

Research at private higher education institutions in South Africa

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Very little is known about whether and what kinds of research are being undertaken at private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in South Africa. This article draws on a recent survey of all registered PHEIs undertaken by a group of interested private higher education providers. This survey was facilitated by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and aimed to examine the quantity and quality of research produced by PHEIs from 2008 to 2010. Placing PHEI research output within the broader context of factors that encourage or discourage research in the sector and in the country as a whole, the survey found that, although PHEI research is negligible in comparison with that of public universities, it is much more substantial than previously estimated.

Keywords: research; private higher education; universities; South Africa

Introduction

Very little is known about whether and what kinds of research are being undertaken at private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in South Africa. In 2009, the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2009: 48) opined, “[a]t present private higher education institutions contribute little to national research production”. Of the approximately 100 PHEIs registered at the time with the Department of Education (now the Department of Higher Education and Training – DHET), the CHE was aware of only two institutions – St Augustine College and Monash South Africa – which were consistently producing research in the form of journal articles, books and chapters in books.

At the 2009 CHE consultative conference, it was proposed that leading private higher education providers form a task team to understand the potential role of private higher education better. As a first step, deeper understanding is needed of the current state of the sector. Five working groups were constituted to investigate,

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research and report on specific aspects of the private higher education sector, with guidance and technical support being provided by the CHE Directorate: Advice and Monitoring. The working groups focused respectively on the size and shape of the private higher education sector, teaching and learning, community engagement and research, and financing and resourcing, with a final group assigned the task of coordinating and integrating the results.

A questionnaire was formulated and sent to all registered PHEIs in the country to elicit detailed information. Drawing upon the results of this survey, this article examines the recent research profile of PHEIs, specifically the kind and quantity of research produced by PHEIs from 2008 to 2010. In addition, attention is paid to the quality of this research, using the same criteria that were applied to evaluate research undertaken at public universities (i.e., publication in Thomson ISI-accredited and DHET-approved journals) and, where possible, comparisons are made to the research outputs of public universities.

It is on this basis that this article aims to contribute to existing knowledge about a sector which, almost two decades old, “is not yet fully understood” (CHE, 2009: 92). A profile of PHEI research activities and output is presented below, with emphasis on postgraduate output. After discussing the general findings, an effort is made to place these within the broader context of the factors that encourage or discourage research in South Africa and at PHEIs in particular.

The PHEI landscape in South Africa

PHEIs mushroomed in South Africa during the mid- to late-1990s (Subotzky, 2003: 419). Most studies of the sector have focused on questions of policy, registration and regulation, as well as quality assurance and equity, and to a lesser extent, on teaching and learning (Cele, 2005; Kruss, 2007; Lange & Luescher, 2003; *Perspectives in Education*, 2002).

To date, little mention has been made of research, yet there might be untapped potential here which could be important not only for the broader higher education sector, but also for the country. As Subotzky (2003: 420) noted, the potentially complementary role that PHEIs could play in human resource development in South Africa could and should extend to conducting research.

While there is evidence of the existence of hundreds of PHEIs in the country, only a few of these are registered (as specified in terms of chapter 7 of the Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997) (RSA, 1997) and are permitted to offer and award formal higher education qualifications. A recent examination of several organisational data sets that list private post-school education providers found that, according to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), there are at least 362 PHEIs, while data from the Sector Education and Training Authority in the manufacturing, engineering and related services industry (MERSETA) indicated the existence of

323 PHEIs (Blom, 2011: 18, 39). As of April 2011, 87 registered PHEIs were listed in the Department of Higher Education's Register of Private Higher Education Institutions, together with an additional 28 provisionally registered PHEIs.

Methodology

During 2010, a survey instrument in the form of an electronic questionnaire was designed to cover the four areas that were examined by the working groups (namely, the size and shape of the private higher education sector, teaching and learning, community engagement and research, and financing and resourcing). A test version of the questionnaire was first developed and, after a reduction in the original number of questions in order to present a more consolidated survey, the design process was concluded with setting up a final electronic version. In late 2010, this final electronic questionnaire, which consists of 98 questions in total and begins and ends with general questions, was sent to all of the 108 registered private higher education providers listed on CHE's books. Of these PHEIs, 94 institutions responded. The responses were coded and made available to the various working groups, which examined the data.

