UNISA | university of south africa

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY 2013

THIRD DRAFT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.   PREFACE

The Policy: Community Engagement operates within the vision of the University of South Africa (Unisa), namely: "Towards *the* African university in service of humanity". Unisa thereby subscribes to an ethos of service to and relevance in the community, be that small and medium enterprises, industry, schools, governments, non-governmental organisations, associations, indigenous and ethnic communities, and the general public. It strives to conduct its research and teaching and learning the 'engaged way', deploying ethical research and pedagogical methodologies in service of communities and taking into account indigenous knowledge systems. This expands the role of Unisa from a passive producer of knowledge to an active participant in collaborative discovery activities that have diverse and immediate benefits to a variety of stakeholders.

Unisa furthermore recognizes that the resources, research and training & learning capacities of the university should be utilised in the generation and/or application of knowledge to bear on the significant features of the conditions of South Africa and the continent such as the great socio-economic divide, severe inequalities, high rate of unemployment, poor provision of healthcare, violence, unintentional injury and poverty.

2.   AIMS

The aims of the policy are to:

1. Define community engagement as well as outreach
2. Contextualise community engagement internally and externally
3. Explain processes and means of engagement with communities, the public and stakeholders
4. Explain processes and structures for implementing and governing community engagement

3.   DEFINITIONS

3.1   Community Engagement

Community engagement is defined as the scholarly activity of academic research and teaching that involves external communities and stakeholders in collaborative

activities that address socio-economic imperatives of South Africa and the African continent while also enriching the teaching, learning and research objectives of the university.

3.2   Outreach

- Outreach is defined as the donation of time and/or resources by Unisa staff, be that academic, administrative or support staff, in their capacity as employees of Unisa to benefit a community or its institutions such as non-profit, faith-based or community-based organisations in an effort to improve the quality of life for its community residents. Outreach activities are not discipline specific.

- The relationship between community engagement and outreach activities should be recognized in that outreach activities can also potentially create opportunities and open up spaces for further community engagement activities or projects.

- This policy recommends a Memorandum of Understanding with partners in outreach activities where possible to manage expectations and to ensure that communities do not expect longer-term involvement as a necessary outcome of community outreach.

4.   COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS SCHOLARSHIP

- Community engagement is a form of scholarship though which the expertise of Unisa in the areas of teaching and research is applied to address socio-economic development imperatives.

- Community engagement is also a form of scholarship where external sources of expertise and wisdom are seen as essential to advancing knowledge and understanding.

- Community engagement involves generating, transmitting, applying and preserving and translating knowledge for the socio economic benefit of external audiences in ways that are also consistent with the vision of Unisa.

- Unisa thereby recognizes the following community engagement output as scholarship: engaged research methodologies such as participatory action research; expert advice/testimony; consulting; academic journal publications; conference presentations; fact sheets; cross-translation of research output and learning materials; disseminating research results in popular language;

policy briefs; in service learning; workshops; training for community members; short learning programmes addressing particular community needs; newsletters; reports; popular publications; public lectures; international fellowships; contract research; innovation; technology transfer; and formal curriculum development.

5.   THE STATUS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT UNISA

- Unisa recognizes community engagement as one of the three founding principles, alongside teaching and research of the post-apartheid reconstruction of the South African higher education system.

- Unisa also recognises engaged research and teaching as expressions of community engagement as forms of scholarship. Community engagement therefore enjoys equal status alongside the other forms of scholarship namely research and teaching and learning.

- Some community engagement activities can be time and labour intensive. The time spent on community engagement should therefore be considered and recognised as a factor in the division of labour and promotion criteria by departments.

- Colleges should also consider incentives and award systems for community engagement along the same lines as those applied to research and teaching and learning.

6.   ALIGNING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

- Unisa strives to support a developmental agenda and to ensure that key developmental priorities are met. The intended spirit of community engagement is therefore that the teaching, learning and research which emerges from engaging with communities should have a significant developmental impact.

- Unisa aligns its community engagement activities to the millennium development goals (MDGs), the National Development Plan and the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) of the South African government.

