

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

According to a well-known comment the trouble with the future is that it is no longer like the past. Paradoxical as this statement may appear to be at first, the message itself is quite clear: the future is not predictable. Rather, in a world that changes so rapidly that yesterday's innovation may well be redundant by tomorrow, certainties have been replaced by, at best, probabilities and more often simply by possibilities. If it is accepted that making effective life decisions really depends on one's capacity to make educated guesses, relevant education becomes extremely important.

It has been established in previous chapters that graduates are not being adequately trained in the life competencies and skills demanded by the world of work and by the rapidly changing South African society. Much rhetoric is currently being bandied about by the many authors who seem aware of these problems.

According to Finch and Crunkilton (in De Jager 1989:441), "any curriculum that hopes to be relevant tomorrow must be responsive to tomorrow's as well as today's needs". Olivier (1988:352) feels that South Africa's still predominantly academic, tradition-based education system is not solving the problems created by a lack of training in basic skills.

Anglo American Corporation's Director of Industrial Relations and Public Affairs, Mr Bobby Godsell (1993:1), acknowledges that "from the foundations of our theoretical knowledge - across the spectrum of traditional academic disciplines: physics, chemistry, mathematics, medicine and the social sciences - we are constantly acquiring not just additional new knowledge, but also fundamentally different knowledge"... in consequence of which ... "learnt facts become obsolete at an ever increasing rate".

In Godsell's opinion, the traditional idea of a corporate career - along with traditional professions - is out of date. Rather it has become clear in the 1980s and 1990s that "the rigid demarcation of occupations is crumbling. Fifteen years ago the German mining

industry abolished the position of miner - and combined these skills of production with those of tradition artisans; to produce the miner/fitter, miner/electrician. Increasingly production work is organized around flexible work teams: a broad range of competencies is needed rather than narrowly-defined (and once and for all) craft skills" (Godsell 1993:2).

Apropos the above, it would appear that Technikons, which in terms of the Technikon Act passed in Parliament in June 1993, are now allowed to confer degrees (SA Communication Service 1993:7), have already taken note of current trends with regard to training in life competencies and skills (refer Vaal Triangle Technikon for example). Universities in South Africa, on the other hand, are clearly lagging.

According to Cartwright (1993:27) South African universities (as well as commerce and industry) have not escaped the disease of mediocrity engendered by several generations of apartheid and sheltered employment. In his opinion, academics have become complacent and intellectually lax, content with recycled or second-hand ideas. "In this atmosphere, the greatest excitement is provided by occasional five-year-old fads from the United States or Japan" (Cartwright 1993:27).

Cartwright feels that universities have perhaps been exceptionally culpable as their special contribution to society is not merely to provide trained personnel for defined social or economic slots but to attempt to think the unthinkable and to question established assumptions. "Much of the energy of South African academics in recent generations, however, ... has been taken up by, on the one hand, elaborating specious intellectual rationalizations for the idiocies of apartheid, or, on the other, fighting off political control and defending an increasingly sterile academic independence" (Cartwright 1993:27).

Khoapa (1993:48) believes that the best preparation for the future is an education that will enable students to adapt to a changing world. In his opinion, adaptation to change requires that one draw on history and on the experience of other nations, and that one apply the theories and methods of empirical investigation. "It requires a disposition toward lifelong learning and the ability to partake of and contribute to the rightness of culture and citizenship of our nation. These requirements are as relevant to the future medical technician-in-training at a technikon as they are to the biology major at a university" (Khoapa 1993:48).

In the opinion of van der Linde (1993:67), professionals in South Africa are joining the ranks of the unemployed in a steady flow. He feels that a close fit with reality, in terms of improving the potential contribution of graduates in a work place, is essential for any qualification. He believes that universities in South Africa "must take cognizance of political, social and economic aspects." Furthermore, there should not be a "definite demarcation between natural sciences, the business sector and humanities" as each covers skills the others can employ (van der Linde 1993:67).

Ryan (1993:70) agrees with the above opinion. He feels that "it is not a question of battling against other faculties or controlling the market. We need to see the total skills required by the emerging cultural and economic situation that the new South Africa is going to produce and provide the necessary trained people" (Ryan 1993:70).

Tothill (1993:43) acknowledges that the idea of basing university curricula on key competencies (understood in terms of a narrow, mechanistic classification of skills) generally finds little favour with academics. On the other hand, she believes that "a more flexible vision of competencies sees them as a synthesis of skills and knowledge, a conceptual means of bridging the vocational/general education divide." In her opinion, "it is inevitable, given a high level of interest in the economic functions of education, that competencies should be on the agenda" (of debate concerning the future of higher education) (Tothill 1993:43).