The section of the questionnaire that deals with research consisted of 10 questions aimed at identifying those institutions that do research and at collecting related information in a similar way that information is collected from public institutions. The questions focused on research publications (including creative/performance outputs), research collaboration and research degrees. Institutions were asked to indicate whether they do research and, if so, to list any books, journal articles or chapters in books (including papers in conference proceedings) published by members of their staff since January 2008 (effectively up to and including October 2010), along with any conference papers presented and any other publications (such as book reviews, opinion and position papers, and letters to the editor).

PHEIs were asked whether their staff had produced significant works in the areas of creative writing (such as fiction, drama, poetry, film and television scripts and translations), drama (directing, choreography, design and performance in a leading or substantial supporting role), public performance or recordings of music, musical compositions or arrangements, visual arts (painting, sculpture, printmaking and design) and design (in the form of major design projects or portfolios). Additional questions focused on research collaboration, with whom PHEI researchers collaborate, for example, with local private institutions, public universities, international universities, business/industry or research institutes, and whether an institution offered research master's or doctoral programmes and, if so, the number of students registered for such research degrees (as of October 2010), as well as the number of academic staff involved in supervising or acting as external examiners for such degrees at their own or other institutions.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to the data returned by PHEIs in response to the survey. For example:

- Not all institutions responded, and those that did respond did not always provide complete information. Some of the information provided was inaccurate, some of it was duplicated and, in a few cases, it was insufficiently disaggregated.
- Most of the data on publications had to be counted manually and, as such, contains a further built-in margin of error.

Nevertheless, electronic searches succeeded in verifying the existence of most, though not all, of the information on publications provided.

Perhaps the main limitation of the survey data is that they represent a mere snapshot of self-reported information. Owing to these limitations, together with concerns expressed by the CHE and the different working groups that some of the results might be inaccurate or unreliable, or that the respondents might have misinterpreted or misunderstood some of the questions, the draft report on the survey results (PHE, 2011) has not been published. Accordingly, the views expressed in this paper are solely those of the authors and do not in any way reflect those of the CHE or any particular private higher education provider.

It should also be noted that the publication counts indicated below ought not to be considered as absolute. The research outputs were classified primarily based on their (book, chapter, article or paper) titles, with additional clues provided in some instances by the title of the publication (book, journal or conference proceedings) in which they appeared. Furthermore, where fields overlapped (such as where a publication appeared to focus simultaneously on theology and philosophy, or public relations and business management), the research output was classified under only one of these fields.

Findings

Institutional context

Based on an assessment informed by DHET annual reporting data, the CHE has estimated that the 94 PHEIs which responded to the survey accounted for approximately 95% of registered private higher education students (PHE, 2011: 1).

The table below indicates the various knowledge areas in which the responding PHEIs offer programmes.

Table 1: Knowledge areas offered by PHEIs

<i>CESM category</i>	<i>Number of institutions</i>
Business, Commerce and Management Sciences	40
Philosophy, Religion and Theology	22
Arts, Visual and Performing	21
Health Care and Health Sciences	17
Communication	12
Computer Science	10
Education	10
Psychology	9
Architecture and Environmental Design	7
Languages, Linguistics and Literature	6
Engineering and Engineering Technology	5
Physical Education, Health Education and Leisure	5
Public Administration and Social Services	5
Industrial Arts, Trades and Technology	4
Social Sciences and Social Studies	4
Law	2
Life Sciences and Physical Sciences	2
Agriculture and Renewable Natural Resources	1
Military Sciences	1

Sources: Survey data (PHE 2011: 3-4)

The survey found that the largest single proportion of PHEIs (40 of the 94 respondents) offer programmes in the Classification of Education Subject Matter (CESM) category of Business, Commerce and Management Sciences. A total of 22 and 21 PHEIs offer programmes in the knowledge fields of Philosophy, Religion and Theology, and Visual and Performing Arts, respectively. PHEIs effectively offer programmes in all but three of the 22 CESM categories, these three being Home Economics, Libraries and Museums, and Mathematical Sciences (PHE, 2011: 3-4).

