of marketing and communication units established at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges through the DANIDA-funded 'Support to Education and Skills Development Programme'. It explores the range of factors associated with the marketing function as carried out at colleges where these units were established.

Marketing is widely seen in the international educational management and policy literatures as a way of improving responsiveness, quality and efficiency in the public vocational education and training sector. For many educationalists, however, this understanding is considered antithetical to the notion of education as a social good. In their view, marketing represents a consumerist understanding of the world dominated by business interests and provides a means by which education is subjected to the vagaries of the market (Apple 2001). Clearly, there has to be a middle ground between these opposing positions that takes cognisance of the peculiarities of this vocational education sector, which needs to be responsive to the labour market and national development imperatives in a developing context, such as that of South Africa.

BACKGROUND

A focus on specialised marketing units within colleges has emerged as part of the wider transformation of the sector. This has been given particular encouragement by the joint DANIDA - Department of Education Support to Education and Skills Development (SESD) Programme since 2002. The main development objective of the SESD Programme was to increase the employability of FET graduates.

The SESD Programme provided funding and support to seven of the 50 FET colleges in South Africa. These seven colleges were selected through agreement between the national and provincial departments of education and DANIDA. Two colleges each were selected from the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, and three from the North West.

The DANIDA-SESD initiative was meant to contribute to the shaping and strengthening of the whole FET college system and it was intended that out of the concentrated support in the selected colleges, new practices and ideas would cascade across the rest of the system.

The SESD Programme identified three key units that should support the college transformation process:

- marketing and communications units
- linkages and programmes units
- student support units.

This report, thus, is one in a series of three reports that examine the lessons derived from the SESD experience of providing support to the abovementioned units.

The 'marketing and communication units' (MCUs) were designed within the context of the new college landscape and reflected a new 'responsiveness' agenda. They were essentially intended to make colleges more responsive to their external environment by increasing student awareness, improving community awareness and identifying niche areas in the local and regional business environment.

METHODOLOGY

Roll out of case studies

Eisenhardt (1989) has argued that case studies are a good means of building concepts and theories in organisational research. This was the rationale for using case study methodology to examine the organisational form of marketing and communications units.

The fieldwork comprised case studies of four FET colleges, located in a variety of metropolitan, urban and rural settings in two provinces, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Colleges from the North West were excluded from the research at the time of setting up the project on the advice of officials from DANIDA and the National Department of

Education (DoE). This decision was based on the later start of the North West in initiating marketing and communication units.

Data gathering

Data gathering was conducted in the first quarter of 2006, immediately following the completion of the recapitalisation research exercise conducted in the latter part of 2005 by the Department of Education.

Data were gathered through interviews with college staff and through analysis of internal college documents made available by college personnel.

Within each college, interviews were conducted to gather information and to encourage respondents to reflect on practices in the marketing and communication function at both central and campus levels.

Visits were conducted over a week. The principal method used to gather data was the semi-structured interview, typically scheduled for an hour. An interview topic guide was used but was adapted according to the managerial position of the respondent. In outline, the topic guide covered basic information on the respondent, and required detailed discussion of the position and role of the respondent, and her/his perceptions about the functions and activities of the marketing and communication units.

Throughout the interviews, the emphasis was on probing for levels of integration between the marketing and various other functions. The degree of consistency between the views of different managers within the same college was explored at the data analysis stage. This involved comparing responses from different sources or respondents on the same topic, to establish whether they corroborated or contradicted each other, as a form of data triangulation.

Different fieldworkers were employed for the four different institutions. To control against the possibility that there could be differences in approach, a workshop was held prior to the fieldwork. In addition, various other mechanisms were used to enable consistency including the sharing of key texts on marketing, and sharing the development of fieldwork instruments and the creation of a reporting template.

Variation between fieldworkers in their approach to reporting on the case studies was also controlled by virtue of the fact that they had shared experience of working together on the same team in other college-based projects.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This report is structured in the following terms. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on marketing and communication units in corporate, not-for profit and education contexts. Chapter 3 identifies key findings based on current performance, while Chapter 4 explores the implications of these case studies to practice.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE: TRENDS IN MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

This literature review of key trends in marketing and communication has three foci:

- the international product oriented 'for-profit' corporate marketing literature
- the 'not-for-profit' marketing sector
- literature on the application of these concepts to marketing education institutions.

CORPORATE (FOR-PROFIT) MARKETING

This section delineates the literature on corporate understandings of the various forms of marketing. This is especially necessary since the concept 'marketing and communications' has been appropriated from that context. A review of the latest thinking on effective marketing strategies as articulated in the corporate sector, therefore, represents an inevitable starting point for understanding the field. The discussion below does not necessarily imply that the authors subscribe to the notion of marketing or agree with its impact on the provision of public education services.

Marketing: customers, profits and 'hyper- competition'

Marketing in the corporate sector is driven by the commercial imperative to increase profitability by retaining and expanding a consumer market. Such growth is considered to be fundamental to enterprise survival and sustainability.

Marketing emerged as a concept indispensable to the modern corporate enterprise in the 1950s. The early marketing literature developed descriptive accounts of how to achieve a

'marketing orientation', delineated the benefits of achieving and orientation and focused strongly on implementation issues (for a more detailed exploration see Liao, Foreman and Sargeant 2001:255).

The importance of developing a 'marketing orientation' is still considered indispensable to the survival of an enterprise. Jobber considers a customer focus as central to an effective organisation: '....marketing-oriented companies focus on customer needs...Marketing-oriented companies get close to their customers so that they understand their needs and problems' (1995:7/8). Clearly an enterprise devoted to a 'marketing orientation' is characterised by its attention to customer needs. As Slater and Narver contend: 'A market orientation is valuable because it focuses the organisation on (1) continuously collecting information about target – customers' needs and competitors' capabilities and (2) using this information to create continuously superior customer value' (1995:63).

A company considered to be 'market oriented' is clearly driven by an awareness and consideration of the external environment in which it operates. While the *raison d'être* is 'profit', there is a need to gain competitive advantage and increasing market share by ensuring that existing customers (or clients) are satisfied. This is achieved by providing either a superior product or outstanding service and consequently ensuring the provision of 'better value'. Meeting 'customer needs', therefore provides the core values for an organisation premised on what is referred to as a 'marketing orientation'. The development of a marketing strategy is therefore not an isolated marketing department function, but is intricately linked to the functioning of the whole enterprise. Consequently, the responsibility for ensuring implementation of a co-ordinated marketing strategy should permeate the whole organisation.

Kotler makes reference to five features of an effective marketing strategy:

1. Come in under the radar

   The key to brand-building is to have something good that you roll-out in a very intelligent way. Maybe even invisibly for a while because you want to be under the radar screen of competitors.

2. Know your customer

   There are still too many CEOs who identify marketing with selling and advertising. But marketing has evolved to be not only product-centered but customer-centered. We are saying you've got to understand and choose the customers you want to serve. Don't just go after everyone. Define the target market carefully through segmentation and then really position yourself as different and as superior to that target market. Don't go into that target market if you're not superior.

3. Own your branding

We are not in a state of competition anymore; we're in a state of hyper-competition. We should think of owning a word or a phrase that helps to build customer retention and loyalty. Look at how we buy the Mercedes because it's the best engineered car. We buy a BMW because it's the best driving performance. We buy the Volvo because it's the safest automobile. A lot of these companies lose that edge too, but they don't lose the impression.

4. Stay ahead of the competition

The worst thing is that if something works, your competitors are going to clone it and before you know it anything that you had as a differentiator is imitated by the others. So you're in the business of constant innovation. Constantly asking yourself, 'three years from now, what will our differentiator be?' Markets change, so marketing has to change.

5. Make it an experience

Once in a while we find someone having a whole new approach to a mature market. Starbucks is a very good example where coffee is coffee but they decided to sell it differently, put a higher price, make it good-tasting and make it an experience rather than just some coffee. There's a big movement to say, 'we're not just adding services to our business and our product, we're actually trying to design an experience'. You'll see that language being used. We're in the experience design business.

Kotler 2005 (adapted)

This extended quotation from a leading marketing theorist provides important insight into the philosophical underpinnings of an organisation which adopts a marketing-oriented policy. From ensuring that organisations strategically penetrate the market by focusing on a specific market segment, and focusing on the need to 'know your customer', it is evident that marketing must ensure responsiveness to the external environment of the organisation. Of particular note is that Kotler characterises the post-millennium market as in a state of 'hyper-competition'. To stay 'ahead of the pack' enterprises must ensure that there is constant innovation and creative new approaches to selling products. Thus, notions of 'branding', 'competition' and 'customer orientation' are important areas for consideration.

The extent to which such a 'marketing orientation' could, should and does feature in a not-for-profit context in general, and in FET colleges in South Africa, in particular, will be examined later. Clearly, an important aspect of this report will be to consider the extent to which these market-oriented characteristics resonate in the public FET colleges.

Marketing services: Servicing the market to secure loyalty

The marketing literature differentiates between the marketing of services and the marketing of products. Without detailing the debate about the intrinsic service component evident in the sale of all products, it is generally agreed that marketing of a service is distinct from 'product-based' marketing. The marketing literature concerned with services recognises that in instances where the 'product' has a high service component, the people who interface directly with the customer have a substantial influence on the level of customer satisfaction (see, for example, Berry and Allen 1977, Berry 1980; Baker 1991:567–570). Grönroos (1980, 1983, 1991) has pointed out that services are produced and consumed simultaneously and there is necessarily substantial inter-personal interaction between buyer and seller. Because services are less tangible than goods, customers look for clues by which to evaluate service quality. In this interaction, the employee assumes considerable importance. Liao, Foreman and Sargeant (2001:256) contend that: 'In cases where production and consumption occur simultaneously, the employee is the service and the development among staff of a "customer consciousness" is, therefore, essential".

Kotler (1994:17) and Jobber (1995:5) agree that there are three basic pillars of marketing in a service context which are: customer orientation, integrated effort and goal achievement. Kotler (1994) adds a fourth feature: 'Market focus which requires that the entire organisation should be focused on the marketing of the service to ensure organisational sustainability. Market focus largely defines the extent to which the service will be initially required by clients, and also ensures sustained demand'.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS IN A SERVICE MARKETING CONTEXT

Kotler's service market triad (1994:70) makes reference to marketing relationships that should be focused upon in a service marketing context:

- the relationship between the customer and the company (external marketing)
- the relationship between customer and the employees (interactive marketing)
- the relationship between the company and the employees (internal marketing).

A particularly interesting feature of this triad is the centrality of the employee. The customer's contact with employees who provide the service is important. Since the service is provided primarily by employees, the quality of service delivery will determine the 'quality of the product'.

This triad represents an important organising framework for understanding the current marketing discourse. It also provides a starting point for analysis of marketing in an education context. Each element of the triad will be discussed in turn below.

External marketing

External marketing captures the relationship between the 'customer' and the 'provider' in a service context and is associated with the term 'relationship marketing', which describes a similar process. Grönroos defines relationship marketing as follows: 'A relationship definition of marketing is to establish, maintain and enhance ... relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises' (1990:138). Sheth (1996) answered the question 'what is relationship marketing?' as follows: 'It is the retention of profitable customers through ongoing one-to-one collaborative and partnering activities between a supplier and a customer for the purpose of creating better customer value at reduced cost (quoted in Brennan, Felekis and Goldring 2003:146).

The external marketing and communication function has also become associated with the term 'reputation management' or conventionally considered to be incorporated into the corporate 'public relations' entity. Although the responsibility for reputation management has traditionally been located in the 'corporate communication', 'corporate affairs' or 'corporate public relations' section of enterprises, marketing theorists argue that there is a need to locate reputation management squarely in the ambit of marketing. Some see reputation management as a guiding new paradigm for the entire marketing field. In keeping with Warren Buffet's admonition that losing reputation is a far greater sin for an organisation than losing money, there has been a call for enterprises to 'adopt reputation management as a guiding philosophy' (Hutton et al. 2001:249). Critics suggest that reputation management will lead public relations toward a superficial role of spin-doctoring and image making in an ill-fated attempt to 'manage' something that is essentially unmanageable or at least not within the control of the public relations function. In contrast, advocates of reputation management contend that it is a significant galvanising concept that will enhance the enterprises' public relations' stature.

In the British college context there has been a concern for 'reputation management' (Bush 1999; Hartley 1999). Part of this is clearly about ensuring that the brand name is projected and protected. However, it also reflects strategic concerns to ensure that the existing 'customers' (learners, parents and businesses) are at least satisfied with and preferably positive about the service they experience from the college.

Interactive marketing

For Kotler (1994) the relationship between customer and the employees is considered 'interactive marketing' and is a crucial ingredient in marketing strategies, which are sometimes overly focused on the external environment.

Scandinavian researchers Grönroos (1994a and b) and Gummesson (1987) identify two essential marketing strategies in a service context: conventional and interactive marketing. Conventional marketing takes place primarily at the stage of creating customer interest in the service and is important in generating first sales, while interactive marketing takes place primarily during the consumption process and is important in generating repeat sales. Active management of the buyer–seller relationship through interactive marketing is considered the essence of effective services marketing.

The above authors have claimed that conventional marketing practices, such as advertising and promotion, are a comparatively small part of the totality of marketing activity within a service organisation. Instead, 'interactive marketing', largely carried out by employees who serve as 'part-time marketers', constitutes the bulk of marketing activity. Part-time marketers are personnel who are primarily employed to work in various enterprise functions, but as a secondary responsibility also contribute to marketing (Grönroos 1994a, 1994b; Gummesson 1987). Gummesson has identified certain key advantages which arise from an interactive approach. These are:

- the customer can become part of the 'production process'. In the educational sector, this is where the contributions of and face-to-face interactions with a learning group or class are an important facet of the individual's learning experience
- rather than being a separate activity, marketing is intertwined in the occupational roles of employees who fulfil other functions in the firm
- 'internal marketing' becomes an important activity in its own right, so that all of the part-time marketers charged with the responsibility of achieving and maintaining customer satisfaction have the information they need. In this way, 'efficient internal marketing becomes a prerequisite for efficient external marketing' (1987:18).

Internal marketing

Internal marketing refers to the importance of ensuring that employees in the organisation are treated as a critical element in the operations of the organisation. Lings (2004) contends that if an internal market orientation (IMO) ensures that employees are more satisfied with their work, this is likely to make them more motivated to serve the customer, and more likely to stay with the firm.

