

# ***Challenges of Establishing a Quality ECS University***

***By Dr Ruth Eade***

***University League Tables*** – The formal recognition of a university as a high quality institution is not a matter for internal designation, but is externally determined on the basis of a university's proven track record. League tables such as those created by the Times Higher Education Supplement UK and Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, are based on global data collected from across a wide spectrum of the life and work of universities, e.g. peer review; employer recruiting surveys; quantitative data - including the numbers of international students and international faculty members; the academic and research performance of faculty and alumni; evaluation of publications, citations; exclusive international awards, e.g. Nobel prizes.

***Hallmarks of High Quality Universities*** – In the context of a geographically dispersed ECS University there will be a need to ensure that the quality hallmarks - identified by the university as typifying the education which it offers - are consistently present across all its faculties.

Research into how universities achieve high quality status indicates that it is the outcome of a process underpinned by *structured visionary planning* and a *corporate culture* dedicated to attaining excellence. Because each university is unique and responds to its own cultural context, there can be no single blue-print for creating a high quality university. However, such institutions have been shown to share a number of important common factors including:

- Making a significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge through research.
- Delivering innovative curricula and teaching methodology.
- Providing excellent facilities and resources.
- Recognising research and making it an integral component of undergraduate teaching.
- Producing outstanding graduates resulting from the provision of strongly competitive environments.

Underpinning such quality outcomes, Jamil Salmi - Tertiary Education Coordinator of the World Bank – identifies the critical alignment of five key characteristics, i.e.,

- Autonomy
- Academic freedom
- Capable students
- Well qualified faculty
- Researchers

The major implications of this research - relative to the establishment of an ECS University - are that it should be capable of:

- implementing a form of governance which encourages strategic vision, mission, direction, innovation, flexibility and questioning of the status quo
- creating a critical mass of well qualified faculty and researchers capable of attracting funding for leading-edge research
- creating an environment which promotes quality teaching and learning and assists the conduct of advanced research

Relative to establishing a new university, questions regarding whether the institution will ever become recognised as a high quality institution are not appropriate since from the *outset* there has to be a sense of obligation and commitment to creating the best possible university.

***The Options for an ECS University*** – On the basis of the university feasibility study research the following emerge as the major options open to the ECS

- (i.) ***Upgrade*** to university faculty status all existing ECS educational institutions to become specialist university faculties offering programmes of study in their particular specialism at internationally recognised degree standard. Each of these faculties would also provide theological education at a range of levels - degrees, diplomas, plus basic theological education and training; and also professional development courses for ECS school headteachers and staff. These specialist faculties would be part of a centrally administered geographically dispersed university.
- (ii.) ***Reduce*** the existing number of ECS educational institutions. Only those with the potential and capacity to attain university faculty status should be retained. These faculties would then become part of a centrally administered geographically dispersed university providing theological education and continuing professional development for ECS schools as identified in (i) above.
- (iii.) ***Create*** a brand new multi-faculty university - with a Divinity School/Faculty of Theology on a single site. Such a university could support and develop the work and standards in existing ECS educational institutions.
- (iv.) ***Create a*** virtual university - as set-out in the section of this report which suggests alternative models to the above.

A number of countries, when reviewing their higher education provision have been presented with a similar range of options as those identified above e.g., France and Denmark, China, Canada. Some analogies can be drawn from the experiences of these countries. E.g., when implementing a national framework for higher education in the early 1980s the Chinese Government's strategy involved establishing one hundred *specialist* universities dispersed throughout the country; in South Carolina, Clemson University implemented a different type of dispersed geographical model by linking its specialisms into the development of local and regional initiatives.

***An ECS University's Unique Selling Point*** - The University's unique selling point is identified elsewhere in this report as being its Christian foundation and the related outcomes. However, a further unique selling point could be the model - identified as the *preferred model* by the university feasibility study research data - for a geographically dispersed institution comprised of regionally located *specialist faculties*. Global examples of high quality institutions which have been successful in achieving high quality status base on specialisms include India's Institutes of Technology which are dedicated to engineering disciplines, and the London School of Economics with its specific focus on economics, sociology, political science and anthropology.