Business and Management are the forte of PHEIs, and by this they are probably responding to, and satisfying their own, entrepreneurial need. However, less than 10% of PHEIs offer programmes in the field of education, arguably an even greater current social need.

The 94 institutions employ 9 438 staff members of whom more than half (4 898) are classified as academic staff (PHE, 2011: 11). Of these academic staff members, 1 763 are considered 'full time' staff, and another 823 are considered 'major time' staff (defined as contributing 60% or more of their time to the institution) (PHE, 2011: 11).

Some 363 academics hold doctorates, and 728 have master's degrees (PHE, 2011: 11). One could assume that these 1 091 academics are responsible for the bulk of the research produced by PHEIs. It could also be assumed that the bulk of the 1 091 academics who hold doctorates and master's degrees were responsible for most of the training of the 503 master's and doctoral graduates from PHEIs in 2009. In other words, for every two research producers, one potential research producer is being trained every year.

Research

Some 46% (or 43 of 94) of the PHEIs reported that they undertake research. Of these, 11 institutions reported no details of any traditional research outputs (books, journal articles, book chapters, papers in conference proceedings, conference papers presented or other publications as specified), and three institutions explicitly stated that no such outputs had been produced. Hence, less than one-third (29) of all PHEIs are producing research as it is traditionally understood.

Moreover, six of the institutions, which affirmed that they do research but produced no traditional research outputs, also made no mention of having produced any creative/performance outputs. Nevertheless, all these institutions indicated that their researchers engage in research collaboration. One of these six institutions explicitly responded 'none' to the four questions about traditional research outputs.

It might be that these institutions are, in fact, research-active but simply have not produced any research outputs from 2008 to 2010. Nevertheless, this could imply an insignificant level of research activity even prior to this most recent period. Other possible reasons for this anomaly is that the institutions in question understand 'doing research' very differently from the norm, or that they responded in error.

Institutions undertaking research indicated that over the reporting period (from January 2008 to October 2010) they had produced a total of some 28 books and 281 journal articles, book chapters and papers in conference proceedings. They also listed 290 conference papers presented, and 86 other publications (including book reviews, opinion and position papers, editorials, theses, reports and contributions to newsletters, newspapers, magazines and exhibition reviews).

However, these gross totals were found to include duplications and other reporting errors. Accordingly, multiple internet searches were carried out in an attempt to verify the existence of all reported books, journal articles, book chapters and papers in conference proceedings. This did not include conference papers presented and other publications. As a result, some 13% of reported articles and

chapters were discounted as unverified and over half of the reported books were identified as textbooks and were discounted as research.

Hence, the total number of research outputs produced by PHEIs from January 2008 to October 2010 could be more accurately stated as:

- 13 books,
- 243 journal articles, book chapters and papers in conference proceedings,
- 290 conference papers, and
- 86 other publications.



Figure 1: PHEI research output by type of publication, 2008-2010

The total number of PHEI research outputs does not appear to correlate very closely with the size of an institution's academic staff complement. Three PHEIs account for 62% of all journal articles, chapters in books and papers in conference proceedings, but only one of these institutions ranks among the ten largest PHEIs with regard to total academic staff numbers (and only in 10th place at that). The other nine large PHEIs together accounted for only 4% of all journal articles, chapters in books and papers in conference proceedings, with five of them not doing any research at all. Nevertheless, in the case of the 10th largest PHEI, there is some correlation between research output and academic staff complement: this particular institution produced approximately one-third of all journal articles, book chapters and papers in conference proceedings.

With regard to the fields in which this research was undertaken, six of the books could be classified as theology, two as philosophy, two as political and social sciences, and the remaining three as health sciences, history and engineering. (Incidentally, and for comparative purposes, the fields of specialisation of those publications that

were identified as textbooks, or as chapters in textbooks, tended to be traffic science, policing, information technology, public relations and entrepreneurship.)

With regard to the 243 journal articles, book chapters and papers in conference proceedings, just over half were devoted to the fields of business management and theology, in nearly equal proportions. Research in political and social sciences, and in health sciences, each accounted for about one-tenth of the total, while research in the fields of education, environmental sciences and economics each made up 5% of the total. The remaining research (about one-sixth or 16% of the total) was sprinkled across the fields of information technology, library science, philosophy, design, public relations, law, engineering, psychology, tourism, history and literature.

