

Delivering Quality – Spirited Leadership and Teaching ***By Dr Ruth Eade***

Institutional Leadership – Extensive global leadership research data indicates that the major common hallmark of the best performing universities is *strong* leadership. It identifies this as being comprised of *personal* and *professional* commitment to the university’s mission, purpose and goals as well as the capacity to

- think courageously
- strategically envision the potential
- translate vision into quality practice

This research also indicates that the best performing universities have leaders who

- combine first-rate managerial skills and a successful research career
- fully understand the institution’s core agenda
- possess the operational skills required for the effective implementation of the vision.

The research of Leithwood and Jantzie (1990) found that, typically, effective leaders used four broad strategies:

- Strengthening institutional ethos
- Stimulating continuous improvement
- Engaging in direct and frequent communication regarding institutional values, principles and beliefs
- Appropriately sharing power and responsibility with others, e.g. colleagues and stakeholders.

Collegiate Leadership - Fundamentally, collegiate leadership is not about a ‘*top down*’ institutional structure but about the fundamental acknowledgement that those closest to an institution’s ‘point of delivery’ are also leaders. Accordingly, it is neither about a hierarchy of tasks, nor the superiority of high office because - logically understood - it is unrealistic for the success and integrity of an institution to be vested entirely in one person.

Naisbitt and Aburdene describe the collegiate model as being,

“A democratic, yet demanding leadership model, respects people and encourages self-management, autonomous teams and entrepreneurial units”.

Accordingly, institutional leadership requires a collegiate model generated by a confident *invitational* leadership style informed by a profound knowledge of self and others. This requires spirited leaders capable of being an embodiment of their institution’s Mission Statement. Potentially, such role modelling has an amplifying effect since - by actively demonstrating the desired levels of commitment and professionalism - it can inspire faculty to transformational levels of corporate vision and mission. In an ECS University setting the leadership also needs to be capable of inspiring a theologically and intellectually informed collegiate commitment to the Christian foundation. The importance of such an understanding is summed-up by Gufstson’s, whose research indicated that,

“The quality of the entire life of an institution may be at stake in the question of the religious outlook of its leader(s)”.

Delivering the University’s Christian Identity - In practice this requires the appointment of a *critical mass* of senior teaching staff *personally* committed to making Christianity visible in education. Ideally, such staff should have the capacity to be interpreters of *the Christian faith*

in the university setting. Spiritually, intellectually and professionally this requires a dynamic synergy comprised of personal faith commitment, professional philosophy and professional practice.

The identification of a staffing model which requires senior teaching posts to be filled by appropriately professionally qualified and experienced Christians does not exclude the appointment of non-Christians to other posts within the university structure. However, because such staff would clearly be influential in the life and work of the university, it would be necessary for them to be contracted *professionally* to support the university's ethos and undertake to do nothing which would undermine the university's Christian foundation. This is critical because - according to the research - the quality of the overall teaching and learning paradigm of any institution is strategically dependent on collaborative and collegiate professionalism whereby *all* staff adopt a mutual professional focus; common values and goals; and also on staff being enabled to work in accordance with identified shared core values, principles and beliefs.

Developing a Christian Theology of Leadership and Teaching – The application of Christian theology to the teaching and learning paradigm implies the consistent implementation of the best possible practice across all university faculties and their disciplines. The *Biblical doctrine of the uniqueness of each individual* - combined with recognition that the fundamental task of the university is to equip students to become self-motivated and skilled learners and to fulfil their God-given potential. Such a teaching and learning paradigm is embodied in the Biblical concept of *servant leadership* and denotes a *circular* ministry between the teacher and the taught, as *together* they seek after truth.

The quality of the leadership and the teaching and learning paradigm in the proposed ECS University will depend not only on structures but also on identifying what constitutes *best practice*, how that should be implemented, and how *quality outcomes* for students can systematically be procured. Based on the understanding that all disciplines are intrinsically and inextricably linked - and that ultimate truth is located in the relationships between individual disciplines - each of an ECS University's faculties would, theoretically and potentially, have a unique, fundamental contribution to make to the overall life and work of the university. Practically understood, this requires the leadership of the university and each academic faculty to be actively committed to the *open search for truth* and the quality *dissemination of universal knowledge*.

Support and Development of the University's Faculty Members - The expectation that - by virtue of being Christians – senior ECS University staff would possess the automatic ability to think theologically about leadership, management and theories of teaching and learning, is unrealistic. Accordingly, there would be a need for specific Induction and Continuing Professional Development Programmes presenting and attesting a Christian world-view within a harmonizing, cross-curricular framework incorporating the pedagogical, methodological and religious considerations. Potentially such courses would bridge the gap between metaphysicians and practitioners thus making theory accessible through a framework which integrated mission, truth, theology, values, ethos and the curriculum.

Similarly, it would be necessary to implement pastoral support structures providing the well-springs upon which senior leadership team and senior post holders could draw for their Christian spiritual sustenance and growth. Such support should be additional to the implementation of structures focused on the ongoing overall spiritual and professional support and development of *the entire* faculty - irrespective of their personal religious

stance. Biblically understood, this would require a focus on the Pauline doctrine of the *building of the whole body* with its recognition of the indispensable importance of the contribution made by each member.

Balancing Christian Commitment with Professional Competency - Whilst a critical mass of Christians is central to the practical expression of an ECS University's Christian foundation, it is integral to the overall integrity of the university as an academic institution, that personally committed Christians should also be high quality, capable professionals. Anything less than a combination of commitment *and* excellent professional practice would inevitably bring the university into disrepute and fail to serve the best interests of students.

Employment Legislation and Contractual Requirements -- Staffing requirements relating to the specific employment of committed Christians in an ECS University would need to be implemented in full accordance with the GoSS's employment legislation. Therefore, it would be necessary for the ECS to identify those posts which would be required to carry an *occupational requirement* for the appointment of a committed Christian and clearly justify why the classification should be applied. Similarly, it would be necessary to determine ways in which the requirements associated with posts carrying an *occupational requirement* should be included in the associated contracts so that the Christian contribution can be reviewed as part of the university's annual programme for the professional appraisal of staff.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the ECS should

- identify ways in which staff who have the relevant professional qualifications, calibre and commitment can be attracted to take-up posts in the proposed university. It should be noted in this respect that university teaching staff are required to be two academic levels above the students whom they teach
- decide the ways in which the ECS will support the university
- establish its position in law relative to its right to appoint Christians to senior university posts in the proposed university and obtain details of the implications embodied in the relevant *occupational requirement* legislation.