***Contributing to Meeting the Needs of South Sudan*** - Whilst high quality educational institutions are commonly top research universities, there are also world-class higher education institutions which are neither research-focused nor operate as universities/conventional universities, e.g., Conestoga College in Ontario which is ranked as the best in Canada; the UK's Open University which, whilst being virtual, has established a global reputation for high quality distance learning as have similar institutions in Turkey, China, India, Korea and South Africa. Accordingly, the ECS might wish to consider the

desirability of incorporating its existing higher education, vocational training institutes and distance learning facility into a working partnership with, and validated by, an ECS University. Potentially, such a combined model would contribute to meeting the country's wide range of education and training needs, the development of both the knowledge economy of South Sudan and the skill-sets which the country needs. Such a model could also contribute to reducing the divisive separation between academic and skills-based higher education. Whatever choices the ECS makes about the role and function of the proposed university, it will be essential that it ensures the quality of its faculty and its ability to offer quality learning and build the learning capacity of students.

***An ECS University's Contribution to a Knowledge Based Economy*** - By proposing to create a university, the ECS implicitly acknowledges the potential of the university sector to make a fundamental contribution to the establishment of the knowledge based economy needed to drive the future development of South Sudan. Such understanding is reinforced in the World Development Report on the Knowledge Economy (World Bank, 1999) where it comments that

*“The role of higher education is particularly crucial in support of building a strong human capital base and contributing to an efficient national innovation system and building globally competitive economies by developing a skilled, productive and flexible labour force and by creating, applying and spreading new ideas and technologies.....Higher education institutions can also play a vital role in their local and regional economy”.*

A further World Bank report (2002) Constructing Knowledge Societies also acknowledges that

*“Universities have a critical role to play in training the professionals, scientists and researchers needed by the economy and generating new knowledge in support of the national innovation system”.*

***The Contribution of an ECS University to South Sudan's University Sector*** - Whilst it is anticipated that the creation of an ECS University would benefit South Sudan in the ways described in these reports, it is arguable that it would also potentially benefit the country's existing universities by contributing to a more competitive knowledge economy. In other countries, e.g. Russia and Uruguay, the emergence of high quality *private* universities - where there is a predominance of *publicly funded* higher education - has resulted in the public universities becoming more strategically focused. Nevertheless, an ECS University needs to be innovative and should not seek simply to replicate what is offered by other Sudanese universities – unless it can demonstrably do it better.

***The Need for Synchronised Planning*** - On the basis of Salmi's research evidence, and the experience of Mexico and Argentina, one of the potential consequences of South Sudan's current limited communication and transport infrastructure could be the risk of an ECS University's geographically dispersed faculties becoming academically in-bred through a major dependency of faculties on their own undergraduates to continue into graduate/research programmes; and also by their high dependency on their own graduates to fill teaching posts. Consequently, geographically restrictive circumstances could result in faculties failing to attain and maintain acceptably high standards educationally and academically. Accordingly, it would be important for the ECS, to consider developing

faculties alongside the GoSS's plan for the development of the country's communication and transport infrastructures.

***Learning from Global Experience*** - There lessons to be drawn from world-wide instances of the development and progress of newly formed educational institutions. Many have been severely constrained by the high level of independence claimed by the constituent institutions and continuing allegiance to their previous identity. What emerges from such experience is the indispensable necessity required when bringing institutions together – in either merger or federation - for consultative change management. From such experience it can be inferred that to be successful newly formed institutions need to develop a shared academic culture; a collegiate transformatory vision; coherent governance; and financing and regulatory conditions which enable the university to become a dynamic institution.

***The International Dimension of an ECS University*** - As discussed elsewhere in this report, attracting foreign faculty members, students and researchers to a university is widely considered to be an excellent way of achieving and maintaining a high quality university and is regarded as an important determinant of a university's excellence. Widespread evidence indicates that to attract foreign faculty requires employment contracts – short or medium term - which are attractive in terms of pay, facilities and accommodation. Such an initiative can be immensely instrumental in the overall development of a university - including the creation of graduate programmes and new research: thus giving the host university competitive advantage.

***International University Partnerships*** - Another strategy employed by many universities seeking to benefit from the input of foreign faculty and students, is the formation of partnerships with top universities in other countries, e.g., The National University of Singapore has formed strategic alliances with Harvard, Duke, John Hopkins University in the US, Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands, the Australian National University and Tsinghai University in China.