As mentioned above, approximately one-third of all journal articles, book chapters and papers in conference proceedings were produced by a single institution, where research in the fields of political and social science, environmental science, economics and business management made up over half of all publications. To put this further into perspective, the next largest single institutional producer of articles, chapters and papers in conference proceedings accounted for only 18%, while the third largest accounted for 11%.

The number of journal articles outweighed the number of chapters in books by four to one, or 80% to 20%, accompanied by a handful of papers that were published in conference proceedings.

Five institutions produced more than 75% of all book chapters, journal articles and papers in conference proceedings. The remainder was produced by all other (89) institutions.

Of the 290 conference papers, about 18% (or 52) were devoted to the field of business management, and an average of 11% each to health sciences, theology, education, political and social sciences. Papers in environmental science, design, engineering, economics, information technology, law, literature, history, library science, philosophy, psychology, tourism, language studies, media studies and public administration constituted the remainder (approximately 38%).

Conference papers: by discipline

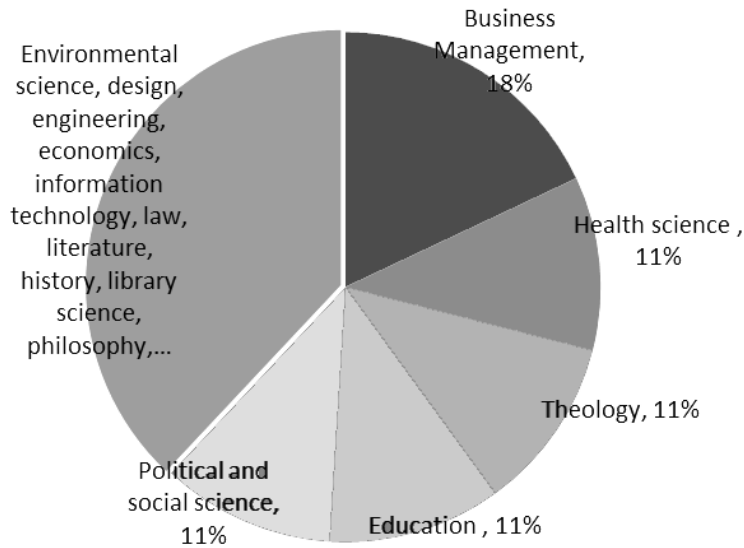


Figure 2: Conference papers by discipline, 2008-2010

A single institution – the same institution that produced a third of all journal articles, book chapters and papers in conference proceedings – was responsible for over two-fifths of these conference papers, more than 50% of which were devoted to the fields of political and social sciences, business management and environmental science. The next largest single institutional producer accounted for 10% of all conference papers, and the third largest for 7%.

Not surprisingly, there is a marked tendency for most – though not all – PHEIs to produce research in only one field, usually the one that correlates most closely to their institutional ethos. For example, most of the theological PHEIs produce little to no research outside the field of theology, and the same applies to some PHEIs focused on health science or business management. Only a few PHEIs produce research across a number of fields.

Only one book was multi-authored, while four of the books were edited volumes. Single individuals authored most of the articles and chapters; with only 69 (or 29%) being multi-authored. A total of 58 (or 20% of) conference papers were multi-authored.

Research published in journals or books was checked against the Thomson ISI, IBSS and DHET-approved lists for 2011. Of the journals in which articles were published, 45 were non-South African journals (including 16 Thomson ISI-indexed

and two IBSS-indexed journals), and 55 were South African (including seven Thomson ISI-indexed and three IBSS-indexed journals, and an additional 24 DHET-approved journals).

Of the non-South African journals, about six were health related, five theology related and four economics related journals; of the South African journals, about 20 were theology related, 10 business management related and five health related.

Of the books in which chapters appeared (leaving aside a handful whose publication details could not be verified), 27 books were published by non-South African presses, and seven by South African presses. In addition, approximately five papers were published in conference proceedings of which all except one appeared outside South Africa (PHE, 2011: 14-15).