7.   GUIDING PRINCIPLES

7.1 Social Responsibility

- Community engagement activities are guided by the principle of social responsibility. Unisa strives to share and translate knowledge generously to address developmental challenges in communities.
- In applying the principle of social responsibility, Unisa acknowledges that many communities might be excluded from access to knowledge by virtue of being resource poor and might as a result be excluded from opportunities for development.

7.2 Reciprocity & Equality

- "Sound community engagement at Unisa entails leveraging our knowledge and skills to the benefit of communities whilst [simultaneously] improving our research, teaching and learning for staff and students as a result"[1].
- Community engagement is not a separate or distinct activity within a university but is a shared enterprise between universities and their community partners that involves an exchange of knowledge and expertise that produces mutual benefit. Engaged research, teaching and learning produce knowledge outcomes and products that are valuable assets for both academia and the public interest.
- Community engagement is therefore a reciprocal, cyclical and ongoing process whereby knowledge is generated and shared in partnership with communities and stakeholders for the equal benefit of all.
- Through collaboration, consultation, involvement and empowerment, communities are engaged in a way that facilitates participation in important programme decision
- Community members are acknowledged as the "experts" on their community and play a vital role in ensuring that programmes and projects are relevant and appropriate to the identified communities.
- Community engagement is therefore the process in which people are actively involved in decision-making regarding projects or programmes.
- Community members must see themselves as citizens with the capacity and authority to ask questions, and the power and ability to carry out changes they desire

---

[1] Unisa Strategic Plan 2015 (2005:17)

7.3 Ethical Engagement

- Unisa staff should adhere to the same principles subscribed to in the Unisa Code of Ethics in all engagements and outreach activities with internal and external stakeholders and communities.
- The Research Ethics policy guides all research activities and practices at Unisa. This policy also guides engagement with communities and external stakeholders through research activities.
- Engaged scholars should plan community engagement activities well. However, should opportunities arise to publish on a topic or themes forthcoming from a variety of unforeseen engagement activities over time, research ethics committees should consider granting ethical clearance *ex post facto*.

7.4 Collaboration

- Unisa recognizes that developmental challenges are most effectively addressed through collaborative approaches such as multi-stakeholder partnerships and multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research practices (MIT). Collaborations with external and internal stakeholders are actively sought in an attempt to maximise impact, and to ensure programme/project sustainability and community accountability.
- Community engagement is fostered in a spirit of collaboration not competition.
- Collaboration between internal and external stakeholders is to minimize duplication of community engagement activities and projects and maximize impact.

7.5 Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

- The policy recognizes the role of Unisa as an Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution whereby ODL creates equitable, flexible and democratized access to higher education to many more people. Unisa therefore actively seeks to generate, transmit and translate relevant knowledge through community engagement.

- As an ODL institution Unisa embraces the notion of lifelong learning. Unisa also encourages communities through its community engagement activities to embrace learning as part of its lifestyle thereby helping communities to improve their quality of life.
- One translation of learning and education in community engagement is skill capacitation provided to community members through various modes of community engagement such as workshops, training and employment opportunities.
- The policy recognizes the important role of technology in ODL and encourages community engagement activities and projects that make use of multi-media, social media, internet platforms, mobile technology and e-learning. It also encourages the use of ODL methdologies such as open educational resource platforms, case studies, and vocational training in community engagement projects.

7.6 Sustainability

- The sustainability of projects should be considered a priority to ensure lasting impact on the communities and to account for the resources invested in community engagement projects. Projects should be well planned but flexible to adapt to the needs of different communities with individual and unique attributes. The sustainability of projects must be considered during the planning phase of the project.
- Sustainability in projects with communities can only occur when a community collaborates on a project as a partner and is accountable for the community and its members. This can be engendered through community participation, community empowerment, the identification and mobilization of existing (yet previously unnoted) community assets and resources, the identification and activation of community leadership and the objective to ensure that all projects and programmes are community-led.
- Unisa encourages multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to projects and programmes in order to increase sustainability.
- Partnerships with multiple internal and/or external stakeholders should be formalized with a Memoranda of Agreement or a Memoranda of

Understanding stipulating how the partnership will be governed and managed.

