

# Western Cape

## INTERIM WORKING GROUP RESEARCH REPORT ON PROVINCIAL STUDENT LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

### INTRODUCTION

In April 2005 the Student Representative Councils of the Western Cape universities came together at the first Western Cape Tertiary Student Leadership Conference (WCTSLC), hosted by Stellenbosch University.

The aim of the conference was to inspire student leaders to think beyond the confines of their respective institutions and to realise the possibilities that exist within the Western Cape, South African and African contexts.

At the end of the conference, an Interim Working Group was established to research the feasibility of constructing a provincial SRC structure. The Interim Working Group was mandated to report back on whether such a structure could be created to promote dialogue and facilitate interaction between the SRCs of the Western Cape.

In this discussion document the Interim Working Group's research is presented, with special focus on the two different organisational structures that were proposed and discussed at our weekly Friday meetings.

### INTERIM WORKING GROUP

The Interim Working Group consisted of the following people:

- o Muhammed Surty - University of Cape Town
- o Motlotleng Moleko - Stellenbosch University
- o Thando Mgqolozana - University of the Western Cape
- o Zodwa Maqoqa - Cape Peninsula University of Technology (Bellville campus)
- o André Müller - Stellenbosch University

At the inaugural meeting of the Interim Working Group (on 22 April at UCT) it was decided that research needed to be done on (1) constitutional issues arising from the creation of such a body, (2) other policy documents that would have to be drawn up, and (3) on different kinds of peer review mechanisms.

(4) Interaction with the Department of Education and (5) the logistics for holding another conference were also to be examined.

More specifically, with regards to the (1) constitutional research: the (1.1) needs for such a body and (1.2) its aims and objectives, (1.3) its membership, (1.4) organisational structure, (1.5) elections, and (1.6) terms of office, needed to be explored.

The work was allocated as follows:

	Topic	Person/people responsible
1.1	Need for a provincial structure	Motlotleng Moleko
1.2	Aims and objectives	Motlotleng Moleko
1.3	Membership	Muhammed Surty
1.4	Organisational Structure	Zodwa Maqoqa and André Müller
1.5	Electoral procedures	Zodwa Maqoqa
1.6	Term of Office	Thando Mgqolozana
2	Other needed policy documents	André Müller
3	Peer review mechanisms	Thando Mgqolozana
4	Interaction with DoE	Muhammed Surty
5	Logistics for another conference	Motlotleng Moleko

} 1. constitutional research

It was decided amongst the five members of the Interim Working Group that they would meet on Friday 22 April, 6, 13, 20 and 27 May and organise a conference on 28 May. The meetings were scheduled to take place at UCT, CPUT, UCT, UWC and SU in that order. Research documents were to be e-mailed by the Wednesday before every meeting.

At the second meeting, held on 6 May at CPUT, however, documents had not been circulated beforehand. Only SU and UCT members were present at the third meeting on 13 May at UCT and the meeting of 20 May was cancelled, because the UWC and CPUT members could not attend. The last meeting was re-scheduled to Thursday 26 May at UCT; again only to be attended by SU and UCT members. This lack of commitment hindered the process as the idea was to have the input of all the institutions.

At the meeting of 26 May it was decided to cancel the conference which was scheduled to take place on 28 May and to rather compile and send out a report of the Interim Working Group's findings.

## **RESEARCH REPORT**

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This research report was compiled on 29-30 May 2005 by André Müller in consultation with Muhammed Surty and Motlotleng Moleko.

Although the Interim Working Group reached consensus on the need for a provincial structure and agreed on the aims and objectives of such a body, two fundamentally different organisational structures were identified and will be discussed later on in this document.

Firstly (1.1) The need for a provincial structure and its (1.2) Aims and objectives will be discussed, followed secondly by an explanation of the two different (1.4) Organisational structures – each with its own (1.3) Membership requirements, (1.5) Election procedures and (1.6) Terms of office regulations.