For this to happen, it is necessary for the organisation to design jobs with the same consideration that it accords to the design of products, and to reinforce what employees value in their jobs. This perspective requires service managers to have a strong employee and customer focus. A powerful IMO requires that marketing managers incorporate human resources issues into the marketing plan and that human resource managers incorporate marketing practices into the human resources plan (Lings 2004:412). Clearly, there is a substantial degree of overlap between the activities considered important for purposes of interactive marketing (for example, motivating and training of 'part-time marketers') and certain conventional tasks of human resource management (for example, employee training and development). The IMO perspective has further implications for recruitment, selection and appraisal of 'part-time marketers' who in effect are all staff that work in non-marketing positions or occupations but who interact with the client and therefore have a part-time marketing role to play. For these personnel, in addition to the required technical proficiencies to qualify for appointment, they would also need to possess marketing aptitude or competence.

Marketing, in this perspective, ought to dominate every aspect of the HR function, from internal communications to recruitment to job analysis and descriptions (Brennan et al. 2003:148). Successful implementation of interactive marketing will therefore depend upon a high degree of cooperation between the marketing and human resource functions within the organisation: 'Where interactive marketing has been implemented, it is to be expected that marketing and human resource strategies will be substantially integrated' (Brennan et al. 2003:148).

MARKETING IN A NOT-FOR-PROFIT CONTEXT

Since marketing in the not-for-profit context first received some attention in the early work of Kotler and Levy (1969), who explored the relevance of the concept to not-for-profit organisations, the literature has not been abundant. As Bennett and Sargeant note in their editorial for a special edition of the Journal of Business Research devoted to analysis of the sector: '...Whilst interest in the topic is growing, as evidenced by the emergence of a range of specialist journals, the quality of research is variable and the volume low when compared with that grounded in other sectors of the marketing discipline' (2005:802). They conclude optimistically that: 'Notwithstanding these problems, however, it is indubitably the case that non-profit (marketing) research is increasingly recognised as a distinct and important field of study in its own right' (2005:802).

Questioning 'transferability'

It is not surprising that the literature on marketing for the not-for-profit sector has appropriated conceptual categories used in the for-profit context. The use of the term 'market orientation' to describe marketing in the not-for-profit context is particularly attractive because of its utility as a conceptual tool to bring attention to: how taking on marketing functions impacts on the organisation, to the effects of marketing on efficiency, and to the importance of marketing as a means by which the whole organisation is involved in serving the needs of users. A marketing orientation offers not only increased efficacy but can provide a unity of purpose for organisational success. However, the utility of this construct that emerges from a sector so different in terms of function and form has been questioned. Liao, Foreman and Sargeant (2001:262) contend that: 'Given the history of the construct it would seem inappropriate to merely "transfer" it from one sector to another'.

The profit motive and the assumptions of corporate and of personal and shareholder reward which fundamentally underpin the actions of for profit organisations are not present in not-for-for profit organisations and this serves as a clear point of difference. Liao, Foreman and Sargeant (2001) have suggested replacing 'profit motive' with 'societal orientation'. They argue that a 'societal orientation' construct would have considerably more meaning for not-for-profit organisations, especially in the light of the various social development objectives that they embody and the multiple stakeholders to which they are responsible.

This distinction is particularly useful since public VET institutions, as 'not-for-profit institutions', are charged to engage on the basis of their publicly defined mandate and social purpose and are expected to be responsive to a range of stakeholders and constituencies, including government and community sectors.

Marketing orientation

It has been argued that the application of the term 'market' in the not-for-profit sector is meaningless (see Bennett and Sargeant 2005 and Liao, Foreman and Sargeant 2001). Others contend that not-for-profit organisations do operate in market environments: one for resource acquisition and another for resource and service allocation. But we will argue, in accordance with Hansmann (1980) and Bennett and Sargeant (2005) that these are often not true markets in the economic sense. Indeed, Hansmann (1980) notes that not-for-profit organisations exist as a response to particular forms of market failure. Furthermore, Hansmann (1980) points out that profit seeking firms will only supply goods and services at the quantity and price that represent maximum social efficiency when consumers are able to:

- compare accurately between competing products and service
- reach agreement with the firm on goods to be provided and the price to be paid
- determine whether the supplier complied with the terms of the agreement.

If consumers are not in a position, for whatever reason, to exercise these checks, profit seeking firms will tend to lower quality or raise prices. Not-for-profit organisations are able to do the latter. Although it could be argued that they could shift quality by providing services to more recipients. However, since their very existence represents a breakdown of conventional market mechanisms which, if they worked effectively, would not have been necessary, it is argued that '...the term "market" orientation is a misnomer' (Liao, Foreman and Sargeant 2001:258).

The distinction between recipients and source of the resources in the not-for-profit context makes the use of term 'market orientation' less appropriate (Bennett and Sargeant 2005; Lovelock and Weinberg 1990 and Sargeant 1999). In a 'for profit' context, where clients or customers pay for and will exact the service, either directly or indirectly – unlike in the case of education provided to clients and paid for by other parties, that is parents or funders or employers - the notion of a marketing orientation has a clear and identified purpose. However, in a not-for-profit context, the funding agency providing financial resources to the not-for-profit organisation to deliver a service is not a client because the service is actually provided to a third party – the beneficiary. The link between payment and receipt of a service characteristic of market environments is broken. The funding agency does not directly consume the service and therefore needs to be convinced by some other means of the quality and efficacy of that service. For instance, in the education context, government needs to be convinced that the institution mandated to deliver a service delivery faithfully carries out that mandate.

In a not-for-profit context, the service provided is frequently identified as a need in the beneficiary group by the funding agency. The beneficiaries or recipients have therefore not 'chosen' the service in a free market sense. From this perspective, the term 'market orientation' is thus inappropriate. It begs the questions 'what market?' and 'why market? A market orientation must, in the case of non profits, refer to the need to develop for awareness of the service to a wider audience. In the national education context, the underpinning rationale for this awareness has to be based on identifying the most appropriate recipient for this service to maximise efficiency of service delivery. Similar arguments have been placed in healthcare. In a study of market orientation in public healthcare, Hayden (1993) distinguished between customers and consumers, and called for an examination of the public healthcare organisation's orientation toward both groups.

The concept 'market orientation' assumes a form of 'exchange', which is not necessarily appropriate to the not-for-profit sector. The act of 'exchange' in the 'for profit' sector represents the fundamental basis for the marketing dynamic, where goods or services are provided in exchange for payment. However, Liao, Foreman and Sargeant (2001:258) contend that: 'While there are a plethora of occasions when not-for-profit organisations do exchange value with the recipients of their goods or services (or even a "warm feeling" in exchange for donations), there are many occasions when the notion of exchange has no meaning'. Foxall (1989) suggests that the term 'exchange' be replaced with 'matching' which is deemed more appropriate to a not-for-profit context because it is more embracing. The notion of matching makes the provision of education services by state sponsored institutions much less a case of market choice than it is of harmonising skills required in the market with individuals who have the potential to develop the targeted skills.

Although the cost-sharing imperative, which has more recently required institutions to supplement their resources, this to some extent reduces the 'matching' prerogative. The considerable state subsidisation of the institutions makes the notion of exchange used in a market context less appropriate. It is also argued that what happens when cost-sharing (read: user/client/recipient charges) represents a significant drain on the financial resources of the household, the household then calculates the returns on its own investment – irrespective of the government subsidy contribution. In other words, as soon as the user fees accruing to households increase beyond a certain magnitude, state subsidy no matter what the extent does not remove 'exchange' or market-like interactions.

Competitiveness and survivalism

Marketing in the 'for profit' sector is informed by a competitive and survivalist mindset which fits only one part of the equation in the 'not-for-profit' sector. The two primary 'client groups' to which not-for-profit organisations respond are: agencies that fund the service activities of not-for-profit organisations, and those that consume the services provided.

It is frequently necessary for not-for-profit organisations to 'compete' for financial and other resources from funders. However, when it comes to providing services there is usually no shortage of demand. Bruce argues that excess demand removes competitive dynamics from non-profit service delivery as follows: 'Demand for non-profit goods and services are often so insatiable that to regard other non-profit organisations as direct competitors would be wholly inappropriate' (Bruce 1994:259). Other authors suggest that the notion of collaboration is at least as, if not more, important than competition in not-for-profit environments (Bryce 1992). For example, Kotler and Andreasen (1987), and Kotler and Fox (1985) - the latter with specific reference to education - suggest that not-for-profit organisations should be able to identify suitable opportunities for collaboration with both

public and private sector bodies. This proposition is particularly significant for the provision of any service in a context of scarce resources, where there is an imperative for institutions to collaborate in order to maximise effectiveness in delivery.

The primary stakeholders in the for-profit sector are customers, enterprises and employees within the enterprise, while in the not-for-profit sector, stakeholders include: beneficiaries, not-for-profit organisations and their employees - but there is the addition of funders. This means that in effect not-for-profit organisations have two powerful clients to serve – funders and beneficiaries (Lovelock and Weinberg 1984). Assessing the extent to which the organisation is oriented to each group can prove difficult. Indeed, market orientation studies such as that by Bennett (1998) show that not-for-profit organisations have tended to focus on one stakeholder group; in this case, funders.

The discussion above has necessarily treated not-for-profit organisations as relatively simple entities. But in the education sector reality, not-for-profit organisations such as public education institutions – in this case FET colleges – have a wider array of stakeholders. For example, it would be necessary to consider the VET institution's marketing orientation towards such groups as: government (the primary funder and regulator); various donors, corporates, trusts and foundations; governance structures such as trustees; as well as employees and of course recipients. Over and above these stakeholders there are also umbrella bodies and public opinion in general.

Assessing quality service delivery in absence of the 'profit motive'

If 'profit' is removed from the equation, just how are 'not-for-profit institutions' expected to handle effectiveness and quality? As Drucker (1990) notes, the non-profit organisation has a duty (towards its stakeholders) to allocate its somewhat scarce resources to results rather than to 'squander' them on being 'righteous'.

Using a range of 'customer satisfaction' surveys, as is suggested in the for-profit literature (and has been adopted by the British further education sector) is one approach. However, Liao, Foreman and Sargeant contend that: '(non-profit) organisations often have missions which require them to change customer behaviours' (2001:262). This is clearly particularly pertinent to the education sector, committed as it is to ensuring that student skills need to be developed. This might well involve some degree of discomfort on the part of the primary recipient, that is students who also need to be graded. As a result, conducting satisfaction surveys only among clients or beneficiaries may defeat the purpose of such surveys. Alternative measures for the education sector have been devised including perception surveys that look at most of the stakeholders, including parents, employers and state

regulatory bodies. However, there is a need for widening the net in an education context and this is likely to require much more resources for research.

Not-for-profit educational institutions should also, in addition to 'collaboration' with other not-for-profit and other public and private sector bodies, examine the extent to which they have responded to national development criteria as part of evaluating institutional effectiveness (Liao, Foreman and Sargeant 2001). This further broadens the scope of criteria for judging institutional effectiveness beyond the narrow confines of the direct market-based exchange relationship between client and for profit enterprise into the realm of the public good and evaluation against public policy.

MARKETING AND EDUCATION PROVISION

This section identifies the way in which the current notion of marketing, in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors, has been applied in the education arena. Much of the research and practice in educational marketing has been conducted in the higher education sector (Sargeant, Foreman and Liao 2002). While some work has been done on the FE sector in Britain recently - notably the work of Siu and Wilson (1998) and Brennan, Felekis and Goldring (2003) – in general, analysis in other national contexts is not widespread.

The marketing triad and education

The work of Kotler (1994) on the marketing triad – as cited earlier – is applied here to illustrate the key marketing relationships in an education service environment. To recap, Kotler's service market triad (1994:70) makes reference to the key marketing relationships in a service marketing context:

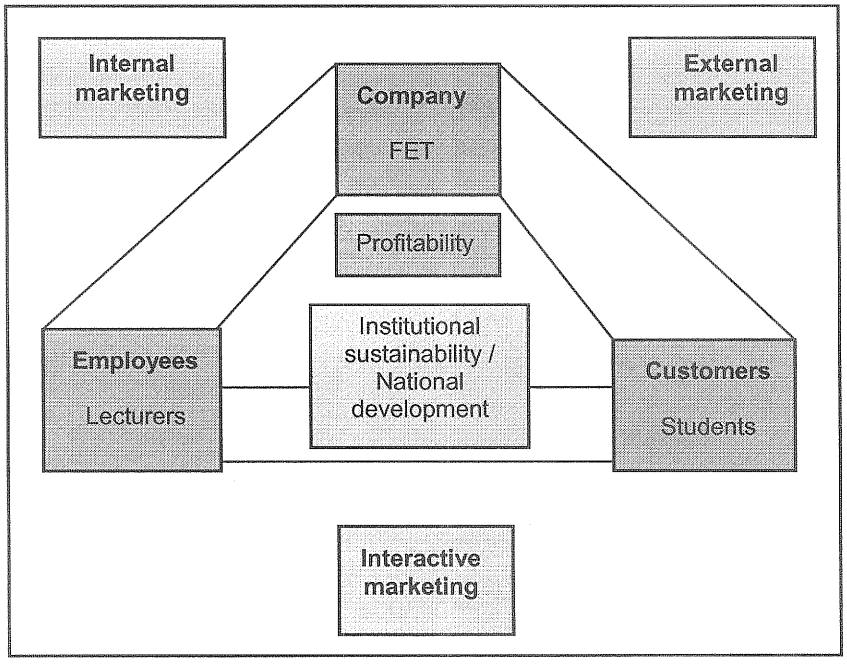
- the relationship between the customer and the company (external marketing)
- the relationship between customer and the employees (interactive marketing)
- the relationship between the company and the employees (internal marketing).

Figure 2.1 on the following page shows Kotler's model as it could be applied in an education context. This may be used as a starting point to understand the current practices in which marketing and communication units in education institutions are involved. In applying this triad – originally describing a for-profit environment - to a state education context, the following shifts are noted:

- the company becomes the 'institution'
- the customers become the students

- the employees are represented as 'institutional personnel'
- institutional sustainability and national development replaces 'profitability'.