- Materials developed should be packaged and the processes must be documented and disseminated to enable the replication of best practices and lessons learnt by other stakeholders and communities as to increase the sustainability of projects. The IP Directorate should be consulted and involved in this regard.

7.7 *Graduateness*

Given the context of national and global inequalities, Unisa views engagement with external stakeholders/communities as an important tool to acquire knowledge to enhance the relevance of curricula with the aim of producing socially responsible graduates that are also well suited to participate in professional and community life as responsible citizens.

8. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

The policy recognizes the range of communities and stakeholders with which Unisa might engage to play a role in human and social development. Colleges and Departments should identify and engage with external stakeholders and communities on which their discipline specific knowledge and skills can bear for the benefit of the communities and stakeholders whilst simultaneously impacting on their discipline-specific research, teaching and learning. Colleges and Departments should also engage with internal stakeholders of other disciplines where appropriate to maximize developmental impact through MIT practices. In this regard it is expected of Colleges and Departments to have external stakeholder engagement plans.

8.1 *Internal stakeholders*

Community engagement is an academic activity where scholars and internal stakeholders of Unisa work collectively to address developmental challenges faced by external communities and external stakeholders.

8.1.1 Regions

- Colleges and Departments should collaborate with regional offices to identify, develop and implement community engagement initiatives and projects that would bear on the specific developmental challenges of the regions.
- Regional offices should assist Colleges and Departments by facilitating stakeholder engagement and community outreach activities to explore possible future community engagement projects.

8.1.2 Non-academic staff

- Non-academic staff should provide administrative support for community engagement equal to the administrative support provided for research and teaching and learning.
- Non-academic staff members are encouraged to work together with academic staff in outreach activities to create spaces and opportunities for further engagement by academic staff.
- Any involvement of non-academic staff in community engagement must be approved by the respective line managers.

8.1.3 Students

- Where applicable, academics are encouraged to involve students in *In Service Learning* programmes. Such programmes should enhance teaching & learning by producing socially responsible graduates that are also well suited to participate in professional life whilst simultaneously addressing developmental challenges in communities.
- Community Engagement should be encouraged as a foundation to postgraduate research.
- Students might wish to initiate community engagement projects. Academic staff should, however, be consulted in the planning of these projects. Academic staff should also provide quality assurance oversight for the duration of the project and ensure that all internal and external stakeholders benefit equally from the engagement.
- Students might also wish to volunteer their time to assist academics with community engagement projects. Such volunteerism should be encouraged as it would assist in producing socially responsible graduates with workplace experience while improving efficiencies in the delivery of community engagement projects.

8.2   *External stakeholders*

- Unisa employees are encouraged to engage and collaborate with external stakeholders from all sectors of society, be that civil society, communities of interest or geographical communities, government, business or others to produce, translate and deliver knowledge that will enhance developmental imperatives.

- These partners include amongst others actors in the informal sector, cooperatives, community groups, small-scale farmers, social movements, governments, government departments, developmental agencies, individuals, households and industry.

9.   MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

- Unisa recognizes that community engagement can occur through the following means: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering whereas informing the community is a one-way relationship whereas empowerment is the highest form of CE that allows for sustainability and community accountability. Unisa recognizes all means of engagement but encourages empowerment as the ultimate mode of partnership building.

- Unisa thereby acknowledges MIT- and multi-stakeholders partnerships as preferred modes of implementation for community engagement. This is because multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary approaches have proven to demonstrate real impact in communities over time.

- Partnerships are typically longer-term projects (3-5 years) governed by Memoranda of Agreement.

- In such partnerships knowledge is produced through participatory research methodologies with stakeholders and the community. Knowledge is subsequently packaged in informal and formal teaching and training offerings and presented to the community and students. Knowledge generated through such participatory methodologies might also inform further research in the same community or other communities.

- Knowledge is also disseminated to the community and stakeholders to inform developmental processes and to influence policy.