Thirdly, (2) Other policy documents that may be needed, will be listed and finally the (3) Peer review system will be briefly mentioned, followed by the Interim Working Group's conclusion

### **1.1 THE NEED FOR A PROVINCIAL STRUCTURE**

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Several reasons exist for the need of such a structure, however, the Interim Working Group has highlighted the following needs, the need for a:

- tool with which to tackle common issues
- more formal and effective link of communication
- peer review system
- way to identify provincial issues

The WCTSL conference identified that students felt that a provincial structure could serve as a fine tool in the tackling of issues common to all the Western Cape campuses. To avoid duplication it was felt that raising issues under the banner of 'provincial concern' would warrant the ear of the education ministry with greater ease.

Another need that was identified, is that a formal link of communication and interaction between all the SRCs needed to be established so that student leaders could challenge each other and engage in dialogue concerning local issues reflected in the national agenda.

The need for a peer review system was also identified where the various SRCs could come together and engage in a process of formative criticism and assessment.

With the dissemination of information among the campuses, one will be able to keep a record of the issues common to all the Western Cape campuses.

### **1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF A PROVINCIAL STRUCTURE – AS IDENTIFIED AT THE WCTSLC**

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- Provide a forum for discussion, dialogue and debate
- Provide a unified Western Cape student voice on consensus issues
- Increase and strengthen communication channels among the Western Cape SRCs
- Provide a provincial peer review mechanism / formative assessment system

- Increase dialogue between SRCs and the ministry of education
- Increase the standard of student leadership via the peer review system. Method and procedure is to be agreed upon by all institutions involved.
- Provide a mechanism that will allow for SRCs to obtain assistance from each other
- Harness the expertise of past SRC members and others
- Doing this whilst being an equally representative body

## **1.4 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES**

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Two distinctly different organisational structures have been identified as possible models for a Western Cape forum of discussion:

### **1.4.1 DEMOCRATIC ORGANISATION STRUCTURE**

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Firstly, it would be useful to note that the proposed structure is by no means infringing upon individual SRCs' autonomy. The structure would be an assembly of institutions, who would agree on what direction the body should take, instead of dishing out directives to institutions and holding them accountable. It would be ludicrous to assume that one SRC would have the power to issue a mandate or enforce a directive upon another institution without their agreement.

The democratic nature of the body would inherently be one in which accountability is enshrined. Accountability is that mechanism that ensures delivery. Democracy would also ensure that the proposed structure does not become a 'token body', which would be nothing more than just that, token. We would refrain from having a structure that is merely conversational. What we need is a democratic structure, through which all institutions at a conference, would have the power to provide a collective mandate to a working group, whose leader would ultimately be accountable to a conference later in the year. Proof of this mechanism ensuring delivery lays this document, in that this very same mechanism ensured the delivery of it.

It is via a democratic process, a core functionary unit would come into being. These individuals would not be empowered to enforce a mandate upon any of the institutions party to the body. The highest decision making power would vest in conference, where all institutions will have equal representation, and even conference would not be legally empowered to enforce a mandate. The Provincial Executive Committee would comprise of dedicated individuals who are willing and able to carry out the day-to-day running of the organisation.

The obvious downfall of such a structure is, as with any other structure, continuity. The looming threat that such a body faces is that it will be recreated every consecutive year. It is for this reason that we propose the parallel membership period, where incoming SRCs are schooled in the operations of the body.

The structure would look as follows:

#### **i. The General Committee**

The Provincial General Committee would consist of all members of the organization, i.e. 6 members per university, which would result in a total of 24 members, excluding other higher education institutions. The General Committee would meet at conference twice a year, in the first and third quarter. These conferences would serve as a platform which would allow SRCs to interact, collaborate, advise, assess and resolve on issues in higher education in general and on issues specific to the Western Cape.