The employment of foreign nationals in a university can sometimes offend national sensitivities and imply a sense of lack of national self-sufficiency. Relative to this, the university feasibility study research indicated acceptance of the need for some posts in an ECS University to be filled by foreigners, but with the proviso that South Sudanese should be appointed to senior posts in order to provide role models. This reflects the position whereby very few countries, globally, have undertaken international recruitment searches for the *highest university posts* - irrespective of this being a recognised means of developing high quality institutions.

***Establishing Collaborative International Partnerships*** – Relative to the development of an international dimension the ECS could consider establishing global partnerships with other Anglican universities. Accordingly, consideration could be given to the possibility of the university joining the following organisations:

- The Colleges and Universities of the Anglican Communion (CUAC). This organisation comprises a worldwide association of one hundred and twenty Anglican higher education institutions in America.
- The Cathedral Group of universities, UK - all of which have a Christian foundation.

***Attracting the Diaspora*** - Many newer universities in the developing world have sought to attract leading scholars from their diaspora. Contributions from research participants

indicated a belief that there are highly qualified South Sudanese academics living abroad prepared to consider taking-up senior posts in an ECS University. Clearly, this report is not able to validate this belief. However, research indicates that a number of universities have been successful in attracting back their country's diaspora. A number of universities in India and China have been implemented strategies which have achieved this aim e.g., Beijing University which closely monitors good Chinese scholars living abroad and offers them favourable contracts. Accordingly, the ECS is advised to investigate how appropriate members of the South Sudan diaspora could be attracted to work in an ECS University.

Clearly, such a strategy needs to focus on talented members of the diaspora who have a proven strong academic track record, supported by measurable outcomes; academics who are highly self motivated; academics who are involved in research and project implementation and have the potential to be catalysts in their academic discipline.

Global evidence suggests that once universities implement strategies to attract foreign faculty, students and their diaspora, interest in contributing to the life and work of the university develops through the diaspora network. However, the common proviso which has emerged globally, in this respect, is that the university should be a quality institution – or have the clear potential to become one.

An example of a successful diaspora network is GlobalScot, comprised of a worldwide network of high powered Scots who use their expertise and antennae to seek-out members of the diaspora capable of forwarding Scottish projects. Chile and Mexico have adapted GlobalScot in seeking to attract their diaspora. There is evidence that diaspora networks themselves can assist in identifying leaders abroad, and contribute to a search network.

### ***Summary of the Overall Considerations for the ECS in Establishing a University***

- What is the ECS's overall vision for its proposed university?
- What are the specific, intended goals of an ECS University?
- Which existing ECS educational institutions have the capacity to be upgraded to university faculty level, i.e. meet with the GoSS's requirements for registration - what are the stages and the ECS's role in implementing this process?
- How will the *transformation* from separate educational institutions to a geographically dispersed ECS University be financed?
- How would an ECS University project team be established, facilitated and supported?
- What are the governance and management arrangements needed to effect the transformation from the status of existing ECS educational institutions to recognised university status?
- How would students be selected for admission to an ECS university?
- What will be an ECS University's *unique selling point* and *niche market*?
- In which disciplines would the university pursue excellence in teaching, learning and research?
- How will the *international dimension* of an ECS University be achieved?
- Relative to *quality assurance*, how will the overall life and work of an ECS University be monitored, evaluated and reviewed?
- How will the success of an ECS University be measured and what *outcome indicators* and *accountability mechanisms* would be implemented?

## ***Recommendations***

In the context of this section the ECS is recommended to consider the following:

Decide which of the available options for an ECS university (identified above) it wishes to pursue.

Determine how the proposed university would meet the criteria associated with a quality university by assessing its potential and capacity to

- make a significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge through research
- deliver innovative curricula and teaching methodology
- provide excellent facilities and resources for recognised research.

Decide how it would

- implement a form of university governance which would deliver strategic vision, mission, direction, innovation, flexibility and questioning of the status quo
- create a critical mass of well qualified faculty and researchers capable of attracting funding for leading-edge research
- create an environment which promotes quality teaching and learning and assists the conduct of advanced research.

Encourage the return to South Sudan of its academic diaspora.

Seek to establish the international dimension to an ECS University.

Identify which international partnerships it might most usefully establish.