Figure 2.1: Kotler's (1994) service marketing triad as adapted and applied in an education environment



While this figure inserts the stakeholders as understood in conventional marketing terms, it comes with a health warning which asserts that the notion that terms like 'company' and 'customer' are not unproblematic in a not-for-profit state education provision context. The purposes to which the 'enterprise' is directed needs also to be considered. In the provision of public education, institutions responsible for implementing the national development prerogative are especially challenged to ensure that these need to be foregrounded, although the institutional vision and mission should incorporate these, as a matter of course. Social development imperatives should predominate and the 'long term survival' alternative identified by Siu and Wilson (1998), considered to be a 'decision criterion' for implementing a marketing orientation in a public FE context so that institutions are able to provide the means by which they ensure survival, may be preferable to the 'profit' objective. According to this view: 'The aim of marketing orientation is to seek a dynamic balance among orienting to the demands of clients and employees, co-ordinating the infrastructure of an organisation, and coping with an unpredictable environment within resource limitations for long-term healthy survival' (Siu and Wilson 1998:303).

External Marketing of education

External marketing in education environments is understood primarily in terms of student recruitment. In a service context, where 'education' is the product being sold, increasing

enrolments is taken as a crucial indicator of market effectiveness. The objective of an external marketing drive is, therefore, directed at raising brand awareness of the service in a particular target market. Defining the target market and identifying strategies to reach this market represents the core function of marketing units which are increasingly assessed narrowly in terms of their effectiveness in increasing enrolment. These units concentrate on 'branding' and maximising market awareness through a mix of print, electronic and other media interventions.

Some authors propose expanding the functions of an 'externally driven' student recruitment approach. For example, Collins and Robertson put forward expanding the conventional remit of communications departments beyond 'recruitment' to engaging in interactive communication with currently enrolled students which requires facilitation, nurture and service so that when students graduate with '...a package of skills, knowledge, experience and contacts that makes both them and the university an eminently more marketable commodity' (2003:317). They also advocate that this be ideally achieved at the level of the course-delivery, where the quality of the instructional interaction will serve as a marketing opportunity.

How marketing interactions are focused on parents and students is also worthy of detailed consideration. Evidence suggests that first impressions and how brand impressions are conveyed between parents and students is important. For example, Glass (2004) recommends that instead of spending hours considering 'branding' issues, intensely debating conceptions of integrated marketing and wasting valuable time debating the value of the 'college tagline' or 'admission brochures', marketing units need to consider the 'first impressions' that the institution provides to prospective students. Here, an awareness of how a parent judges whether the institution will adequately respond to their child's needs is equally as important as the prospective student's impressions. According to Glass: 'A perception on some campuses seems to be that if enough time is spent on marketing strategy, the positive messages will trickle down to students and families. Strategy is important, but communicating the messages actively and effectively is one of the master keys that unlock the door to full enrolment' (2004:3). Furthermore, the institution should respond not only to the criteria that prospective students apply to their selection of college but also to how sponsors, bursars and grant organisations evaluate colleges as suitable institutions at which award recipients can be registered.

It is evident that most marketing units emphasise external marketing mechanisms as their primary responsibility. The relative effectiveness of external marketing within an overall marketing strategy and the need to balance the emphasis between external, internal and interactive marketing has been discussed above. A reminder by Glass (2004) to marketing personnel that they should expand their horizons is particularly insightful and valuable given the 'tunnelled vision' in which current marketing drives operate. Glass'

recommendations for an effective marketing plan to ensure increased enrolment as developed in the US context comprises the following:

- 'Stop searching for the "silver bullet"'. Using 'deep discounting' (providing courses at competitive rates) might have short term effects, but will not resolve the more important consideration of 'using wisdom to achieve (more long-term) goals'.
- Rather than concentrate on a 'tagline' to communicate the culture of the institution, find the best means possible to communicate this culture to prospective audiences.
- Diversify the focus group. Spend a third of the budget on targeting parents.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of what is offered at the institution.
- Ensure that student admissions personnel are adequately trained, qualified and remunerated. They represent the front line of the recruitment drive.
- Understand the differences between an 'integrated marketing' strategy and 'Integrated Communications Marketing' (ICM). ICM involves print media, electronic communications and advertising. An integrated marketing strategy takes years 'to bear fruit'. The immediacy of a results oriented approach is emphasised (Glass 2004:3-4).

One theme that comes out of Glass' work – as represented in the last bullet point - is the tension between short- and medium-term marketing strategies. Really effective strategies are likely to take considerable time to build but providers are often desperate for immediate results.

Internal Marketing of education

The education marketing literature in Britain seems to agree that marketing and communications requires strategic leadership but that this responsibility is not just a task to be left to a CEO and a marketing manager. Rather, it is about the orientation of all staff towards hearing and understanding what various stakeholders want. This notion is akin to the concept of an integrated marketing orientation (IMO) identified earlier. Gray (1991) argues that an IMO will not work if staff are not first convinced that their role in marketing is vital - hence the need for 'internal marketing' (Hartley 1999).

For South African colleges, staff-wide buy-in to the vision and mission will probably be crucial to the marketing process. However, there is a clear tension here between trying to inculcate a service orientation within the staff and the staff's counter claim to change their pay and conditions. In any case, staff morale has been found to be low.

Interactive Marketing

From the literature it is clear that the conventional understanding of marketing as a process of using publicity mechanisms to attract customers needs to be reviewed. Evidence suggests that it is perhaps more effective to adopt a holistic approach, and to ensure that the marketing process is infused into every aspect of the organisation where some form of customer interaction takes place (Brennan et al. 2003).

Brennan, Felekis and Goldring (2003) refer to the intensely competitive context of Further Education in Wales and England, in which the integration of marketing and human resource strategies is fundamentally important. They contend that for an educational organisation to ensure that it is responding to the 'marketing dynamic', it is necessary to assess '...whether marketing and human resource strategies have been integrated with each other and have been integrated into a broader strategic thinking within FE colleges' (2003:144).

It is assumed that most marketing of services takes place in direct interaction with the customer and attention to this aspect is the most effective way of retaining customers. In an education context, Black (2004) argues that the internal marketing and communication function actually represents the co-ordinated 'face' of the institution which involves all members of staff who come into contact with institutions. Rarely do students distinguish between academic and administrative functions of the institution.

More and more, the need for an integrated marketing and communication (IMC) strategy is emphasised (see for instance Black 2004; Sevier 2002; Brennan et al. 2003) which ranges from the need to co-ordinate media production to the big picture of co-ordinating all resources of the institution. Referring to the university context, it is suggested that all marketing material from advertisements, to web pages, stationery and multimedia presentations should be consistent (Black 2004:53). The integrated marketing and communications plan should ensure a steady message stream which provides the basis for choice. It is important that 'Collectively....the communications should present a consistent image of the institution designed to synergistically motivate students to enrol, persist, or donate time or money. It is the cumulative effect of the communications plans that influences choice, not a single contact' (Black 2004:54).

For IMC to succeed at the institutional level there is a need to combine resources, financial and human, *together with* buy-in from all sectors of the institution. According to Black (2004): 'Integrated marketing communications will only become a reality if there is vision, adequate resources, an action plan, staff skills, and campus-wide-buy-in. If any of these elements are missing, integration will be difficult, if not impossible to achieve' (2004:54). In addition, IMC, described as 'resource-hungry', requires the support and strategic leadership and commitment of everyone in the organisation for its realisation.

Sevier (2004) similarly notes the increasing importance of an IMC at colleges and universities which is embodied in a '...comprehensive, coordinated, institution-wide effort to communicate mission-critical messages in ways that target audiences notice, understand, and respond to' (Sevier 2004:49). In order to achieve this, three broad strategies are identified: 'brand marketing', 'direct marketing' and 'customer relationship management'. While 'brand marketing' is concerned with awareness and name recognition of the institution, direct marketing is focused on student recruitment and fundraising, and customer relationship management is concerned with delivering on promises made in the course of brand and direct marketing.

The immediate financial implications of establishing marketing functions in education institutions have also been addressed in the literature, though no information on actual or estimated marketing expenditure as a proportion of budget is provided. The not unsubstantial economic costs of establishing and running the various functions required of an integrated marketing unit needs to be championed at every level in the organisation. As Sevier points out these costs can be considerable and leadership may be inclined to baulk at the initial outlay. He observes:

> One of the biggest challenges anyone faces...is that of re-orienting people away from a focus on initial costs toward a focus on return and effectiveness...its not an easy challenge especially when all eyes are focused on budget cuts...But it's during a tough economy – more than at any other time-that the economics of marketing must be properly understood (Sevier 2002:24).

Form, function and institutional location of the Marketing and Communication Department in an education context

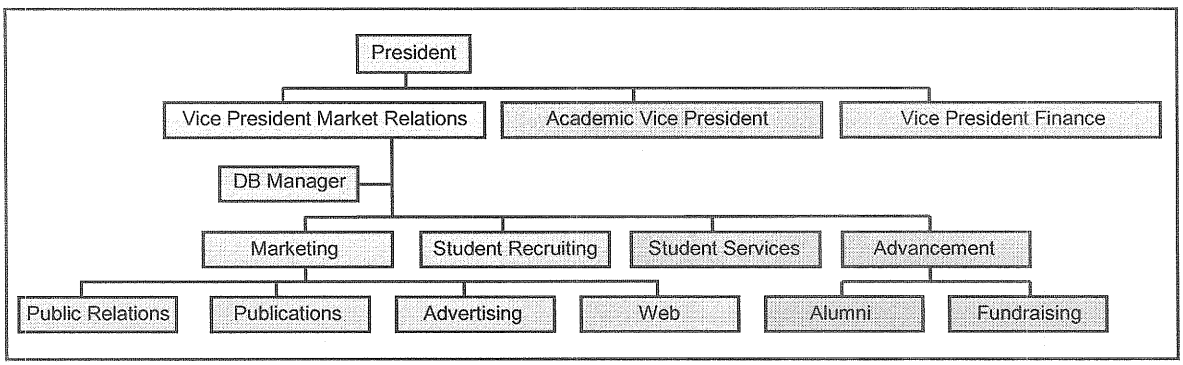
For Grönroos (1983) and Brennan, Felekis and Goldring (2003), the bulk of the marketing activities of a typical service organisation are outside the direct control of the marketing department. As observed earlier, this is largely undertaken by employees as part-time marketers. The role of the professional marketing staff under these circumstances, in addition to the 'traditional marketing' tasks, is to support the part-time marketers through internal marketing designed to inform, train and motivate them.

As observed in the section on internal marketing, implementing a policy of interactive marketing will involve integrating the marketing and human resource strategies since many of the functions associated with interactive marketing are also associated with the human resource function, for example motivation, training and internal communications. Internal marketing, including the 'marketing of marketing' (that is, explaining to employees that

marketing is an important part of their job even though it may not be their explicit professional responsibility) needs to be an explicit marketing function.

The location of the marketing function within the structure of the institution, and the seniority of the marketing manager is also important as this positioning reflects the importance accorded to marketing and links the marketing manager to high level decision-making forums. An example of the location of the marketing function within the organogram of a higher education provider is given in Figure 2.2. Naturally, the seniority of the position of a 'marketing officer', who would co-ordinate institution-wide marketing and communication efforts the size of the marketing unit and the organisational location cannot be dictated. Many institutional factors will influence this strategic placement including the size of the institution, its number and spatial distribution of campuses, the range of clients, etc.

Figure 2.2: Location of marketing unit within a higher education provider



Source: Sevier 2004:50

The head of marketing and communication in the model above incorporates the 'student recruiting' and 'student services' functions. In addition, the public relations division can represent a significant component of the overall remit of the marketing function in the organisation. The mix of responsibilities would vary from institution to institution.

Sevier (2002) makes reference to typical activities in which marketing personnel ought to be involved. This includes:

- organising for marketing effectiveness
- gathering baseline demographic and perceptual data to determine current institutional position
- adequately prioritising issues, options and goals
- developing clear marketing goals to measure progress
- delineating detailed action and responsibility plans

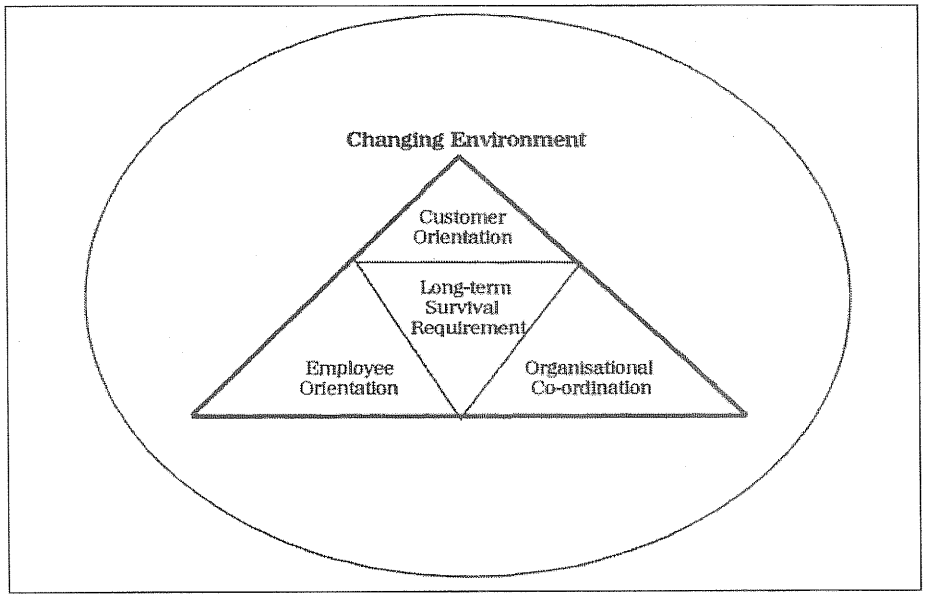
- ensuring a funding stream for the activities
- conducting evaluative research to determine success.

For Sevier, the bottom line is the extent to which the institution commits to a marketing function and to '...invest dollar, time and political resources in the creation of a marketing infrastructure that supports the idea of marketing as a resource allocation tool' (2002:24).

Marketing and further education

Siu and Wilson (1998), with reference to the British FE context, have argued that to apply a marketing approach to the setting of Further Education colleges, it is necessary to drop the concepts of profit and competition and replace them with what the authors refer to as an 'employee orientation' and a long-term survival requirement (cf. Liao 2001:296, Siu and Wilson 1998). Their framework is reproduced in Figure 2.3 on the following page.

Figure 2.3: The conceptual framework of marketing orientation



Source: Siu and Wilson 1998:297

The conceptual framework is useful in its replacement of 'profit' with a 'survival' requirement. The other categories, however, taken as they are from the 'for-profit' sector are problematic for application in the provision of education services in a not-for-profit environment. These are discussed below.