The General Committee would be an assembly of the membership of the structure, from which the executive committee would be elected. Ultimate power in decision making as well as policy formulation would vest in the PGC.

#### **ii. The Provincial Executive Committee**

The Executive would be elected by conference in the first quarter. The PEC would consist of the following members; *Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General & Treasurer General*. The PEC would be the core functionary unit of the organization. They would be responsible for the organization of the conferences as well as the day-to-day running of the organization. The members who serve in the respective positions would carry out the functions generally associated with the respective positions. The PEC would further be held accountable by the PGC for the running of the organization.

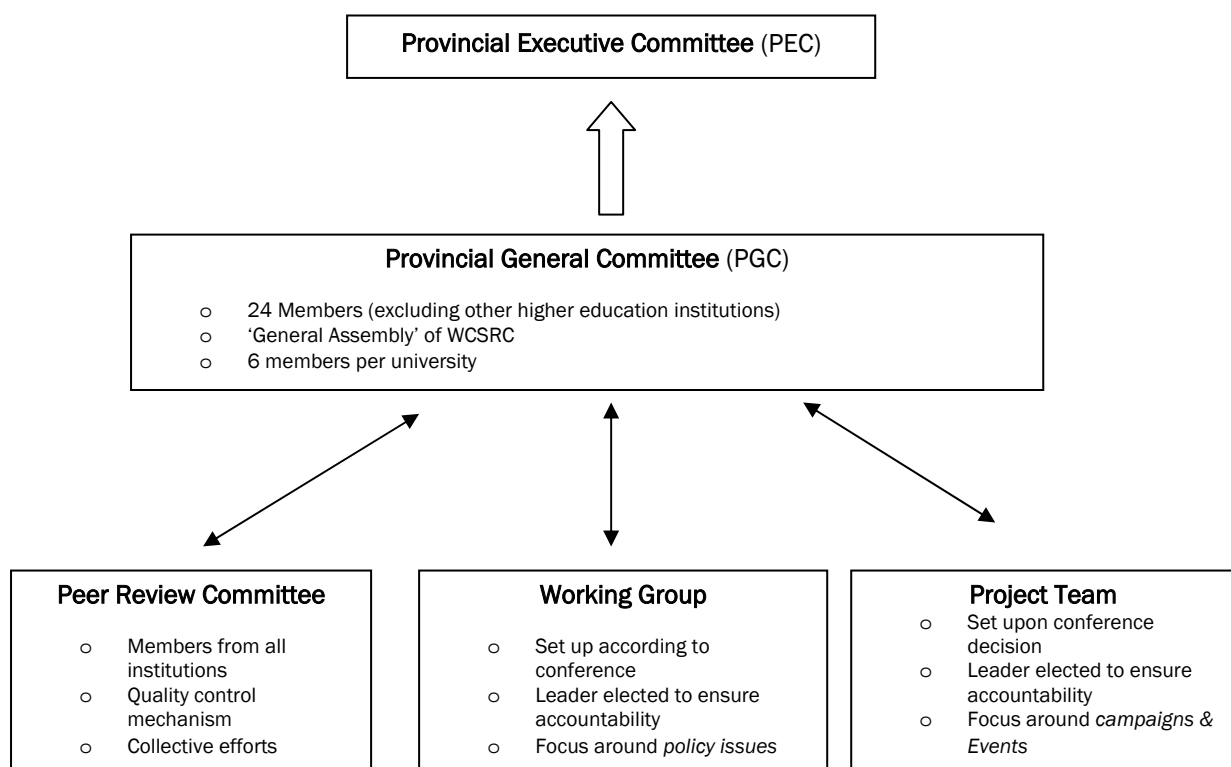
The PEC would be empowered to make decisions on behalf of the PGC and be tasked with the general coordination of the organization. The understanding here is that you would have a group of dedicated individuals, elected via a democratic process, who would meet on a more regular basis in ensuring that the structure is in order. They would overlook the activities of the working committees and projects.