Other findings related to research

The general impression was that not all the respondents interpreted the survey questions in the same way and, in some cases, included works which did not meet the implied criteria of the field into which they were reported. It is unclear whether questions were misinterpreted, misunderstood, or whether all institutions understood the concept of 'research' in the same context as traditional universities. This misinterpretation/misunderstanding could be construed to be consistent with an industry that might still be establishing or developing a research culture and profile.

It was found that research collaboration by PHEI academics is more likely to take place with public universities than with other private institutions or with business/industry and is most likely to be local rather than international.

Academic staff members at institutions which indicated that they undertake research are about five times more likely to be supervising or externally examining research degrees than academic staff at institutions not undertaking research. More specifically, 11 institutions stated that they offer research master's or doctoral programmes. As of October 2010, 119 master's and 57 doctoral students were registered, involving 187 academic staff members as supervisors or acting as external examiners for research degrees at other institutions.

Academic staff members at institutions with an emphasis on visual arts, design, creative writing, drama and music and which stated that they undertake research are about twice as likely to be producing creative and performing artwork as staff members at institutions not undertaking research.

There are certain similarities between the production of research in the public and private higher education sectors. Almost two-thirds of all PHEI journal articles, book chapters and papers in conference proceedings were produced by three institutions, and over three-quarters by five institutions. Similarly, only a handful of institutions dominate research production among the public universities: "Five universities – the

University of Cape Town, Pretoria University, Stellenbosch University, the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of KwaZulu-Natal – dominate the production of research in South Africa”, producing “more than 60% of all research and post-graduate output” (CHE, 2009: 48).

It was found that some of the publications listed by individual PHEIs had also been listed in the annual research reports of certain public universities. Because some staff members at public universities are also employed part time at PHEIs, and vice versa, the question is raised as to which institution should be credited with the research output. At the same time, it suggests that more research is required about possible formal and informal partnerships between public and private institutions, especially regarding access to or sharing of research funding (PHE, 2011: 13).

Several of the outputs that were listed constituted training manuals and textbooks, or appeared in in-house newsletters or electronic discussion forums. For the purposes of this article, textbooks have not been considered to involve research. In some instances, however, it might be argued that even textbooks (especially where they have been developed from scratch and not merely reprinted unchanged from year to year) also require the selection, development and application of knowledge, hence research. In-house publications, which might well involve research, could also, through a more rigorous system of peer review and external editorial board members, serve as “nurseries” for future and more recognised research outputs.

Discussion

Contextualising research output

Clearly, in comparison with the research being produced annually by public universities – 8 632 South African-authored Thomson ISI papers in 2008 alone (CHE, 2009: 47) – the quantity of research from PHEIs is negligible.

Nevertheless, it is equally apparent that the PHEIs on the whole are producing far more research than previously estimated. For example, until recently, the CHE was aware of only two PHEIs that were consistently producing research:

St Augustine College lists 13 journal papers and 7 book chapters published in 2008. Monash South Africa lists 12 journal papers and 3 monographs/book chapters in their research report for 2007/08. A search of the ISI indexes revealed one publication by a private higher education institution in South Africa between 2004 and 2008 (CHE, 2009: 48).

It is, thus, worth reflecting on the context in which this research is taking place and on what might be driving some of the PHEIs to undertake research or constraining them from doing so.

One of the most important drivers of research is the availability of funding. All over the world, government and other subsidies make it possible for higher education institutions to allocate more of their often-scarce resources to research.

In South Africa, where PHEIs do not qualify for subsidies on research output, such subsidies, specifically those emanating from the DHET, appear to be a key factor encouraging research output in public universities (CHE, 2009: 49). The CHE found that the increase in research output at public institutions from 2004 to 2008, including a 69% growth in Thomson ISI-accredited publications, was accomplished in the absence of significant growth in the numbers of permanent academic staff. This, as indicated by circumstantial evidence from the CHE survey, suggests that the increased output might partly be a result of universities using incentives to increase their output by using the contributions of contract staff, visiting scholars, research fellows and postgraduate students to supplement their own output and, thus, generating increased subsidies.

The CHE further suggested that high output reporting might be in pursuit of the monetary values associated with such output. While reference was made to higher personal-professional standing as another possible reason for the increased output over the period, the report was silent on the possibility of increased research capacity as a possible contributing factor. The report also suggested that universities might have increased the monetary amounts allocated to researchers as individual rewards in order to motivate higher output (CHE, 2009: 49).