Whilst in agreement with most of the above, it is the contention of this writer that enough evidence to support the need to include some sort of training in life competencies and skills in university/higher education has been found. If, as Godsell (1993:2) maintains, "education is about knowing how to learn" and "the preparation for work is about learning how to do: how to act in society in a way that adds value; how to produce useful goods or perform useful services", then the time has surely come to find a way both to address and to redress the situation discussed above. Guidance support for undergraduate students is offered as an attempt to achieve this.

## 5.2 SUMMARY WITH A VIEW TO RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.2.1 Chapter 1

The following were dealt with in this chapter with a view to gaining perspective and an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, namely Guidance Support for Undergraduate Students: title and concept elucidation, methodological justification, problem formulation, formulation of research hypotheses, an exposition of the aim of the study and an outline of the research programme.

### 5.2.2 Chapter 2

In this chapter a life skills questionnaire was presented which could be employed as a diagnostic medium by University Counsellors in order to assist with ascertaining the levels of competence university entrants have with regard to said life skills. It was proposed that the results of the questionnaire could serve as an indication of possible problems experienced by university entrants, either individually or as a group (for example within departments, faculties or the university as a whole), thereby enabling counsellors and academic staff to react accordingly. Furthermore, the students could thus be assisted with regard to the discovery, recognition, grasping and evaluating of areas of strengths and weaknesses. The compiling of CVs from the first year of university training could also be facilitated via the use of said questionnaire.

The life skills questionnaire was administered to all first year residential students available on the days of testing. Profiles indicating both overall results and results obtained within specific subfields were given.

It was discovered that all the students who responded to the questionnaire were in need of training in life competencies and skills.

### **5.2.3 Chapter 3**

This chapter attempted to ascertain whether or not graduates could be considered sufficiently trained in life competencies and skills to meet the demands of the world of work.

The aims of the chapter were to discover which skills relevant people considered to be of value, proficiency levels of graduates, which skills were being consciously and deliberately taught at universities and whether or not training courses were being offered to address problem areas. In order to achieve these aims, a survey was done of the needs of employers and the self-employed via a literature review, a questionnaire which was sent to the deans of the various faculties at the University of Pretoria and to Councils, Associations and Institutions, and an investigation into the types of courses covering life skills training offered by Human Resources Development departments of companies and various Training Companies.

A conclusion was reached that a need exists to train students in life competencies and skills in order to increase productivity and employability levels and to improve the preparation of graduates for the practising of their future careers.

### **5.2.4 Chapter 4**

This chapter introduced the concept of guidance support for undergraduate students. It covered the traditional role of universities, current perspectives and alternative approaches employed internationally. A rationale, a definition and the aims of guidance support were discussed and suggestions were made with regard to implementation of the concept via the establishment of a guidance support department. The advantages of implementing such a concept to the universities, to students, to graduates and to the community at large were given.

### 5.3 REPORT ON HYPOTHESIS VERIFICATION

In summary it can be said that the hypotheses were verified phenomenologically (see hypothesis formulation, p. 17) and by means of the appropriate research procedures (see pp. 7-13).

### 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below can be made on the basis of the preceding study.

#### 5.4.1 Guidance Support

Much of what follows has already been covered incidentally in Chapter 4 (see 4.5 pp. 110-115). Reiteration and enumeration are given below for ease of reference.

- \* The concept of Guidance Support needs to be seriously considered as a means of both addressing and redressing problems surrounding levels of employment and productivity.
- \* Guidance Support in terms of life competencies and skills should be conceptualized as a cohesive, long-term system of training able to cater to the appropriate life and career development needs of all students.
- \* Guidance Support should prepare young people for the service age that is replacing the technological era by empowering them to deal with the realities of the world of work. The lifelong learning required by the service age presupposes the possession of skills such as how to learn, effective decision-making, problem-solving, entrepreneurial skills and value clarification. The fact that societies are changing as rapidly as they are both in South Africa and internationally emphasizes the need for students to receive life skills training not only to assist them with the practising of their future careers, but also to ensure that their training does not fall too far behind current international approaches.

- \* Due to its proactive and preventative approach, Guidance Support should be able to redress some of the problems surrounding mental health in South Africa, while allowing for remediation of said problems where necessary.
- \* The concept of Guidance Support should facilitate a concerted approach to the teaching of life skills in place of the discrete one currently prevailing. It should encourage transference of skills intra and inter-departmentally, and between faculties and disciplines where applicable.