Notions of customers in a public education context are considered problematic for purposes of a state controlled not-for-profit context. The retention of the term 'customer' still suggests a 'seller-buyer' relationship central to the 'for-profit' context. If this is the case, then education logically can be bought and sold like a commodity. As Burbules and Torres (2001) argue, this kind of notion of education smacks of crass consumerism, which is associated with the current global neoliberal consumerist agenda (2001). Apple (2001) has also warned of the 'equity impacts' of this 'product oriented' notion of education.

Marketing models in a for-profit corporate context assume that decision-making power is in the hands of local management who can make critical decisions about employee recruitment and retention. In contrast, while the individual institutional management structure is responsible for operational sustainability in a not-for-profit context, these individuals are unlikely to be responsible for all the functions pertaining to its effective realisation. For example, in South Africa, the layers of VET responsibility at the national and provincial levels suggest the need to respond to a range of players who impact on institutional accountability and autonomy. In this case, elements of the human resource function exist outside of the institution, an aspect considered crucial to an effective market oriented organisation. This 'autonomy vacuum' leaves the issue of accountability and effectiveness issue still unanswered.

The British experience

So far, the discussion in this chapter has where appropriate tapped into the British literature in order to build an overview of the key themes relevant to the marketing function in not-for-profit organisational environments, with emphasis on the FE college sector. There are, however, two specific lessons that can be gleaned from the British experience: first to avoid a tendency to develop culturally monolithic marketing campaigns to underestimate the complexity of their potential client base, and second, that marketing strategies can ironically reduce rather than increase the scope of participation from certain communities in the FE colleges.

Maguire, Ball and Macrae (1999) point to the over-simplicity inherent in much of the marketing activities of British FE providers. They note that it is grounded in a technical-rational view of choice that ill fits the complex reality. They caution that the choice of institution by potential students is constrained by structural factors such as language, class, ethnicity, spatial distance and social background.

In addition, there is a likelihood that students will respond with various levels of activism – even resistance - to the way in which college curricula are presented and represented. Clearly, potential students vary in the activism and sophistication with which they address their choice decisions. They also caution that choice is shaped by other social factors such as

the feel of the place; where friends are going and, particularly for Muslim girls, family views as to suitability and safety.

Whilst Maguire, Ball and Macrae (1999) accept that educational marketing is trying to tap into individuals' identities and sense of their future lives, they contend that it is often 'under-aware' of the complex ways in which factors such as race and class affect the received meaning of marketing through cultural preferences.

There is a widespread concern that growing marketisation has led to reduced rather than increased participation among certain communities in colleges. The reasons for this lie in limited success colleges enjoyed in connecting with and attracting a non-captive and diverse student constituency as reflected in Gravatt and Silver's (2000) observation that: 'Unlike schools ... colleges do not have a captive population because there is always an alternative to attending. Colleges need to work inside their local communities, not just respond to them' (2000:115–116). The heterogeneity of communities is observed by Hyland and Merrill who refer to: '...the complexities and the multi-layers of relationships and interactions colleges have with their heterogeneous communities. Colleges have to respond to the lifelong learning needs of a variety of individuals and groups. However, both learning needs and group characteristics, do not remain constant in a context in which policies and funding are shifting' (2001:341). This implies that marketing strategies cannot be fixed, but must be adapted in accordance with changes in constituencies and in programme offerings.

Hyland and Merrill (2001) note that the changes in the college sector have encouraged communities and observers to ask what colleges are for. However, academics also stress the need to ask also 'who are they for?'

CONCLUSION

For FET colleges in South Africa, there is a need to respond to national skills development imperatives, and simultaneously impact meaningfully on national redress imperatives arising from decades of apartheid neglect. As indicated, there is a need to ensure that colleges respond to the national redress and equity agenda with respect to student selection and retention.

Current national development imperatives in colleges also require that students are skilled enough to enter the employment market or to become self-employed. These multiple objectives to which FET colleges are expected to respond makes it evident that college marketing is much more complex than corporate marketing initiatives, directed as they are to the profit motive.

South African FET reforms have been strongly influenced by British FE reforms since the rationalisation of the South African colleges sector in 2002. The British literature makes it clear that public colleges are not pure market institutions and that they should not attempt to operate as such. Commentators argue that marketing should not be understood simplistically as a narrow sales pitch or merely an exercise in advertising. Instead the literature emphasises the importance of a college getting to define and understand its market.

In particular, South African colleges need to avoid the early British tendency towards excessive inter-institutional competition, which has been bemoaned especially by business and government. South African FET colleges are perhaps more insulated from market forces than their British counterparts. This is because they have relatively limited autonomy in comparison with the British model. Furthermore, South African colleges are not driven to the same extent by threat of imminent closure – given that the Department of Education is currently engaged in a recapitalisation of the sector. Lastly, the desperation of FET-level learners to obtain a marketable qualification, and high youth unemployment means that the local colleges are unlikely to suffer a massive exodus of prospective clients in the near future.

Hyland and Merrill's comments about the continuing difficulty for English colleges in repositioning themselves almost a decade after a new Act, seems to hold true for the South African sector, which is at an early stage in the transformation process:

> ...colleges are still in the process of clarifying their purpose and identity as a result of the 1992 Act. They are pluralistic institutions and face a difficult task of trying to cater for a heterogeneous student population and diverse communities by providing academic, basic, vocational and adult education. Colleges have not been able to escape society's push towards individualism, marketisation, managerialism and profitability.
>
> Colleges are also arenas in which there is a constant tension between social/community purposes and economistic pressures, and both staff and communities are still negotiating the resultant conflicting forces. FE colleges need to be flexible multi-agencies if they are to meet the needs of their local communities and maintain a balance between courses for profit and those for marginalised excluded groups (Hyland and Merrill 2001:345).

These are the kinds of supreme challenge of which South African colleges need to be constantly aware. Tough decisions about both managerial efficiency driven by economistic pressures together with the need to respond to national development prerogatives, underpinned as they are by the very real and immediate institutional sustainability issues, are particularly pressing in this sector. Moreover, the challenge is to respond to an education

and skills agenda that is crucial in a developing context and to attempt meaningful reconstruction after the ravages of historical exclusion.

Chapter 3

THE PERFORMANCE OF MCUS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we will draw extensively from the four college level case study reports. Instead of attempting to concentrate each report to produce a series of necessarily abbreviated case studies, we will approach the content and analysis thematically across the four studies. Each theme will be illustrated by appropriate data that shows both convergence and divergence in the way in which colleges approached marketing.

We will explore how the MCUs are structured, as well as their priorities, how they are resourced and the activities they undertake. This will lead us on to an analysis of their achievements, of current challenges, and of the state of understanding of marketing theory that prevails amongst staff.

As indicated in the methodology, fieldwork comprised case studies of four FET colleges, located in a variety of metropolitan, urban and rural settings in two provinces, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The colleges were:

- College of Cape Town (Western Cape) with nine campuses
- Elangeni College (KwaZulu-Natal) with five campuses
- Mthashana College (KwaZulu-Natal) with two campuses
- South Cape College (Western Cape) with four campuses.

WHAT WAS THERE BEFORE THE MCUS?

It is well known that development of South Africa's system of colleges under apartheid was extremely uneven. Inevitably, this unevenness influenced the development of marketing and communications functions in colleges.

Some colleges had marketing structures in place prior to the phase of mergers. Consequently, in a few instances, the new and larger merged colleges inherited marketing capacity which was developed in campuses which had formerly operated as independent institutions. For example, the College of Cape Town inherited seven marketing staff from two of its campuses, whilst South Cape College had a relatively strong marketing presence in Oudtshoorn and George.

However, in the intervening period under pressure of wider challenges faced by the new colleges during and after the mergers, it is not surprising that some staff in the College of Cape Town and in the South Cape College perceive that the marketing and communications capacity, that had existed at their campuses prior to the merger had, in general, declined in the past few years. This has potentially serious implications for the future performance of MCUs as it serves to undermine the respect in which they are held by some academic staff and managers. Clearly, the level at which the MCU personnel are employed in the sector is linked to the importance of their function in the college hierarchy.

HOW ARE MCUS STRUCTURED?

Evidence from the four colleges shows clearly that a single model for organising colleges, and MCUs place within them, has not yet emerged. Rather, in keeping with the experience of the linkages and programme units (LPU) (See Human Sciences Research Council 2006b), we can see a range of approaches that probably reflect the strategic marketing priorities, provincial vision, resources and leadership approaches in former college campuses among historical antecedents of current MCU units.

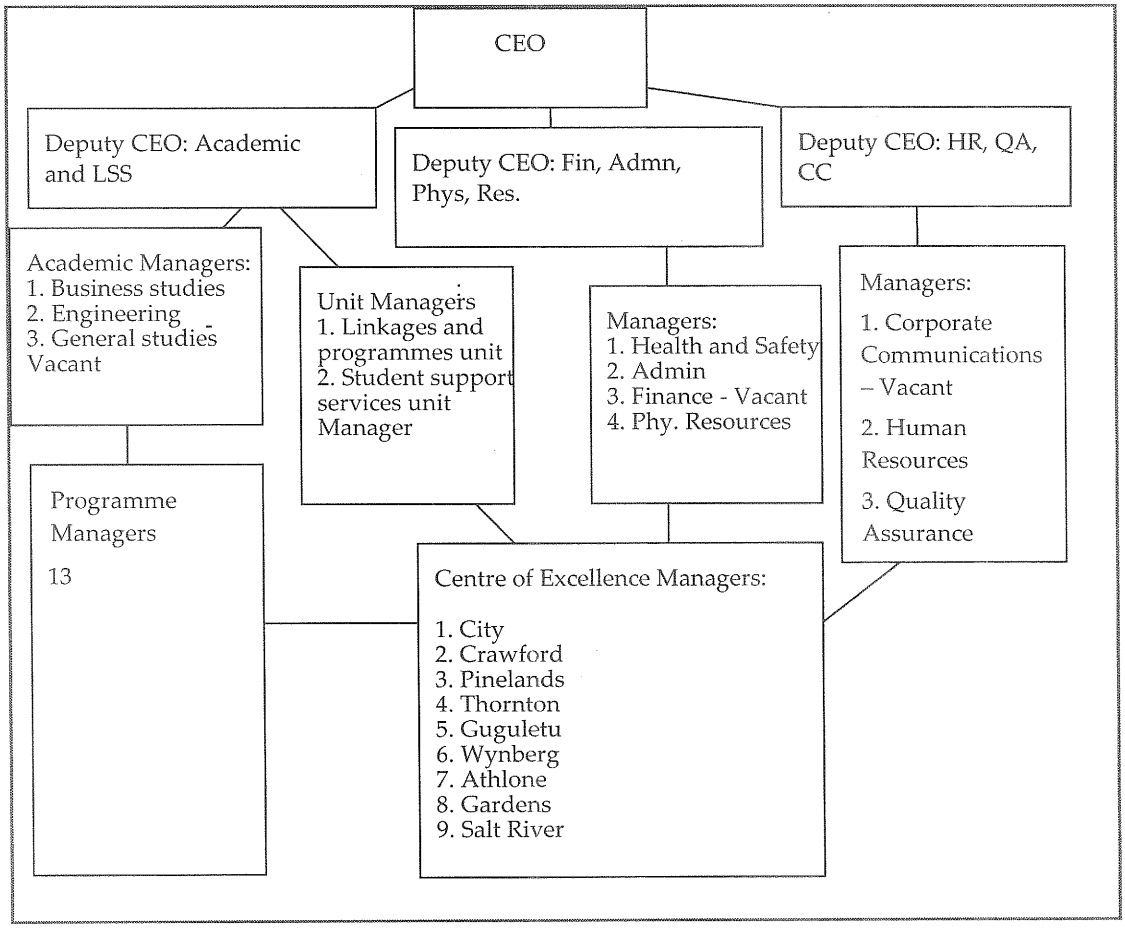
Therefore, it is not appropriate to talk in terms of identifying 'best practice' for MCU's that could be adopted by other colleges. Nonetheless, some strengths and weaknesses are apparent in the various approaches taken by the four colleges as will be discussed later.

As indicated, there is no standardised organisational structure in existence across the colleges. Indeed, there is considerable variation in the way that MCUs are incorporated within the overall college structure and how the MCUs are positioned in relation to other units and functional areas.

This can be illustrated by reference to the four college organograms included in our case-study and with reference to the structure of the MCUs themselves.

The College of Cape Town

Figure 3.1: College of Cape Town organogram



As the above figure shows, the College of Cape Town's formal structure locates the MCU under the Deputy CEO for Corporate Affairs. It is positioned alongside the 'human resources' and 'quality assurance' units/departments, and is functionally separate from academic programmes. Consequently, it is under a different Deputy-CEO from the linkages and programmes unit (LPU), which is considered an academic function.

Although the College of Cape Town appears to be developing a strong centralised approach to management, there is a countervailing sense that campus level identities also continue to be important for many staff.

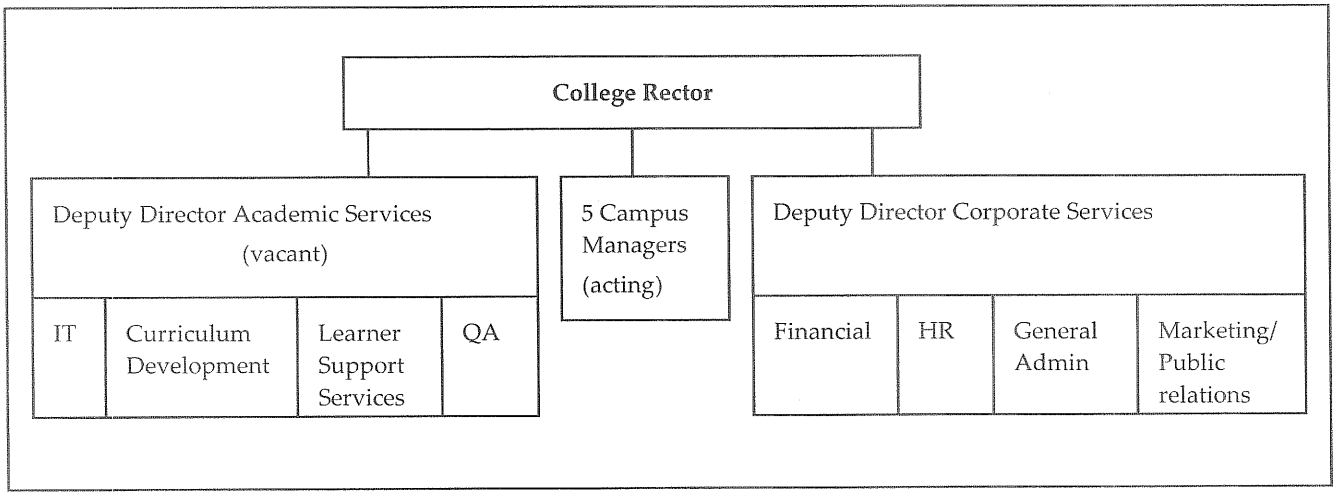
The centralisation of functions is reflected in the structure of the MCU itself. At the time fieldwork was conducted in this college, there were three MCU staff, all of whom were located in the central campus of the college. They are:

- a student recruitment co-ordinator
- a student recruitment co-ordinator/events manager
- a call-centre operator.