- Academics are encouraged to collaborate across disciplines, departments and colleges to offer their discipline specific knowledge through such partnerships to enhance collective impact.

10. QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Community engagement is a form of academic activity. The activities and its impact on communities and stakeholders should therefore be assessed and measured with academic rigour.
- This engagement activity should also be assessed internally as one of the three functions of academics being research, teaching and learning and community engagement.
- The Quality Management System for Community Engagement, developed by the Department of Strategy, Planning and Quality Assurance provides a system to measure external impact and to assess staff performance.

11. GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURE

Community engagement is governed and support by the following structures:

- The Senate Community Engagement Committee under the leadership of the Pro Vice Chancellor sets the overall strategy, recommends the CE policy for the university, and monitors the progress and impact of community engagement as scholarship. It also advises Senate, Mancom and Council on community engagement matters.
- The Community Engagement and Outreach Directorate provides leadership and direction in executing the strategy for community engagement. It enables community engagement through the development of systems, procedures and capacities, and the facilitation of stakeholder forums, and is responsible for aggregated institutional reporting on CE and outreach matters.
- College Community Engagement Committees, individual staff members or groups of staff members in departments together with Centre management committees in the case of Short Learning Programmes relating to community engagement should conceptualise, develop and implement projects and activities in partnership with stakeholders and communities.
- The Community Engagement Coordination and Operational Committee coordinates community engagement projects and activities across the

colleges, regions and various units of Unisa. It advances collaboration between internal stakeholders and innovate new modes and pathways to express community engagement.

12. RELEVANT POLICIES

This Policy acknowledges that there are several policies in Unisa approved by Council that are relevant to community engagement. They are:

- Tuition Policy
- Research and Innovation Policy
- Policy on Grants from Research Funds
- Policy: Short Learning Programmes (non-formal tuition)
- Experiential Learning Policy
- International Relations and Partnership Policy
- Policy on Research Ethics

The aim of the policy is to facilitate links between existing policies, not to duplicate or infringe on them.

13. FUNDING MODEL

- Colleges and Regions must submit annual project plans for Community Engagement and Outreach projects, programmes and activities aligned to budgets to the Community Engagement Directorate. Centre CE budgets must be included in College submissions. The Community Engagement Directorate consolidates the budget and presents it to the budget committee. Once approved, community engagement budgets are de-centralised to the Regions and Colleges. Colleges are to provide support to project managers where needed to manage the budgets. Colleges must report quarterly on the spending against their project plans to the Senate Community Engagement Committee.
- Any surplus generated from community engagement activities through, e.g., SLPs, consultancy or contract research, should be declared and reinvested in the community engagement budget of the College to fund further community engagement activities such as the appointment of field workers, community workers, and administrative staff, bursaries for students to participate in SLPs and new SLPs relating to community engagement. The surplus could also be

utilised to fund research projects; preferably but not only community engaged related. However, subsidies generated from the publication of research findings stemming from engaged research such as participatory action research will accrue the to university and academics as is the case with all other publications in accredited journals.

- Executive Deans may use discretionary funds to advance community engagement activities that are not funded.
- ACHRAM staff points may be used by Colleges to staff support offices for Community engagement.
- The Unisa Foundation has defined community engagement as a strategic focus area for funding. Colleges are to collaborate with the Directorate and the Foundation to develop proposals for community engagement projects not funded through the dispersed College Funds.
- Academics might also submit proposals to the Strategic Project Fund according to the funding guidelines.
  - Unisa however also recognizes the cost of community engagement and will therefore make resources available to cover the costs of community engagement.
  - In instances where a surplus is generated through a community engagement activity/project, as is the case with contract research and some short learning programmes (SLPs) responding to developmental imperatives, such surplus is not to be shared amongst staff but is to be reinvested in either the same community engagement activity/project to ensure sustainability or in another or new community engagement activity/project.

14. REVIEW AND REVISION

The Pro Vice Chancellor is responsible for initiating the review of this policy every third year according to the Policy: Policy Formulation.

15. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

Related policies of the former institutions that were in force prior to the commencement of this Policy are replaced with effect from the date on which Council approves this Policy.