### iii. Working Groups & Project Teams

Working Groups and Project Teams would be set up as conference sees fit. In the event of conference resolving the need for a Working Group or Project Team, conference would elect a leader for the WG or PT, who would be the individual held accountable for the execution of the conference mandate. The elected leader would then draw the members of the group or team from the PGC, according to their suitability for the working group or project team in question.

These Working Groups and Project Teams would report back to the PGC at the conferences. This structure has accountability checks and balances in place to ensure that the mandate of the structure is carried out.

### iv. Organization Structure Diagram:



### v. Membership

1. Membership shall be open to all Higher Education institutions in the Western Cape, which are recognized by the Department of Education and are democratically elected in terms of their constitutions.
2. Membership shall be recognized upon the payment of an affiliation fee, or upon the receipt of a promissory note, the amount of which shall be determined by the PGC. The receipt of the fee shall serve as an indication of institutions willingness to join.

#### 3. Membership Types

##### 3.1 Full Membership

Universities, as identified according to statute, shall have an option of full membership. Full members shall have voting rights. They shall have the right to vote in electing the PEC. Universities shall have an option of a maximum of 6 seats per institution on the PGC.

### 3.2 Nonofficial Membership

Colleges, FET's and other higher education institutions, in accordance with (1), shall have an option of non-official membership. Non-official members shall be allowed speaking rights but will not be allowed to vote. Non-official members shall have an option of a single seat per institution on the PGC.

4. Membership shall be for a period of one year, beginning on 1 February and expiring on the 31 January of the following year. There shall be a period of parallel membership from the time that new SRC's come into office to the conference in the first quarter.

## 1.4.2 DEMOCRATIC ROUND TABLE FORUM

The other proposed structure functions quite differently. Instead of a hierarchy, a compact round table forum is created. Presidency becomes irrelevant, with only a convenor and secretary elected, and a rotating speaker and venue.

Whereas seats are important for voting on the previous structure, this forum rather tries to find consensus. Where the previous structure tries to enforce a mandate, this forum will rather act as a core think tank to solve common and specific university problems.

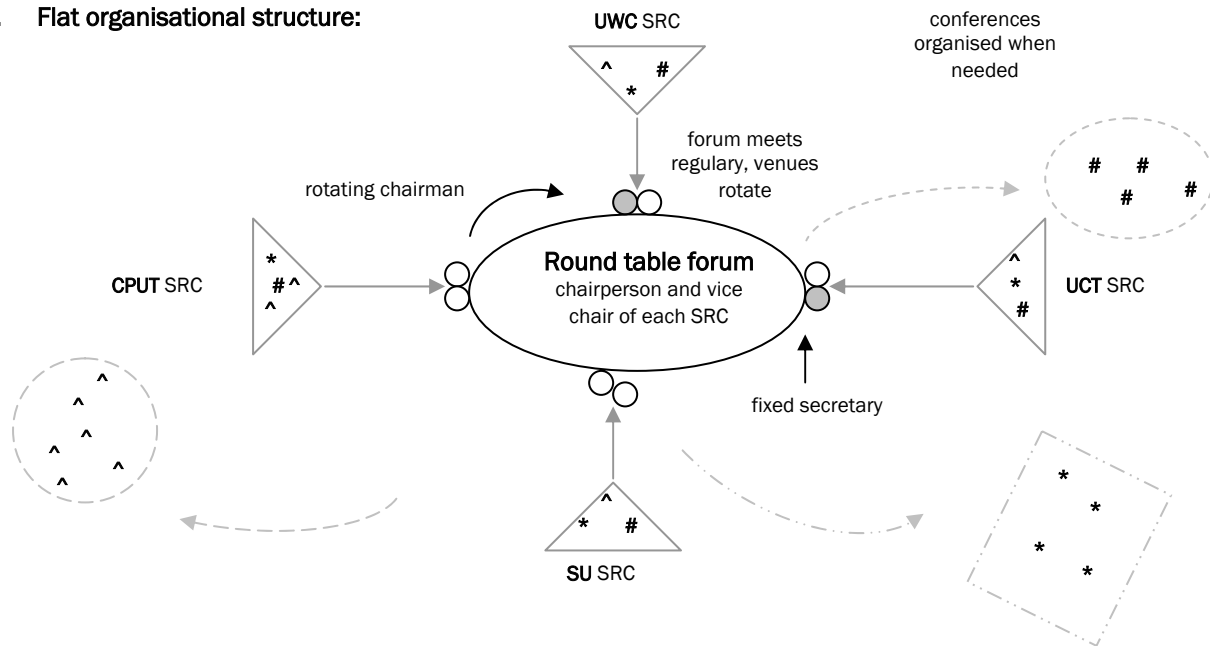
Democracy is inherent to this structure: democratic voting takes place on each campus, and the elected representatives of the students do exactly that: represent their students. No part of democracy whatsoever is lost here: it merely streamlines the existing democratic processes on each campus.