The staffing complement of the MCU function – at three - was lower than the level of seven staff before the merger. Fieldwork revealed that at that time there was no unit manager, the previous incumbent having left in late 2005.

Elangeni College

Figure 3.2: Elangeni College organogram



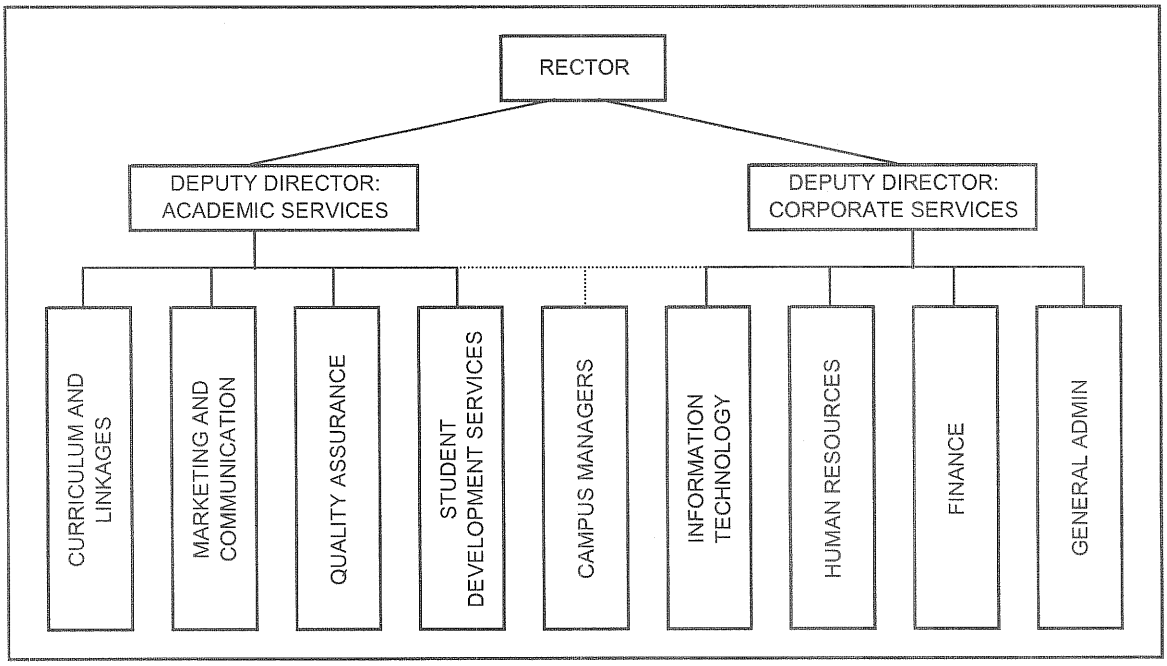
In February 2006, Elangeni College appointed a new Deputy Director for Corporate Services. This Deputy Director has responsibility for finance, human resources, administration and marketing/public relations. Similar to Southern Cape, this means that the MCU is in a different part of the reporting structure from the LPU. However, the organogram provides for the marketing and public relations as a unit within Corporate Services to share equivalent status with the key finance department.

The Elangeni Marketing and Public Relations Unit had two staff at the time of fieldwork: a manager and an assistant. As with the College of Cape Town, these posts are located at the central office.

In addition, Elangeni College does have a marketing committee that includes representatives from the various campuses. This type of structure which provides for consultation with campuses did not appear to be in place at the College of Cape Town.

Mthashana College

Figure 3.3: Mthashana College organogram



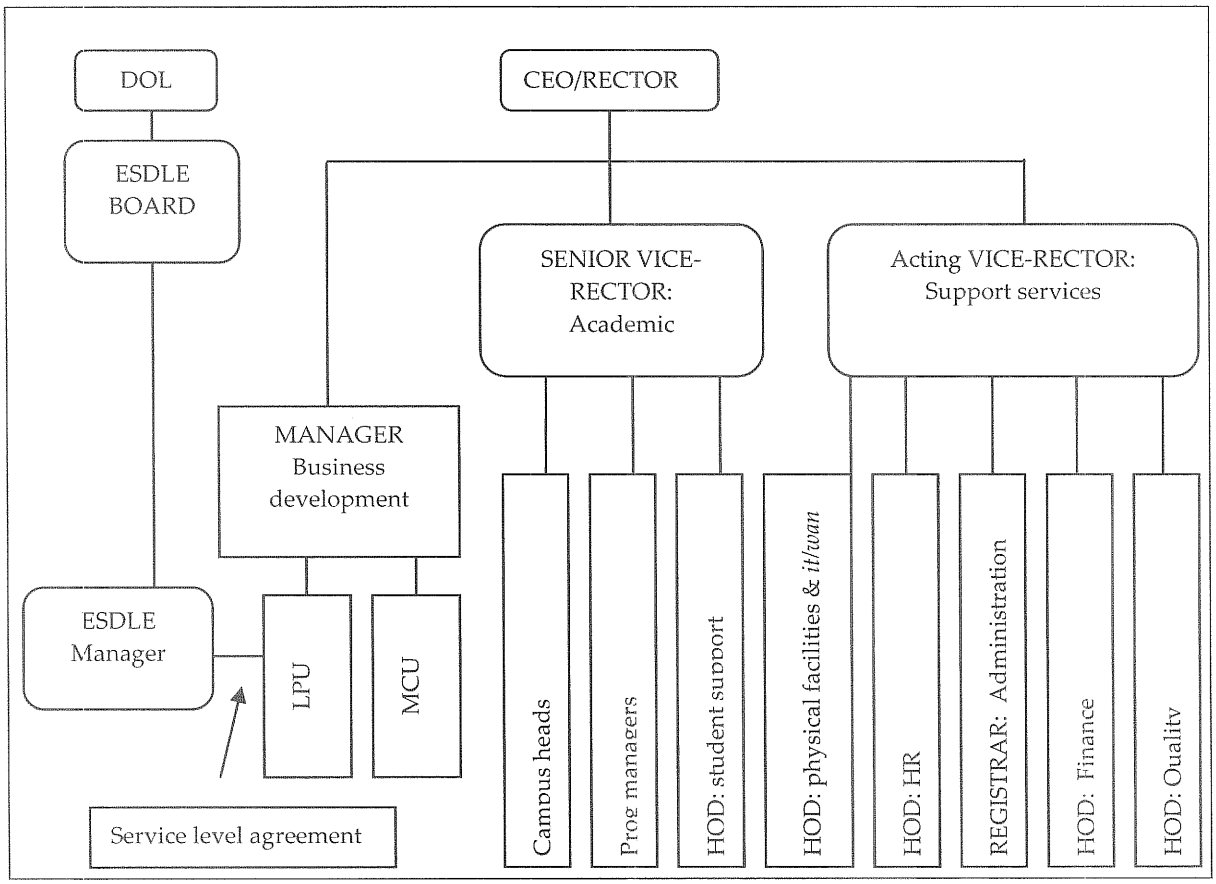
The above diagram shows that the marketing and communications unit is supposed to report to the Deputy Director of academic affairs, in contrast to the approaches of the previous two colleges which structurally place the MCU function in the broad domain of corporate support.

At the time of fieldwork there had not yet been the appointment of even an acting Deputy Director of academic services, so the MCU reported directly to the Rector. Being close to the Rector until the Deputy Director post is filled may prove to be of some advantage to the interests of the MCU.

In turn, the MCU unit was headed by an acting manager which was not ideal for the development of a cohesive marketing drive. Furthermore, the same person was also responsible for the LPU as well as for the information technology and for management information systems unit: a very broad and challenging remit, and one which cuts across the domains structured for the two Deputy-Directorates in the organogram.

South Cape College

Figure 3.4: South Cape College organogram



Note: ESDLE refers to Employment and Skills Development Lead employers Agencies

The fundamental organising principle of the South Cape College's institutional structure was a distinction between externally and internally focused activities. This has resulted in the creation of an independent Business development unit whose manager is responsible for both the MCU and LPU. South Cape is only one of the four colleges in which these two units together form a distinct structure within the college.

Although not of the same rank as the two Deputy CEOs, the Business development manager reports to the CEO which suggests that the designers of this organisational structure are sufficiently convinced of the importance of the MCU and LPU functions to place them close to the CEO in terms of line function. This is positive for the external facing Business development unit as long as the CEO and the Business development unit manager have a good relationship. This last comment is intended to reflect the fact that organisational structure will not on its own altogether define the levels of support accorded to the MCU function. Ultimately the compatibility and shared vision of the CEO and the MCU managers as people will influence the work of the MCU on a day-to-day basis.

Whilst the MCU-LPU articulation within the organisational structure at South Cape College appears to be a strength, there are some challenges that derive from differences in approach to marketing between the campuses. Tensions exist regarding the relative interests of the college overall and campuses regarding marketing. At the time of fieldwork, the unit comprised four staff who were located in different campuses:

- a Head of Department
- a marketer for George campuses (George, Outeniqua and Tembalethu)
- a marketer for Mossel Bay
- a marketer for Oudtshoorn and for national programmes offered by the college.

The latter post reflects past practise where national recruitment would be undertaken to support some of the Oudtshoorn campus's hospitality and tourism programmes.

At the time of fieldwork, the three marketers were expected to report both to their campus managers and to the head of the MCU. Some tension between the two structures became apparent, which resulted in marketers being pulled in two directions. This may reflect in part the longer traditions of marketing present at the George and Oudtshoorn campuses and a desire at those institutions to continue with their own approaches regardless of the new college-wide marketing strategy.

There is a plan to revise this structure to reinforce the central marketing vision of the college as a whole by relocating all marketing staff to the centre, that is head office or central office. However, this was being resisted at the campus level at the time of fieldwork. This case reveals how even with sound organisational structure as reflected in the organogram must be implemented within a physically decentralised organisation, underlying differences in the mode of operation and communications between satellite campuses and the central campus may produce difficulties for MCU functioning.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MCUS?

The role of MCUs, both intended and actual, can be discerned from a variety of data sources. These include interviews conducted during fieldwork; reports arising out of various projects within the SESD Programme; college strategic plans and business plans; key performance indicators and job descriptions of college staff; and MCU and other unit annual reports. This section will review the most important evidence from these sources in order to reveal, on the one hand, the range of activities MCUs are expected to carry out, and on the other hand, the activities which turn out to be the main priorities in practice.

Priorities of MCUs

Table 3.1 outlines synoptically the key priorities of the four colleges in marketing and communications. It shows there are a number of shared features in these colleges' visions for their MCUs. Increased enrolments feature prominently in all the priorities listed by the four colleges. Only South Cape College appears to specifically link the general aim to increase enrolments with specific targets for designated groups. Nonetheless, as we shall see later, the drive to increase enrolments of target groups, and also more generally, generates some tensions and concerns within colleges.

Table 3.1: Key priorities of marketing and communications units in the four case study colleges

College of Cape Town	Elangeni College	Mthashana College	South Cape College
Build brand awareness	Market services of college to current/prospective students , communities and industry	Publicise new college	Promote the college as a unique and desired brand
Increase enrolments by 20% per annum	Maximise awareness of the college	Promote positive internal and external image	Increase numbers of enrolments through intensive marketing processes and activities
Build a positive relationship with all external stakeholders	Grow student numbers	Increase mutual understanding with stakeholders	Broaden the profile of students at the college to be representative of designated groups
Develop internal and external communications plans	Fundraise	Increase enrolments	Build and maintain relationships with a broad base of external actors
Develop marketing department		Disseminate information about courses and services	Enhance a culture of constructive communication across the college
		Maintain contact with alumni	Restructure the marketing department to meet the diverse marketing challenges of the South Cape region
		Generate income	
Source: Strategic Plan for MCU	Source: MCU concept document	Source: MCU concept document	Source: Key Performance Indicators for MCU

As can be seen from the table above, there is also a shared concern with branding and promoting the new college. This is an inevitable consequence of the merger process and has resulted in the development of a range of new logos, slogans and corporate marketing paraphernalia such as posters, corporate gifts, etc.

The development and maintenance of relationships with various stakeholders also emerges as an important focus of colleges' MCUs. As can be seen, most of the documents cited in the table above also stress the importance of including internal stakeholders, primarily students and academic staff, for relationship building. The Mthashana College priority list also makes specific mention of alumni; a group that College of Cape Town are also targeting, as we shall see below.

Also noticeable is some concern with the importance of building the marketing and communications structures of these colleges. This is not particularly surprising given that the new merged colleges are at an early stage of building up and institutionalising the marketing function.

Finally, there is reference in documents of the two KwaZulu-Natal colleges to an income generating role for the MCU. However, there are differences in how each college views the issue of income generation as it applies to marketing. This is seen more as a focus on generating sponsorship at Elangeni College, whilst for Mthashana College there is more of a sense that effective marketing inevitably should in a non-specific way increase the overall college income.

Job descriptions

While documents at the institutional and unit level reflect particular priorities, it is important to consider whether or how these focus points are carried through to specification in the actual work responsibilities of staff. Prioritisation, as defined in terms of the broad areas of focus given in Table 3.1, is also reflected in the key performance areas (KPAs) of MCU staff. The KPAs of the head of the MCU units/departments, the position we refer to generically as the 'Marketing manager' are shown in Table 3.2 on the following page.

As with the specification of MCUs unit priorities, we can see a considerable degree of commonality across KPAs specified for college marketing managers in three colleges - Mthashana College will not develop these until the vacancy is advertised. The KPAs generally align well with the priorities shown in Table 3.1. Noticeably, the job descriptions give more weight to the *market research* function, something that is not stressed particularly

powerfully in the unit-level priorities but which must be central to any effective marketing approach.