Because PHEIs do not qualify for subsidy on research output, these institutions might not consider research as critical to their business. Rather than generating income, research would incur additional expense. In addition, PHEIs that do not offer postgraduate courses might not necessarily have adequate capacity to engage meaningfully with research, or see the need to do so in the absence of higher degree offerings in their institutions – only 11 institutions indicated that they offer research master's and doctoral programmes (PHE, 2011: 11).

In the absence of such monetary incentives, those PHEIs that are undertaking research and producing research output must be doing so for other reasons which might include:

- Legal reasons: Research is a legal requirement for institutions that offer postgraduate degrees because it demonstrates that they have the capacity to offer those qualifications and that they are able to contribute to the academic community by producing new knowledge. Institutions applying for accreditation of new postgraduate qualifications must demonstrate that they are producing research output as part of the accreditation application process (CHE, 2004: 14).

- Institutional reasons: PHEIs that produce research might be able to use this fact in their advertising and marketing campaigns as an indication of the overall quality of the institution and its qualifications and, thus, to attract both new students and high-quality academic staff.
- Career reasons: Individual academics in PHEIs, regardless of whether their research is subsidised or whether they are personally incentivised, might produce research for purposes of continued professional development so as to enhance their career prospects, professional recognition and standing in the academic community. Personal reasons: Individual academics are often intrinsically motivated to participate in and contribute to the “republic of letters” and to engage in knowledge generation activities which benefit both society and the international knowledge community in general.

Measuring research output within PHEIs

Public universities report their research output to the DHET annually for the purpose of claiming subsidies. They do so under the following categories only:

- articles in accredited journals,
- book publications, and
- published conference proceedings (DHET, 2009).

The issue of what is considered “research” was raised earlier in this article. “Subsidy-earning research output” constitutes only a part of what is traditionally considered as research, or all activities involving the selection, development and application of knowledge. In other words, that for which the public universities annually submit reports so as to obtain government subsidy does not encompass the full ambit of otherwise bona fide research outputs.

This implies that, for both the public and the private higher education institutions, more consideration could be given to what might be defined as non-subsidised research. With regard to the PHEIs in particular, a closer investigation of this category of non-subsidised research might assist in understanding both the kinds of research being undertaken and the reasons for undertaking research.

In the absence of any monetary incentives, such as subsidies for research output in PHEIs, consideration of other forms of research and research output might more realistically reflect these institutions’ engagement in and production of research, since such activities are clearly driven by objectives other than monetary incentives.

The survey on which this article draws attempted to enquire into engagement into other forms of research or research-related activities such as:

- visual arts (painting, sculpture, printmaking, design),
- design (major design projects or portfolios – the unique utility product or projected product of the creative act of an individual or team of individuals),

- published creative writing (fiction, drama, poetry, film and television scripts),
- public performance/recordings of music,
- drama (directing, choreography, design and performance in a leading or substantial supporting role),
- musical compositions/arrangements, and
- published creative writing (translations).

Sixty-seven outputs were recorded under these categories. While these categories represent mostly creative work, there might also be additional categories that could be considered as valid research-related output (and which would typically not qualify for subsidy), such as research-based policy, position or opinion papers or reports for an institution or a company, for industry as a whole or for a government department. Another example might be monographs, which are defined by the CHE as “relatively short books or treatise on a single scholarly subject written by a specialist(s) in the field and ... generally not extensive in scope” (CHE, 2009: 50). Arguably, policy, position or opinion papers, as well as the papers and materials which go into the writing of certain handbooks, manuals, overviews, guidelines or even textbooks might be classified as monographs in certain cases.

Another question relates to the tracking of research output. PHEIs, in the absence of any real need to formally record and make known their contributions to research as part of institutional governance (in the case of institutions not offering postgraduate qualifications), let alone inform government or regulatory bodies of these contributions, might not see any need to institute or insist upon formal, cyclical reporting systems. In addition, it is known that a relatively large proportion of academic staff members at PHEIs are contracted to their institutions as opposed to being permanently employed there and that they could work for more than one institution, as indicated earlier in this article. This begs the question of whether there might be output which was not reported in the survey of PHEIs on which this article draws, because some of these academics might have chosen to rather report their research output in the returns of a public institution with which they are associated and which offers them incentives for doing so. Alternatively, some output might simply not have been reported because of a lack of formal record keeping at many PHEIs.