Instead of enforcing a mandate, student leaders will come together to discuss issues and share successes, and SRCs will retain their complete autonomy.

The African Union, SADC and European Union all started with such a forum. Trust first needs to be built and different SRCs have to be convinced (through proven successful endeavours) that working together on (certain) projects will be mutually beneficial for the different campuses. Currently that is exactly the way in which SAUVCA (South African Universities Vice-Chancellor's Association) works.

Simpler structures have proven to work well (especially where new members are introduced every year) and have the potential to grow into more formal structures over a period of time, whilst more complex structures face a myriad of challenges that cannot easily be bridged.

### i. Flat organisational structure:



# Transformation committee mandated by the Round table forum to meet with each other about identified issues

^ Task team looking into gender equity problems, comparing notes; tasked with organising a coordinated women's day celebrations

\* SRC members for sport comparing sport structures and drawing up a plan for a provincial sports championship

1. This flat structure takes the transient nature of student leadership into account. When a conference is held, time is not wasted on electing a higher structure; time is solely spent on discussing the issues and brainstorming for solutions. Also, SRC members serving on this forum, do not get additional portfolios to run. We assume that they have enough work on their home campuses already.
2. The round table forum brings together the most influential leaders from each campus, who can in turn delegate tasks to their respective SRC members, knowing where their interests lie. Also, having the presidents as members ensures accountability.
3. No time is wasted in attaining individual power/positions; power is unleashed when working together with SRC members from other campuses.
4. The smaller structure does not face the logistic problems and/or unnecessary bureaucratic mess of a more complex hierarchical structure.
5. The democratic round table forum is extremely cost-effective, with no membership fee charged.
6. Instead of assuming that outside people will necessarily know what is best for your specific campus, this structure presupposes that each university's SRC chair is in the best position to change his/her own campus. Therefore the challenge lies in broadening each other's perspectives through dialogue and convincing each other to take action when and where needed.
7. This simple structure is flexible and can be adapted from one year to another. Ad hoc task teams can be created via e-mail, with the different SRC chairmen keeping in contact right through the year.
8. This 'simplicity' does not imply that people will not be held accountable. On the contrary, the chairmen will follow up on the taskgroups, and on each other.
9. Taking into account the inherent lack of continuity that all SRCs face, this structure does not rely on past experience or positions. It does not have financial obligations, or any acquired tricks for the trade; it is very simple, but powerful at the same time: both through its membership and its agile nature. It is in fact better equipped than any other kind of structure to deliver efficiently.
10. Unlike a structure which is elected from a general assembly, this forum ensures equal representivity, thus omitting the need for political doings in the lobbying for seats on the body, and no platform for a power struggle of any sort.
11. This body creates the opportunity for different campuses to first get to know and trust one another, before imposing any mandate and/or creating situations that can breed distrust.
12. In essence, the Interim Working Group was compiled from one/two representatives from each university, in most cases the vice presidents external. This was by no means a less democratic process than an election by a general committee. The secretary position was shared between Thando Mqolozana and Motlotleng Moleko, and even the chairmanship was less essential, because the conversational topics almost steered itself. Nonetheless, even with such a simple structure, the Interim Working Group struggled to convene for its regular meetings. We had our fair share of successes and failures, but it is difficult to postulate how a more complex structure would have contributed to the Interim Working Group's efficiency.