From both the College of Cape Town and Elangeni College, we see the wide range of functions that MCU managers are expected to perform. As well as a series of more generic managerial functions - that have not been included in this analysis - both colleges specify at least ten KPAs for their MCU managers. Furthermore, the Elangeni manager in particular is tasked with such responsibilities as 'international relations' and 'production of the annual report', areas of responsibility that are not explicit in any of the other colleges' MCU documents. This observation does reflect relatively wide variation between the colleges in the definition of what constitutes 'marketing'.

Table 3.2: Key performance areas of marketing managers in selected colleges

College of Cape Town	Elangeni College	Mthashana College	South Cape College
Assist in updating strategic plan through provision of marketing information Manage communications and PR strategies Assess needs of existing and potential markets Grow RPL enrolments Grow enrolments of designated groups Grow enrolments in skills programmes Coordinate annual awards Manage fundraising and sponsorship activities Manage corporate image Inform all internal stakeholders about MC activities Manage staff and learners satisfaction Manage external relations Identify new stakeholders Manage marketing events	Community orientation Product development Market research Promotional activities Management of internal and external communications strategies Coordination of college functions Media relations International relations Corporate and fundraising functions Corporate reporting (incl. annual report, website)	At Mthashana, job descriptions are not formally developed until jobs are advertised. Hence, there are no detailed descriptions for MCU posts available at present.	Marketing research Student recruitment Media coverage College branding Relationship building Internal communications

Note: the KPAs listed do not include generic managerial responsibilities

Campus marketers' job descriptions

In some colleges marketing functions and activities are allocated between the central marketing office under the marketing manager, and marketing undertaken at the college level. Historically, the South Cape College has the most developed campus-level marketing function. Its campus marketers' functional areas are as follows:

- communication with external target markets
- networking with other role players
- communication with internal market
- maintaining corporate image on campus
- collecting and processing marketing information
- developing marketing materials
- managing campus-level marketing functions.

As we have observed, from the Cape College experience, there is potential for misunderstanding and some degree of conflict where allocation of functions between the central marketing office and campus level marketing is overlapping. At the same time, total centralisation of marketing to the centre may not necessarily be the best option.

MCU activities

So far, this chapter has provided an explication of the intended set of functions and activities that are delegated to the MCU. We refer to these as 'intended' in that the key source of information has been institutional documentation which locates the MCU within its institutional structure and which sets out KPAs of senior marketing personnel. However, sociologists of institutions will agree that there is almost invariably a difference between stated expectations and what actually happens in institutional environments. Based on this general observation, we explored the activities that MCUs have actually begun to undertake.

College of Cape Town

The College of Cape Town unit has been engaged in a variety of activities. The following were identified by staff as the most prevalent in 2005:

- advertising
- obtaining celebrity endorsements (getting prominent alumni to publicly endorse the college)

- community development (Community Social Responsibility)
- school visits
- exhibitions at public events and also in shopping malls
- internal marketing
- development of a database of industry contacts
- negotiation of customised courses for particular clients
- an alumni function (this first alumni function took place in September 2005).

Elangeni College

Elangeni College marketing staff identified the following as their main activities of 2005:

- market segmentation and analysis
- school promotions
- official functions
- development of corporate stationery
- compilation and design of the annual report
- publication of a student newsletter
- development of the college website
- a fundraising campaign
- marketing at malls
- development of pamphlets and posters.

Mthashana College

For Mthashana College, the key marketing activities of 2005 were:

- exhibitions
- roadshows at schools
- continuous advertising in newspapers
- open days
- presentations to local government, business and education leaders
- industry liaison
- stalls at FET events
- radio talks.

South Cape College

In 2005, the South Cape College engaged in the following activities:

- 53 school visits
- 22 career exhibitions
- open days at three campuses
- arranged for a school for people with disabilities to attend an open day at the college
- seven functions targeted at school principals or local business chambers.

Clearly, these activities show that major efforts that are being made in this college to attract young people to enrol. The special arrangement for a visit from learners living with disabilities is indicative of some progress towards meeting national and provincial commitments to improved access for this target group. The final bullet also shows that the college does reach out to the business community, an area in which the institution has had some record of success, both before and after the merger.

Allocation of resources to different marketing functions

While the text above provides a picture of the range of activities currently undertaken in the different colleges, what is equally important is to know how much time is spent on these activities. Fieldwork at South Cape College generated a useful estimate by the MCU manager of the proportion of available time allocated by staff in the unit to their portfolio of activities. This is reported in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Estimated time spent on core functions (%) by MCU at South Cape College (self-reported)

Core function	%
Student recruitment	70
Marketing strategy	8
Public relations	8
Corporate identity	8
Customer surveys	2.5
Marketing research and analysis	2.5
Internal communications	1

This table appears to provide confirmation of the observation that marketing is currently understood in many colleges as being primarily about generating increased enrolments – the overwhelming bulk of time is concentrated on external marketing and recruitment. Marketing research, analysis and customer surveys together with development of a marketing strategy combined are given a significant amount of time. The 1 per cent of time

expended on internal communications speaks very powerfully about the relative neglect of this issue. Given what has been said in this report and in other SESD outputs about the continuing challenge of forging a single South Cape College identity, such neglect is rather surprising. Notwithstanding these observations, it is evident that the South Cape MCU has been very active as can be seen from the sections above. This example of how a college MCU manager was able to assess the time commitment to various functions should be replicated in other colleges so that the balance of non-financial commitment to activities can be assessed.

An overview of MCU activities

A range of approaches and activities was put into practice across all four colleges during 2005. Given the primary focus on enrolling young learners, all four colleges spent considerable effort in visiting schools. In addition to this, college open days, participation in careers exhibitions and promotional events in shopping malls were all fairly standard approaches to student enrolment promotion. With the exception of Elangeni College, this research also found evidence of a relatively strong concern with engaging with the local business community and, in the rural context of Mthashana College, local government and traditional political structures. The sensitivity to constituencies in local government and traditional authorities at Mthashana is also revealed strongly in the HSRC's 'Summative Impact Assessment' and LPU reports (Human Sciences Research Council 2006a and b) and reflects the college's reading of its context.

Some colleges developed particular areas of the marketing function. For the College of Cape Town, it appears that targeting alumni was seen as an important element of marketing. This was reflected both in the move towards recruiting alumni to participate in formal advertising and in generally promoting alumni relations with the expectation that these stratagems would have a spin-off through informal promotion of the college by alumni. The College of Cape Town also explicitly recognised corporate social responsibility as an important part of its marketing work, although this understanding can be seen, less explicitly, in some of the findings from Mthashana College.

Mthashana College concentrated a number of activities on the media, running advertising continuously in local newspapers. Additionally, the Rector also targeted the broadcast media in a concerted way, participating in a number of programmes on isiZulu language radio.

South Cape College is the only college for which we have evidence of practical steps taken towards recruiting learners living with disabilities, whilst Elangeni College placed a

particular emphasis on entertainment or social events, such as the Miss Sivananda Pageant to raise awareness.

HOW DO MCUS INTERACT WITH OTHER COLLEGE STRUCTURES?

The organograms presented earlier in this chapter demonstrated the variety of college approaches to organisational structure and the location of the marketing function therein. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the interaction of each MCU with other units and structures inside the college and with other colleges is varied.

Interaction with the other SESD-supported structures

Most important from the perspective of the SESD Programme is the way that MCUs interact with the other SESD-supported structures: the linkages and programmes units (LPUs) and student support units (SSUs). As the introduction in Chapter 1 notes, the intention behind the creation of all three units was to support both programme and national goals in terms of repositioning colleges to be providers of high quality and labour-market relevant teaching and learning. All three units were seen as strategically vital complementary interventions in this arena.

The evidence from this study (and the parallel report on the LPUs) suggests that this complementarity has not been well developed in practice. In all four colleges, there is a sense that the logic of locating certain of these functions – MCUs, LPUs and SSUs - in distinct parts of the organisational structure has led to a silo mentality in which units are encouraged to go their own way. At a practical level, many of the possibilities for complementarity and collaboration appear to have been missed by the time the fieldwork for this study was undertaken.

However, there are signs of more positive interactions and outcomes. The South Cape College organisational structure has resulted in a relatively strong relationship between the MCU and LPU as these two units are located together under the Manager of Business development. Whilst both units are seen as having largely discrete functions (the LPU being concerned with industry linkages resulting in development and delivery of new programmes), it is clear that both units are well-briefed on each other's activities and work together in a number of ways. Market information flows relatively well between the two units and both come together practically to organise events targeting the corporate sector.

At Mthashana College the present organisational and employment situation means that both units are headed by the same acting manager. In this college, there is also evidence of some complementarity, particularly with regard to relationship development with key provincial and local stakeholders.

What is readily apparent though is that across all four colleges the MCUs' primary marketing focus on increasing student enrolments has led them to concentrate primarily on the traditional NATED programmes rather than working more imaginatively with LPUs in developing new programmes. Much more collaboration between MCUs and LPUs could be effected in the area of market research which should inform the diversification of programmes to meet new needs and expectations of potential student groups.

Only in South Cape College did this research produce any clear evidence of thinking about the relationship between marketing and student support. Here, there was an understanding that students were central to the marketing endeavour. This led the MCU to the conviction that any support it could offer to the SSU would reap rewards for its own recruitment goals.

The main practical area of collaboration between the SSU and the MCU in South Cape College was in the area of communicating with and promoting the college to current students. In this instance, dissemination of accurate information about the college was seen as helpful to both marketing and student understanding of and confidence in the college. In addition, the MCU was providing information on financial aid to prospective students on the basis of information forwarded to it by the SSU which handled bursaries and loans. The two units have also been working together in the development of student databases and a tracking system for graduates. A number of informal meetings have been held between the respective heads of department of the SSU and the MCU at which they share information pertinent to each unit, for instance on iKapa loan targets, planned student activities and social responsibility projects. At campus level, there have also been instances of informal liaison between MCU and SSU staff on various issues.

Interaction with other college structures

MCUs and campus management

There is a tension regarding the appropriate balance between college and campus level marketing and communications roles, responsibilities and activities that mirrors and adds to wider centre-campus tensions that are apparent in several of the SESD colleges (Human Sciences Research Council 2006a). In terms of marketing, some campus managers want to infuse a stronger local dimension to the marketing information being disseminated which creates a tension with general marketing information emanating from the institution.

Another angle on this tension relates to the optimal placement of marketing staff between the campus where the MCU main office is located, and satellite campuses. There is also no common view as yet across the colleges about where best to locate marketing staff and how best they should report.

MCUs and academic departments

There is a second tension between the subject-specific and generic elements of the marketing function. Concern was widespread amongst interviewees in some colleges that the MCUs are not capable of disseminating accurate subject specific information about courses to the right target audiences at the right time.

Marketing and HR issues

Marketing theory suggests that institutional marketing success can be achieved only when all staff to see marketing as part of their jobs. Some awareness and support for this orientation was evident during the fieldwork. However, there was no evidence that such a message was being reflected in the approach of college human resources departments to job analysis, and recruitment. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that any issue to do with job descriptions in colleges is complicated by the current uncertainties about staff establishments and the future of provincial as opposed to college contracts.

MCUs and CEOs

It is evident that interaction with college CEOs is central to MCU performance. CEOs must be champions of such units if they are to flourish. Moreover, the marketing and communications function is also one in which the CEO must be an active participant. It is the CEO who represents the college most visibly both internally and externally. However, there is evidence that CEOs vary in the extent to which they champion MCUs and participate in marketing and communications processes. This attests to the existence of unevenness in leadership across colleges at present, as is reflected in the SESD Summative Impact Assessment (Human Sciences Research Council 2006a).

MCUs and College Councils

Although their primary function in the new colleges is one of governance, it is clear that there was an expectation that College Councils would also play a supportive role in improving college responsiveness and in building colleges' reputations within the community. This logically implies that there should be a relationship between the work of MCUs and their councils.

However, the positive contribution of councils to marketing and communications only emerges from the fieldwork in one institution: South Cape College. In this college, external

council members collectively saw themselves as representing local business, community and various government department interests. They also saw one of their roles as promoting the interests of the college, enhancing its image, and indirectly marketing it through their engagement with the sectors they represented. The outgoing council apparently paid consistent attention to the need to positively position the college in the community, to raise local and wider awareness about it and to ensure that it was used as a local and regional resource. Council members' direct involvement in marketing and promoting the college, however, was limited by their many other commitments. Nevertheless, at times council members attended college public relations functions and campus open days. Moreover, they took regular opportunity in other meetings and forums to promote the college. The above comments indicate some potential for strengthening council - MCU interactions. However, there is need for caution about expecting council members to play a very active role in such activities, given their other commitments.

Current research commissioned by UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (McGrath 2006) has examined the role of councils in merged colleges and reinforces the point that many councils are not well-equipped to understand or practically promote the college transformation agenda. Moreover, from Mthashana College there was a sense that an additional constraint existed in the form of some council members' relatively weak understanding of the activities and priorities of the college they represented.

HOW ARE MCUS RESOURCED AND IS THIS ADEQUATE AND SUSTAINABLE?

Current resourcing

There is considerable variation in MCU funding at the colleges as reflected in their 2005 budgets:

- College of Cape Town- R1 000 000
- Elangeni College- R300 000
- Mthashana College – R 99 074.00[1]
- South Cape College- R712 000.

Equally, staffing complements vary quite considerably (figures as at the time of fieldwork):

- College of Cape Town - three staff; no manager
- Elangeni College - two staff; including manager

[1] Figure excludes salaries because the new MCU manager was not appointed.

- Mthashana College – two staff; including acting manager with responsibility for multiple units
- South Cape College- four staff; including manager.

Adequacy of resources

There are widespread and seemingly well-founded concerns about the adequacy of the MCU's current resourcing both in terms of staffing and other resources.

Staffing

Staffing is generally inadequate. We have already noted that the College of Cape Town has experienced a decline in marketing staff from seven pre-merger to three currently. Salaries across MCUs are generally low. For instance, at South Cape College they are approximately R4 500 per month. In the units, contracts are often short-term and in several instances, staff has been simply deployed to the units in an 'acting' capacity from elsewhere in the colleges in question. Retention of staff is poor and those that are in the position are largely young, inexperienced and poorly qualified as a result of the combination of the conditions noted here.