#### **5.4.2 A Guidance Support Department**

A guidance support department should be established in order to carry out the following functions. It should:

- Approach all suitably qualified people to assist with the facilitation of life skills training and exploit all relevant sources of information;
- Act as a co-ordinator of information and resources gathered both nationally and internationally including ASP departments, student advice bureaux, faculties and departments within universities, outside institutions such as councils, associations and institutions, the Department of Manpower, the world of work and the like;
- Collate and classify all resources gathered and establish a media centre for the storing and accessing of said resources;
- Evaluate and update existing resources as well as generate new resources via relevant research done alone or in conjunction with other interested parties;
- Act as a transferrer, advisor and facilitator of said resources where and when required;
- Be prepared to assist with training of all persons involved in life skills i.e. professional staff, students, graduates, alumni and the community at large;

- Be prepared to assist with the adaptation and/or design of curricula so as to accommodate life skills training;
- Be prepared to assist with the construction and evaluation of assessment techniques (e.g. profiling);
- Ensure that, particularly in the case of certificated courses, standards are maintained;
- Be prepared both to generate and to teach life skills packages, programmes, modules and/or courses wherever and whenever required e.g. in terms of compulsory, supplementary or elective courses, extra-concurrent, extra-mural or extra-curricular programmes and community service based or distance learning packages;
- Be prepared to run induction courses for both students and newly appointed staff members;
- Be prepared to act as a link between institutions of higher education and the world of work;
- Be prepared to assist with the training of social science graduates (e.g. social workers and psychologists) via the offering of internships so as to increase the number of graduates in these disciplines and thereby address problems of mental health currently experienced in South Africa;
- Offer opportunities for the employment of expertise currently being lost due to the process of rationalization.

#### 5.4.3 University Personnel

As was stated in chapter 4 (see 4.5.2. p.115), the creation and the workings of a guidance support department would be futile without the support of the majority of the academic

and administrative personnel of a university. The most important stakeholders will be discussed below.

- \* Firstly, the deans of faculties should be the leaders in terms of implementation of designed curricula through teaching as well as formative curriculum evaluation. The deans should ensure that subject curricula are implemented in such a way that the educational goals of the university are met. Deans need to recognize and plan for stages in the implementation process including creating a climate for change, communicating the rationale for and managerial/organizational implications of the implementation process, facilitating staff development and giving guidance with regard to instructional planning (Steyn 1992:39-41). Thus the responsibility for ensuring training in life competencies and skills, particularly with regard to teaching from a life skills perspective, would devolve on the deans. Equally, they would need to ensure that close ties between both faculties and departments within faculties were maintained in order to share skills and expertise and to obviate possible duplication of any kind. A guidance support department should assist with the above. Du Toit (1993:69) has suggested a series of workshops for deans of faculties as the people who have access to heads of departments, lecturers, students, Councils and employers, in order to facilitate restructuring of courses to ensure they prepare graduates more adequately for the world of work. A guidance support department should be able to organize and/or facilitate sponsorship (Edey & Molin 1993:24) of such workshops for the deans.
  
- \* Secondly, lecturers should be persuaded as to the many advantages involved both in teaching from a life skills perspective and in making use of a guidance support department in terms of finding solutions to any disadvantages and providing the lecturers with the support they may require with regard to management of change, auditing of courses, assessment techniques and the like (refer pp.115, 147 and 163-164).

Lickindorf has suggested that lecturers may be assuming too sophisticated an ability on the part of even final-year students to make the links for themselves between what is learned in their courses and how it can apply in "real life". She feels that it may be taken for granted that exposure to selected course content is sufficient

for a course's relevance to be perceived by students and for its material to be applied in their lives. She recommends that BA teachers (at least) build into their courses "specific applications - to life and employment - of competencies acquired at each stage of a course, and of practical ways of resolving issues by applying such skills systematically" (Lickindorf 1993:51). A guidance support department should assist lecturers with the concretizing of the above recommendations.

- \* Thirdly, guidance counsellors should be prepared to reconceptualize their traditional role and to appreciate the complexities of their work in a changed and changing world. A guidance support department should be in a position to assist, especially career guidance counsellors, with keeping up to date with latest developments and with retraining where necessary.

Furthermore, many counsellors are often expected to work in isolation. In order to prepare students for the realities of the world of work, counsellors need to join forces with teaching staff and they would, in the opinion of Mauer, "in all probability, have to be sufficiently persuasive to gain the necessary cooperation" (Mauer 1993:31). A guidance support department should be able to facilitate co-operation between teaching staff and counsellors.

- \* Fourthly, close links should be maintained between students (and recent graduates) and professional staff in order to ensure both sides understand and maintain relevance with regard to course content. A guidance support department should facilitate consultation between students and academic personnel.