Comparing PHEI research output internationally

In order to locate the findings of this survey of South African PHEIs within a broader, international context, internet searches were conducted to ascertain whether and to what extent PHEIs in other countries, both developed and developing, also conduct research. These searches revealed that, while a considerable amount of research has been undertaken on private higher education internationally, very little research has examined the volume, scope or nature of research being produced by PHEIs around

the world. Nevertheless, based on the limited information available, it could be said that, for the most part, PHEIs globally do relatively little research and certainly do much less than public institutions. The United States and a handful of institutions in other countries are the exceptions.

As a recent UNESCO publication indicates, PHEIs are multiplying across the world, with Asia and Latin America showing the greatest growth and Western Europe the least (Bjarnason, Cheng, Fielden, Lemaitre, Levy & Varghese, 2009: 3). Typically, however, most PHEIs focus on attracting students to niche courses (such as business studies) and do not undertake significant amounts of research (Bernasconi, 2006: 308; Bjarnason *et al.*, 2009: 2, 99). In Africa, despite the proliferation of PHEIs, there is a general “absence of research in private higher education” (Jegede, 2012: 3). The situation is similar in Asia, where only a few PHEIs (mostly in China, Malaysia, South Korea and Vietnam) produce limited amounts of research (Levy, 2010: 40). Recent media reports from Bangladesh, citing the 2010 Annual Report of the country’s University Grants Commission, state that in that year not a single research project was undertaken at 29 of the country’s 51 private universities (Chowdhury & Joarder, 2012: n.p.). However, in Pakistan the government is considering providing research funding to its PHEIs, where recent initiatives are said to be encouraging even though the sector still does hardly any research (Saleem, 2011: n.p.). In Australia, where the private higher education landscape consists of 132 providers, including five institutions owned by public universities and 17 government-owned entities, only 13 (10%) of the 132 offer research degrees (Ryan, 2012: 6).

The US is somewhat of an anomaly in the field of private higher education research production. Many US universities that are in the forefront of research are private, but even there, financial stringencies are said to be causing the US to fall behind many other developed countries in terms of both government- and business-funded university research (Atkinson & Stewart, 2011: 2). In Brazil, as in the US, many universities are private institutions but, unlike in the US, most of these produce very little research (with the exception of certain religious institutions, such as the Pontifical Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro) (Bjarnason *et al.*, 2009: 11). In this respect, Chile is similar to Brazil in that its private universities evidence only limited research capacity (despite the fact that their mission statements unanimously express a commitment to research) and, among those few that do do research, Catholic institutions figure prominently (Bernasconi, 2006: 326). Based on the limited information available internationally, therefore, it can be concluded that the findings of the survey of South African PHEIs mirrors the paucity of research at or by PHEIs globally.

Conclusion

When initially conceptualising the survey questions together with the CHE and the consortium of PHEIs, the designers hypothesised that they would find minimal research activity in the PHEI sector. The results of the survey both confirm and

disconfirm this hypothesis: in comparison with the public universities, the survey confirms the negligibility of research undertaken by PHEIs. In comparison with what had previously been known, however, the survey shows that research activity is, in fact, much more substantial than in earlier estimates.

Nevertheless, despite almost two decades of development of the PHEI sector, it could be concluded that there are only a few pockets of good research at PHEIs, only a handful of good researchers, and a smattering of quality research outputs. In general, the volume and quality of the research output in relation to the size of the sector is small compared to the output produced by the higher education sector in general. One of the reasons might be that the sector as a whole is comparatively young and that those institutions that entered more recently are more occupied with setting up the institutions than focusing on other dimensions of higher education. The PHEIs also have fewer incentives to undertake and produce research than do the public universities, given that they do not receive subsidies, and that only those institutions offering postgraduate degrees are legally required to engage in research.

By and large, then, the PHEI sector in South Africa evinces an immature understanding of the importance of, and offers as yet only a tiny contribution to, knowledge creation and dissemination.

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