It is important to remember that the challenges affecting the adequacy of staffing of MCUs reflects wider problems for colleges in the area of staffing (cf. Human Sciences Research Council 2006a). The recent past has seen provincial (and national) moratoria on new appointments; uncertainty and delay in ratifying and funding new staff establishments; procedural delays in appointment where posts are to be filled; issues of provincial versus council appointments and their respective pay and conditions; and generally uncompetitive salaries.

Other resources

The fieldwork revealed considerable concerns across the four colleges about the adequacy of other resources for the MCUs. This included widespread views from MCU staff that operational budgets were inadequate. For instance, staff at Elangeni College were concerned that their budget had to be supplemented from other funds in order for planned activities to take place.

At some of the colleges there were concerns about inadequate access to computers, printers and vehicles, all of which undermined the ability of units to do their job.

The South Cape College MCU head pointed out that the college spent 3 per cent of its budget on marketing, which compared very unfavourably with corporate benchmarks. Moreover, the proposed budget of the MCU had subsequently been significantly cut, along with those of all other departments, due to an overall funding shortfall in the college.

Sustainability

There were mixed views about the future sustainability of MCUs after SESD funding ceases. Respondents generally agreed that SESD funding within the current programme had allowed activities and structures to develop further than would have otherwise been the case. There was a similar consensus that marketing and communications were core functions of a college and so would have to be sustained through college budgets in the longer term. Nonetheless, given existing concerns about the adequacy of budgets, the scale of a sustainable marketing and communication function and its likely adequacy were matters for general pessimism.

This is, of course, linked to larger sustainability issues for the sector. At the College of Cape Town, MCU income is derived from fees. However, there are serious concerns about the ability of many potential learners to pay the level of fees that the college needs to sustain such functions. At Mthashana College, the financial sustainability of the entire college is a major challenge in the light of the poor and deep rural milieu in which the college is situated.

HOW ARE THE PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENTS SUPPORTING MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS?

Both provinces included in this study, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, have placed considerable emphasis on marketing and communications activities related to the FET college sector. In both cases, colleges were seen as important to supporting Provincial Growth and Development Strategies and as integral parts of the Provincial Human Resources Development Strategies. Both provincial governments, at the level of Premier as well as the relevant MEC, have understood colleges to be capable of playing a key role but also to be in need of considerable attention in respect to raising institutional quality and re-branding.

Western Cape

Beyond its SESD-supported Marketing and Communications Strategy, it is evident that the Western Cape has developed a clear vision for the sector, which includes an emphasis on

what the provincial FET strategy terms 'changing the negative image of FET'. A number of provincial events have taken place where the changing nature of the sector has been presented to key stakeholders and championed by leading speakers.

KwaZulu-Natal

KwaZulu-Natal has conducted a similar strategy of high level events, including a launching of the new colleges to more than 1 000 delegates at the Durban International Conference Centre in 2003. The KZN Department of Education (KZNDE) produces 'KZN College Scene', a newsletter about the sector every quarter, and has produced annual overviews of the province's college sector.

The provincial department has also made efforts to promote marketing and communications across all of the colleges in the province. Initially driven by the SESD-initiated best practice forum for marketing and communications, the KZNDE has sought to encourage colleges to develop policies in this year. This resulted in a two-day meeting in October 2005 and the provincial department was intended to engage in joint marketing activities.

WHAT HAVE MCUS ACHIEVED?

It is typically difficult to discern hard evidence on impacts on the registered student population, on the quality and effectiveness of institutional marketing or other changes that can be directly attributable solely to the MCU units. Moreover, many of the likely impacts may only be discernible in the medium-term. A number of remaining constraints on MCU impact lie outside of the control of the units.

Yet at the same time, there are successes that reflect successful collaboration of MCUs with other actors and of MCUs creating the conditions conducive for their success. Thus, it is possible to point to some areas in which MCUs do appear to be exhibiting evidence of achievement.

There is a sense of an increasingly positive attitude towards the colleges amongst their local stakeholders that has been facilitated by the work of the MCUs. The very active recruitment drives of some of the colleges appear to have some reflection in growing applications and enrolments at the start of the 2006 academic year. There is also a perception in colleges (but no real compelling evidence) that the MCUs are having a positive effect on recruitment from designated groups.

MCUs are also seen in some cases as playing a vital role in helping build community embedded-ness and a new college identity, positive observations that were very clearly expressed at Mthashana College.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Most marketing and communications staff are as new to their colleges as are their units. Moreover, the colleges themselves and their leaders are also new in important ways. It is entirely expected, therefore, that sophisticated understandings and practices of strategic marketing and communications are absent from these colleges at present.

The major focus of marketing and communications within these colleges currently is on increased student enrolments. This has led to considerable activity in getting the college message out to schools and also in shopping malls, on telephone poles and on walls in the colleges' catchment areas.

The language of catchment area, however, is one indication of the current limited state of marketing thinking in the colleges. Even in the metropolitan colleges, where access to transport to the sites of neighbouring colleges is feasible in terms of time or cost, there appears to be little sense that colleges can attract students from outside their geographical zone. And where there is evidence of in-migration (for example, students from the Eastern Cape to the College of Cape Town; national movements of students to Oudtshoorn's tourism and hospitality centre) this appears to reflect historical realities or pre-merger marketing efforts rather than any new, innovative or productive marketing initiative.

The notion of catchment areas also leads some colleges to adopt what appears in reality to be a supply-side mentality about the need to reach out to deprived and excluded communities. Such a drive has been most powerful in the rural hinterland of Mthashana College but also appears to be motivating South Cape College's recent expansion into Beaufort West and Plettenberg Bay. Whilst there are strong arguments for such an expansion of services into poor and remote rural communities, it is clearly a very different drive from the imperative to be more responsive to demand for skills from industry and the labour market. Furthermore, it needs to be understood that being responsive to formerly excluded communities and/or being responsive to industry requires particular approaches.

In the process of considering how to leverage greater enrolments, there appears to be little sense among the MCUs of how market segmentation must be taken into account or of what new or adapted programmes the market might demand. Rather, the drive is largely to sell better what colleges already offer. This seems to reflect that processes of re-visioning rather

than en-visioning as described in the LPU report (Human Sciences Research Council 2006b) are also dominating MCU thinking. Equally, whilst there is recognition of the needs of designated groups, especially in the Western Cape, there is only limited evidence of a focus on their particular needs and the specific challenges of marketing to these potential clients.

Notwithstanding these observations, there is some evidence of an emerging college interest in niche markets. In the two Western Cape colleges this appears to largely take the form of building on the historical strengths of certain campuses, rather than a more radical and market-driven approach. Where niche approach does appear to have developed furthest is at Mthashana College. Here it appears that the very enormity of the challenges of operating in a deep rural setting have forced the college to engage in a more radical strategic rethinking. Thus, the Mthashana College strategic plan suggests that the college should increasingly focus on three niche areas:

- tourism
- agriculture (commercial and subsistence)
- forestry.

These niche areas did not emerge from what the college considered itself to already be good at (re-visioning – cf. Human Sciences Research Council 2006b) but from a reading of the local economy (en-visioning – cf. Human Sciences Research Council 2006b).

Thus, in spite of Provincial Growth and Development Strategies and HRD Strategies, there appears little evidence that MCUs are yet engaging in more strategic analysis of local challenges and possibilities. Of course, the focus on MCUs as discussed here does not fully capture the range of other activities undertaken by these colleges that are also designed to promote responsiveness. In particular, the current organisation of MCUs and LPUs means that the latter are at the forefront of talking to local employers and of designing and delivering new demand-driven programmes. Whilst there is some evidence of good communication between the two units in some colleges, the tendency of MCUs' to primarily focus on enrolments for NATED courses has led them to avoid taking more complex approaches to market analysis, and in this sense they may be missing out on new opportunities.

Indeed, one of the most obvious lessons to come out of a reading of the current report alongside the report on the LPUs is that the colleges' reveal a weak strategic sense of the potential value that lies in adopting a vision and strategy that is informed by a combined marketing and linkages approach.

This chapter has argued that internal marketing and communications have been relatively neglected in the drive towards achieving enrolment growth. Nonetheless, there are some signs that a link between the internal and external is understood by some in the MCUs and colleges. This is demonstrated most clearly by looking at South Cape College's marketing goals where the MCU goals express the belief that by successfully improving internal communication (goal 3) this will help to promote South Cape College as the desired brand (goal 1) and increased enrolments (goal 2) will follow.

The notion of a desired brand was something that appeared relatively widespread across the colleges. The management of reputation and the undoing of past negative perceptions of particular colleges and the sector were routinely seen as crucial to the challenge of increasing enrolments.

Finally, there was some indication that academic staff recognised that they could and should play a role in marketing, although there was little evidence that these views were developed conceptually or effectively formalised. Certainly, the link between understanding academic staff as part time marketers and the implications for hiring academics with marketing competencies or training of academics towards a marketing orientation was nowhere evident in HR approaches.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES THAT MCUS FACE?

Whilst marketing and communications do appear to be core functions for the new colleges, it is evident that there are a wide range of challenges to be overcome if the MCUs are to be effective and efficient contributors to the repositioning of South African FET colleges in order to deliver on national development goals.

Enrolments

Throughout this chapter we have observed how strong is the belief among staff in the colleges that the primary function of MCUs is to promote significant increases in student enrolments. At the same time, it is also evident that there are concerns and even resistance from staff about this drive for enrolment growth. Some of this is a worry about standards. Staff understandably are concerned that increased student numbers will drive down overall performance. This is linked to concerns that staffing will not increase in line with enrolments, leading to excessive workloads and class sizes. They also worry that resources will be insufficient to cope with the rapid growth envisaged (such as the targeted 20 per cent per annum stated by the Western Cape Education Department for instance).

There are also some concerns expressed about the possibility that designated group learners will bring particular challenges that can raise demands on academics time. More practically, this concern is analogous to some staff members' response to the aim of increasing enrolments of people living with disabilities. Several respondents pointed out that college infrastructure was, in many cases, inadequate to meet current demands, let alone to cater for more students and particularly not for more disabled students.

Capacity to cater for enrolment growth was in the view of staff going to be seriously constrained in some cases in spite of national and institutional commitments to rapid expansion. This suggests the need to focus current recapitalisation initiatives with a view to removing such blockages to growth. It seems inevitable that the drive for rapidly increasing enrolments will lead to tensions about quality and outcomes. As with other systems internationally, it seems unlikely that South Africa can simultaneously meet goals of improved enrolments, throughput and labour market insertion.

In the drive to rapidly increase enrolments through conventional marketing strategies, it needs to be remembered that many of the students and communities who are to be served by colleges are impoverished. In such an environment, marketing cannot be a major element in the solution to the enrolment challenge.

MCU capacity

Major problems with staffing and physical and financial resourcing have already been clearly outlined and these are very serious challenges for the future performance of MCUs.

However, there is a potentially more fundamental concern expressed by many other college staff that MCUs lack the capacity to understand and explain the curriculum effectively. If this is indeed the case, then there are likely to be even greater challenges in responding effectively and efficiently to the current re-curricularisation process.

(De)centralization

The SESD Summary Impact Assessment (Human Sciences Research Council 2006a) highlights the wider tensions that are evident between campus and college levels across the SESD colleges. The four colleges illustrate a variety of models of central office - campus organisation of MCUs but it is not apparent that one works best or would be more widely applicable. The centre-satellite campus tension is visible inside of the MCUs in several

colleges. Whatever the answers to the above challenges, at a more pragmatic level it is evident that there needs to be greater sensitivity to local conditions at different campuses: whether urban- as opposed to township-located or in different towns and areas.

Internal support

Whilst there is evidence that councils, CEOs and senior management are championing MCUs, the actual levels of support and understanding from each of these levels appears uneven. It will be important to strengthen MCU support from all of these groups.

Moreover, MCUs have limited and uneven support from non-management rank and file college staff. There is serious concern amongst academic staff that marketers are overselling institutions and generating unrealisable expectations amongst students. At the College of Cape Town there appears to be a particular problem of serious unhappiness amongst staff and management about MCU performance. Whilst this is partly because the unit did not have a manager at the time of fieldwork and declining levels of staffing in marketing, it will be difficult to change views of the MCU quickly and, indeed, the whole future of marketing and communications in the college appears seriously threatened by the current negativity.

External brand awareness

In spite of the considerable efforts and expenditures in this area, corporate branding is not yet fully standardised in all cases. In Elangeni College's case this is clearly made more difficult and costly by the recent name change. Overall, it appears that there is still limited public brand awareness of some colleges.

Internal communications

It is evident that internal communications is a relatively underemphasised part of the overall marketing and communications function. It is not surprising, therefore, that internal communications are widely perceived as being weak (although this varies across colleges). Whilst the reasons for underemphasising internal communications in favour of an external emphasis may be understandable, international evidence and our experience of following the development of the SESD-supported colleges suggest that this area needs far more emphasis in future.

Management Information Systems

Further Education and Training Management Information Systems are still weak across the sector in general and this constrains the effectiveness of marketing. Such problems are inevitably greatest in the more rural and widespread colleges, such as South Cape College and Mthashana College, in spite of considerable efforts to address this issue at South Cape College in particular (Human Sciences Research Council 2006a).

Lack of strategic vision and contribution to institutional strategic planning

Whilst there has been the occasional reference to supporting and refining college marketing strategies in the case studies, we argue that MCUs have not yet developed a sufficiently important role in helping develop college strategies through the collection and analysis of market information and its communication to those involved in the strategy development process. There is very little sense that MCUs are seen, or see themselves, as important actors in strategic planning. Moreover, in some cases, it appears that the sheer scale of the day-to-day administrative tasks of MCUs is preventing much in the way of strategic thinking.

Of course, the MCU role in strategic planning is largely shaped by the way colleges themselves have developed their ability to engage in this core institutional process. This has been an area that many colleges have struggled in coming to terms with and the 'Summative Impact Assessment' (Human Sciences Research Council 2006a) points to considerable unevenness in capacity to engage in strategic planning amongst supported colleges, even after three years of SESD assistance.

The deep rural challenge

The vision for new colleges generally, and for their marketing and communications function specifically, is implicitly based on the model of a large, urban college. Nowhere in the national policy debate has there been a real engagement with the particular needs of colleges that are located in rural areas, many of which are particularly weak in terms of enrolment size and institutional performance. Within the small group of case study colleges, we can see evidence of the particular challenges of marketing and delivery in the deep rural context that characterises much of Mthashana College's catchment area and also parts of South Cape College's hinterland, particularly the area around Beaufort West. These colleges are struggling to find workable strategies for such contexts. There is a case for national and provincial authorities to pay far more attention to the challenge facing colleges located in rural regions. The LPU report's exploration of Mthashana College's experience of

developing skills centres (Human Science Research Council 2006b) may merit further consideration regarding its implications for marketing and communications both in this institution and more widely.