#### **5.4.4 Other Stakeholders**

Close ties should be maintained between institutions of higher learning and the world of work. In the opinion of Unilever's Geoff McDonald, what is really needed is "some kind of body that could be representative of employers, so that (an) interface between tertiary institutions and industry could be enhanced" (McDonald 1993:64). The opposite is equally important, namely that the universities need a similar kind of body to represent them. This function could be performed by a guidance support department. Furthermore:

- \* A guidance support department should attempt to ensure graduates are sufficiently trained in terms of the life competencies and skills required by the world of work. In order to do so, all relevant sources of information should be accessed including appropriate university personnel, other universities both here and overseas, deans, Councils, Associations, Institutions, Professional Societies, employers and the self-employed. The department should also ensure appropriate dissemination of such information.
- \* A guidance support department should attempt to keep employers informed as to the skills graduates should be in possession of once they enter the world of work and what certification of courses in life skills entails in terms of giving graduates "added value".
- \* A guidance support department should consider the possibility of attempting to arrange employment experiences for students e.g. in terms of part-time employment, mini internships, placement in relevant organizations for short periods of time, vacation employment and the like. This should facilitate the finding of fulltime employment or the successful practising of self-employment after graduation. Simultaneously, it should facilitate the maintenance of close ties between the worlds of work and the academe.
- \* A guidance support department should also keep alumni and the local communities aware of courses which might possibly be of interest to them and offer said courses, programmes and/or packages where and when desired, thereby providing opportunities for "continuing education".

#### **5.4.5 Employment of the Life Skills Questionnaire**

The questionnaire should be used as a diagnostic medium in the following ways:

- \* With individual university entrants, or groups within departments, colleges, faculties or the university as a whole.
- \* At the beginning of the first year of university to assist relevant personnel to identify problem areas, to plan forecasts and to adjust course content accordingly.

- \* To provide relevant information any time during the year when required.
- \* To provide students with results in order to promote insight into their own problems. They can then be encouraged to remediate these problem areas and to avail themselves of any course material on offer so as to gain practice in the required skills.
- \* To provide indicators with respect to further research in terms of which skills have value for a particular career, which are unnecessary and/or which could be scrapped altogether.
- \* To act as a point of departure for further research with respect to the designing of a questionnaire aimed at assessing the skills levels of graduates, who may wish to take extra-mural courses in life skills.

## 5.5 RESEARCH

The concept of Guidance Support with the concomitant notion of a guidance support department necessarily entails a certain amount of further research.

- \* Research should be undertaken into the feasibility and viability of establishing a guidance support department.
- \* The above would necessitate investigation into a number of areas such as the concept of Guidance Support itself, attitudes and reactions of university personnel, of students and of the world of work, and the availability of manpower, resources and finances.
- \* Research should be undertaken either by or on behalf of each faculty in order to determine which skills are the most in demand with respect to each course offered.
- \* Research should be undertaken in order to determine the effectiveness of overseas approaches to the teaching of life or core skills. Information obtained should be carefully examined before any adaptation to the South African context occurs.

- \* The establishment of a guidance support department would, of itself, involve ongoing research. For example, the content of courses, programmes, packages and modules should be a matter of ongoing research.
- \* Alumni, post-graduate students, new entrants into the world of work, Councils, Associations, Institutions and Professional Societies, employers, the self-employed and the local communities should be canvassed: firstly, in order to ascertain their reactions to such a concept and secondly, in order to establish levels of interest with regard to courses/course material a guidance support department might be able to offer.
- \* Research should be undertaken with regard to the evaluation and standardization of material so as to enable a guidance support department to offer certificated courses which would in no way compromise academic standards of excellence and which would allow graduates to enter the world of work with "added value".
- \* Research should be undertaken with regard to methods of course assessment and the possible employment of profiling techniques.
- \* The extent to which distance learning could be facilitated should be researched.
- \* The extent to which the community at large could benefit should be researched.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is of fundamental importance that cognizance be taken of the extent to which graduates appear to lack adequate training in life competencies and skills. That graduates are inadequately prepared to meet the demands of the world of work or successfully to deal with the implications of a rapidly changing South African society can no longer be denied.

In the opinion of Godsell, "education prepares the individual for life. It can provide a survival kit for living in a society that is complex, dangerous and characterised by rapid

change. Education can be a crucible in which we refine values and make vital personal and individual choices" (Godsell 1993:2).

The concept of Guidance Support, concomitant with the establishment of a guidance support department, could go a long way towards providing such a "survival kit": whilst both addressing and redressing some of the areas of concern discussed in this study.

Implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations could significantly contribute to

- \* the relevance of university training in terms of producing graduates able to make meaningful and positive contributions to the economic, social, cultural and political situation in South Africa;
- \* the producing of graduates empowered to actualize their potential with regard to both self and career management;
- \* the relevance of universities with regard to both community responsibility and accountability, and
- \* improvement in the quality of life for all South Africans.