## **1.5 ELECTIONS**

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Due to logistical problems, it will probably be less advisable to have more than three (preferably two) representatives from each university to form a provincial SRC/discussion forum, and instead of a complex electoral process, each SRC could elect or appoint their members.

(Special care must be taken with satellite campuses and universities which have been affected by mergers, to sort out fair representation.)

If the structure mimics a normal SRC body, with portfolio members and an executive committee, then it is suggested that a representative from each university forms part of the EC, rather than votes being lobbied on a political basis. Nonetheless, it is doubtful whether this Interim Working Group can create portfolios yet, or hence determine exactly how big such a structure should be.

If we decide on the first mentioned organisational structure, it is suggested that no member of the Interim Working Group, as creators of the structure, form part of the provincial SRC. It is simply part of good corporate governance not to create structures for yourself to serve on (KING II report).

Concerns have been raised as to whether conference members would have had the candidates other well enough to cast a vote for a provincial SRC.

## **1.6 TERMS OF OFFICE**

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This key point still had to be discussed in more depth.

## **2. OTHER POLICY DOCUMENTS**

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Although we have not yet decided upon the structure of the Western Cape SRC, we can anticipate that a number of policies, besides the constitution, will have to be drawn up. Some of them are listed below:

- 2.1 Mission and vision
- 2.2 Ethos
- 2.3 Code of conduct
- 2.4 Disciplinary regulations
- 2.5 Transformation charter
- 2.6 Standing/procedural rules for portfolios
- 2.7 Strategic framework
- 2.8 Peer review structure
- 2.9 ...

## **3. PEER REVIEW MECHANISM**

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The Interim Working Group did not reach a conclusion as to how the peer review mechanism should work. Our discussions focused on the organisational structures and we have not yet debated this issue thoroughly.

## **4. INTERACTION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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The Interim Working Group did not establish formal contact with the Department of Education.

## **5. LOGISTICS FOR HOLDING ANOTHER CONFERENCE**

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Motlotleng Moleko was thanked for organising the WCTSLC and looked into the logistics for hosting a conference/report back meeting at Stellenbosch University on 28 May. The Interim Working Group, however, decided to not convene on 28 May due to academic pressures. The Interim Working Group decided to rather compile and send out this discussion document.

## **CONCLUSION**

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Having fulfilled the mandate of the WCTSL conference that was held in Stellenbosch, the challenge now lies in the way forward. All of the information required to make a decision has been presented, but much of the detail still needs to be debated and agreed upon.

We, the Interim Working Group, recommend that all institutions party to the body agree and commit themselves to a conference where the different organisational structures could be discussed and a decision on constituting the body may be taken. We recommend that the conference be held early in the third quarter, before the new SRC elections start.

All institutions that will be a party to the body are now part owners of this document and thus are empowered to decide on a way forward. The Working Group is willing to continue in our mission to establish a body of SRCs in the Western Cape. We therefore seek the consent of all of the owners of this document, to organise a conference to be held in Stellenbosch before 31 August 2005.

Please study this document and send any queries and/or comments to Muhammed Surty ([msurty@gmail.com](mailto:msurty@gmail.com)) and Motlotleng Moleko ([tleng@sun.ac.za](mailto:tleng@sun.ac.za)).

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**COMPILED AS A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT – 31 MAY 2005**

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