Customer orientation of colleges

Overall, colleges are still struggling to develop a strong customer orientation. Whilst MCUs are seen as important in overcoming this problem, their performance is itself constrained by limited customer orientation elsewhere in institutions. For example, the LPU report shows the complexity of progress in generating such an orientation in the key curriculum area of learnerships (Human Sciences Research Council 2006b), and there remain a wide range of areas in which customer orientation is limited. Moreover, there appears to be widespread uncertainty as to what the concept 'customer orientation' means in the context of national education and development social good projects and imperatives.

The scale of the challenge and the rapidity of change

The discussion of the last sub-section above links to a more general challenge. Throughout this chapter, it is evident that much of problems faced by MCUs relate to the huge scale of the overall challenges that colleges face in transforming themselves.

Moreover, in some colleges the processes of change are so rapid that it is very difficult for the nature and impact of changes to be adequately communicated both internally and externally.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided the first detailed evidence on the performance of what are still very new units within the college sector. Inevitably, these units remain rather fragile and under-developed. Indeed, some staff on certain campuses perceive (and perhaps with some justification) that their local marketing capacity has declined as a result of the merger process. This is an inevitable consequence of the merger process, which for some of those in previously privileged campuses will appear to be associated with a decline in resourcing and standards before the full fruits anticipated from merger and transformation can result in an improved sector for all.

which is likely to have private providers as competitors, as well as other public institutions in its catchment area.

Marketing and communications are likely to become a core function of colleges in the future and so the degree to which these units are sustainable will inevitably have to be addressed. Clearly, there will be challenges in developing let alone sustaining effective MCUs.

What these key messages might mean for policy and practice will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 provided some evidence of how MCUs are organised, what functions they are expected to perform and the challenges MCUs continue to face. Some of the gaps between current practice in South Africa and recent theory and experience internationally about marketing and communications were identified. In this brief final chapter we will explore a series of implications for policy and practice that arise from the analysis.

ARE MCUS WORTH REPLICATING?

The most important question we need to address is whether the evidence from this project suggests that MCUs are important and successful enough to be prioritised for development in all 50 colleges.

MCU performance to date

In assessing the performance of MCUs to date it is vital to remember that they are new structures which have not yet come to full maturity. Chapter 3 provides evidence of considerable activity within the MCUs during 2005. It also highlights some early and tentative evidence of impact. However, there is not yet a compelling case from the MCUs performance that they should be continued, let alone replicated in all colleges.

MCU resourcing

Those MCU units for which case studies were undertaken as part of this study were under-resourced, even with SESD support. The question of resourcing is fundamental to the

sustainability of these units but they must compete for funding alongside a wide range of other college functions requiring resources. Moreover, the sustainability of a range of activities in these colleges is uncertain (Human Sciences Research Council 2006a). This suggests that adequate funding of marketing and communications activities across all colleges might be very difficult to achieve within the current budget constraints.

The importance of marketing and communications

However, the above points should serve as health warnings rather than as a compelling case against a national programme of MCU development.

The real argument for providing national and provincial support to the marketing and communications function is driven by the need to deliver in these areas if colleges are to be successful in their new environment. Greater college responsiveness to national development imperatives and market demand requires that colleges should both better understand the environment in which they are operating and better communicate their quality and vision to others. Indeed, there appears to be a synergistic relationship between improved marketing and communications and improved responsiveness.

The desire to increase growth in enrolments that lies at the heart of national and provincial strategies is unlikely simply to come from offering more places. Many prospective students are poor and there are other possible learning pathways available. Leading private providers are heavily engaged in areas of marketing and are consequently at least in partial competition with public providers. Moreover, public knowledge about and understanding of new colleges is still limited and needs to be developed further. Simultaneously, the clarity with which staff inside the colleges understand their own rapidly evolving institutions in such a way as to be co-marketers is rather limited. All of these factors constrain college development and suggest that better marketing and communications can assist college development across a broad array of key performance areas.

MCUs and current policy imperatives

The case for supporting MCUs is also strengthened by the current policy concerns of national and provincial departments. Current major linked initiatives of recapitalisation and re-curricularisation clearly heighten the need to ensure that colleges interface with communities to inform them of this revitalisation process through marketing and communications. The pressure has increased on the new improved college sector to be effectively marketed and communicated to stakeholders. Crucially, the re-curricularisation

exercise will be of little real value unless colleges are able to use their marketing activities effectively to ensure that new curriculum options and pathways are populated by students. Each MCU needs to convince its potential clients of the attractiveness of the college's new curriculum offer.

HOW CAN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLEGES' MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES BE MAXIMISED?

If we accept that there is a case for promoting marketing and communications activities across all 50 colleges, it is important to consider how best to maximise the effectiveness of such activities.

Organisation

The first point to be made is that it is unclear whether marketing necessarily needs to be located in the same unit as communications. Whilst the two activities are clearly closely related, it can be argued that there are distinct functional areas within the broader area of marketing and communications that could usefully be provided by separate units.

Second, whatever structure is to be adopted, there is a need to think clearly about what the focus of marketing and communications within colleges should be at the present time and how best to deliver upon it. The findings of this project suggest that the current units are being expected to do too much, and may be prioritising certain activities without adequate reflection as to the underlying rationale for such choices.

Third, it is clear that given the range in institutional shapes across colleges where and how marketing and communications units fit into the overall college structure cannot be specified on a homogenous basis. Instead, the placement of an MCU will need to reflect each college's specific development path.

Nonetheless, it is important to pay careful attention to the general location of MCUs within the overall structure of colleges. It is evident that whether a unit is located with academic services or corporate affairs, for instance, can profoundly shape the way that it comes to operate and is perceived by the institutional community. By the same token, the MCU can influence the units with which it is co-located. On the other hand, irrespective of its location, there are dangers that a silo mentality can emerge causing the marketing and communications team to fail to communicate with other units and staff located in the structure of the college.

What seems particularly important is for marketing and communications staff to be located in a place and in a culture where they can work together with other staff working in cognate functions – for example those responsible for business linkages, admissions and student support, and for academic and campus functions.

Resourcing

A major concern for those seeking increased support for marketing and communications is the already parlous state of resourcing in the existing, externally-funded MCUs. Chapter 3 clearly shows that staffing and general resourcing are inadequate, which reflects the general issue of resourcing across the South African public FET college sector as a whole. This point is reinforced by the LPU and Summative Impact Assessment reports (Human Science Research Council 2006a and b).

Notwithstanding the larger issues surrounding funding of the colleges sector, there is a need to implement budgetary decisions in a more strategic way. Colleges have to better align their budgets with their strategic goals and invest in functions that are crucial to the achievement of these goals. Such a strategic approach to funding is likely to increase the profile of marketing given its close functional alignment to the achievement of strategic priorities across the system.

The size and scope of the plan for marketing and communications and institutional expectations of the MCU must be realistically related to resourcing. If there is not to be a significant increase in funding for these functions, then it is necessary to rein back the expectations placed upon marketing and communications and the wide range of activities included within the remit of these units.

Championing marketing and communications within colleges

Marketing and communications, like any other college function, is only likely to flourish when it is championed by CEOs and senior management teams. In particular, marketing and communications is of strategic importance because it can play a vital role in informing the CEO about the performance of strategic plans. Their ongoing revision, therefore, needs to be seen as a core area of work for both CEOs and such units.

It is also important for MCUs to develop a better working relationship with councils. Council members, by virtue of their status, can also play a role in marketing and

communications. This should be encouraged. However, realism about the capacity and ability of councils to play a marketing and communications role is needed.

Provincial support

In the two provinces covered in the process of conducting the four case studies – KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape - there has been a strong provincial role in developing the marketing and communications function. This was probably also reinforced by the existence of larger provincial strategic processes.

However, we need to remember that most provincial governments lack the capacity demonstrated by the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Nonetheless, all provinces should be able to usefully support local level capacity and to respond to provincial and sub-regional trends. This would include developing and sustaining effective models of FETMIS.

Knowledge sharing between colleges is another area in which provinces can play an important role. The KwaZulu-Natal experience of using the 'best practices forum model' to encourage inter-college knowledge sharing seems worth replicating.

Provincial departments' overall support to the college sector as a whole is also a key factor. Perhaps most crucially, this includes issues to do with staffing. College based respondents are strongly of the opinion that provincial departments have been too slow in finalising and funding staff establishments and in completing appointments where posts have been advertised. These weaknesses are considered to be playing a major constraining role on the ability of colleges to perform.

Provinces can also continue to play an important role in bringing various stakeholders together and in ensuring that issues such as Sector Education and Training Authority and Umalusi accreditation and quality assurance are efficiently managed.

National support

The national Department of Education has an important systemic role to play in developing clear and realistic policies that encourage the broader college transformation process and the specific supporting role of marketing and communications. Clearly too, the Department has

an important role to play in motivating for adequate funding for colleges to be able to engage in their marketing and communications work.

At present, the management of the re-curricularisation process is the most crucial task. At the heart of this challenge is the need to ensure that: the colleges can deliver new programmes; that they are supported in successfully marketing such programmes to a wide student body; and that the range of curricular offerings reflect (now and in the future) the realities of local and national labour markets and national development priorities.

In this process, it will be crucial that the national Department leads a process of developing the informational capacity of the system. Areas of priority here might include building a better national FETMIS; and collaborating with other providers of data such as the Departments of Trade and Industry and of Labour.

The new curriculum offerings developed by the Department of Education will not be the sum total of all offerings by colleges. In this light, it will be particularly important that the Department works together with the Department of Labour, Umalusi and SAQA to ensure that colleges are able to offer other appropriate programmes that are both accredited and quality assured.

National leadership is also required on the issues of staff contracts. A clear decision is needed about the future of provincial and council contracted staff.[2] Whatever this decision is, it will be vital that any new contractual approach will ensure the recruitment and retention of the right quality of staff.

In continuing to drive the strategic planning process, it is desirable for the Department to facilitate a greater focus on the development of internal college market information collection and analysis capacities. Inevitably, this would need to be done in partnership with other colleges and provincial FET college directorates.

Finally, the national Department can play an important role in providing national leadership in improving learning from the theory and international practice of marketing and communications.

[2] Provincial contracts are those funded by the provincial authorities based on the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) system. Colleges often need to increase staff levels and therefore, use student fees to pay staff, referred to as 'council staff'.

Learning from theory and practice

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing marketing and communications in the South African public FET college sector relates to the poor current levels of knowledge and understanding about such issues within the colleges. This inadequacy is hindering the sector's effectiveness. There are lessons to be learnt from marketing and communications theory; how this theory has been applied to the case of education; how a more specific theoretical approach relevant to education has evolved; and how educational providers internationally have experienced trying to improve their marketing and communications approaches.

This study is no substitute for a detailed exploration of such lessons but we have briefly outlined a series of key lessons and challenges from the existing literature that appear to be particularly salient to the South African college sector:

Customer orientation

It is widely accepted that systemic reform of the nature and scope being attempted in South African colleges needs to be based, in part, on the creation of a better customer orientation. Without this, colleges will never be able to shed negative historical perceptions held about them, or hear and respond to what various stakeholders and potential customers want.

However, accepting the need to become more customer oriented is only the starting point. There is a need for the creation of locally grounded understandings of client and stakeholder needs and practices of improved customer orientation that are balanced with responses to national development imperatives and strategies.

A balanced approach

Marketing and communications theory points to the need to balance the external, interactive and internal dimensions of marketing. This is something that the MCUs have struggled with in their initial stages, leading to an overemphasis on the first dimension.

Elements of the external dimension, such as reputation management, will continue to be important as colleges seek to be seen as providers of first choice. However, the theory suggests a need to downplay the importance given thus far to branding. Rather than logos and slogans, the international literature suggests that more importance need to be paid to focusing on the experience of the prospective student or customer (including corporate and government clients). This experience depends less on branding and more on actual interactions with college staff.

The central role of interactive staff is reflected in arguments in the international literature about the need to internally communicate the nature, ethos and vision of the new colleges more effectively. This is particularly pressing given the two-fold reconfiguration of the sector in terms of institutional landscape and orientation.

Staff as marketers

A commonplace of marketing theory is that all employees are marketers, which has been widely accepted in the new literature on educational marketing. This literature is grounded in an argument about the centrality of the interaction between staff and learners in increasing the likelihood of learners re-enrolling or recommending institutions to other people in their community.

There is some evidence that an understanding of this concept is emerging in colleges. However, this notion must be more clearly translated into a strategy by marketing staff to communicate the vision to colleagues. Following on from this, marketing personnel must encourage staff to accept their role as co-marketers and support them in this marketing role. There is also a need for HR and other practices to be consistent with this vision.

Understanding the FET market better

At the heart of the current marketing and communications challenge in the South African college sector is the need for marketing units to understand the re-curricularisation process and to communicate the new curriculum to all relevant external stakeholders and potential customers. Re-curricularisation assumes a significant degree of specialisation by colleges which will offer a set of curriculum pathways that balance colleges' existing expertise and facilities with local and provincial demand within national developmental needs and opportunities. Marketing units need to play a key role in helping colleges to make viable decisions in this regard.

Consequently, the need for marketing units and colleges to develop a stronger capacity to scan the environment must be emphasised strongly. They must develop more comprehensive and coherent understandings of the complexity of market segmentation. We argue that they should also go beyond current understandings of catchment areas whilst remaining committed to local responsiveness.

In developing a new model of marketing and communications grounded in the realities of the South African public FET college sector, it will be vital to understand how student choice is already bounded by factors such as cost, culture and epistemological access. Moreover, it is crucial to remember that the sector is not intended to operate purely according to market

principles. Rather, the state has a strong and legitimate interest in the creation of tastes when it comes to participation in FET.

CONCLUSION

For all of these challenges facing the South African FET college sector to be addressed effectively, support from outside will be required. Thus, the continued strengthening and building of relationships between the national, provincial and institutional levels and between colleges and other stakeholders remains of great strategic importance.

Progress on developing an approach to FET marketing and communications that can support systemic and institutional goals has begun. With renewed effort and clearer focus, this progress can be accelerated and deepened.

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