



HERANA

**University World News:
Special Africa Edition**

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(University World News, E-Briefs)

INTRODUCTION

The project is a partnership between the Ford Foundation (South Africa), the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) and University World News (*U-News*), a new international online publication, to provide a niched news and information service to higher education policy-makers, institutions and organisations, managers, scholars and researchers across Africa. The aim is to keep people who are working or interested in African universities informed about important higher education news and developments across the continent, via a fortnightly e-mailed newsletter supported by an active website and archive.

There is currently no such service to African higher education – indeed, African academics are often better informed about higher education in the ‘west’ than in Africa. A tertiary news and information service could assist in the realisation of two major aims of the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa – to generate and share information about African universities and higher education; and to promote collaboration among African researchers, academics and university administrators.

The Ford Foundation

The Ford Foundation is heavily involved in higher education in Africa, funding a variety of programmes that support universities, scholarship and research in many African countries. It is a founder member of the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA), an initiative of United States foundations that is encouraging efforts by African universities to transform themselves and promote national development. The Ford Foundation, and PHEA, believe that universities have a key role to play in Africa’s development and that “an independent scholarly community supported by strong universities goes hand-in-hand with a healthy, stable democracy”¹. In the five years from 2005, the US foundations have pledged at least \$200 million towards a revival of African universities, with sharing information about higher education and promoting collaboration being two of PHEA’s four major aims.

One of PHEA’s special initiatives supports the provision of broadband and the use of information and communication technology to improve access to information and the production of knowledge in African universities. Tens of thousands of African scholars and university managers across several African countries are already internet-connected, and as more and more universities obtain quick and easy broadband, the potential reach and effectiveness of a higher education news and information service will simultaneously expand.

Centre for Higher Education Transformation

The Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) is a Cape Town-based agency that mobilises trans-disciplinary skills for tertiary development projects, coordinates a network of higher education researchers and provides a forum for dialogue. CHET is driving the establishment of a Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA), which is aimed among other things at developing the field of higher education studies in Africa. A major component of the network will be higher education advocacy “through multi-modal research information

¹ The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa: Preface to “National Policy and a Regional Response in South African Higher Education”. <http://www.foundation-partnership.org/pubs/southafrica/index.php?sub=prefser>

dissemination”². One of the aims of HERANA is “to introduce a more systematic research-based voice into the policy debates regarding higher education in Africa” (CHET 2007), through dissemination of research information via journals, forums, dialogues and interpreted information that reaches decision-makers.

CHET (2007) describes two components of the proposed advocacy work of HERANA. The first would develop a method of better coordinating existing sources of information through the creation of a central web server (an African Higher Education Knowledge Network), an information ‘portal’ that would allow for a centralised search function across a range of existing higher education information resources, including *University World News*. The second would be development of a media-advocacy strategy that includes disseminating higher education news and information to a wider audience by proactively ‘pushing out’ information from the central portal via the websites of organisations participating in HERANA – also including *University World News*, whose co-editor is a member of HERANA’s Advocacy structure with responsibility for media.

It is argued that by producing special fortnightly Africa-focused special editions of its weekly e-mailed global newsletter, whose content will also feed into and be supported by a regularly updated website related to the HERANA portal, *University World News* would be able to produce and collate focused, relevant news and information about higher education in Africa, and ensure its dissemination to a very wide range of African higher education stakeholders. The newsletter and website could also be used, via special sections of its content, by HERANA participants as a vehicle for the delivery of information on and analysis of African higher education.

CHET has agreed to fund a limited number of Africa editions of *World University News* that investigate issues of special importance to higher education in Africa, especially those in which it is involved. This proposal requests further ‘general’ funding for the development of a fortnightly Africa-focused newsletter and website that would deliver regular news and issues coverage of African higher education to a large audience – and importantly, also generate articles on African higher education, which is generally not widely or well covered in the African media and as a result does not enhance communication within or advocacy for the sector.

University World News (U-News)

University World News is a new media initiative founded by 18 senior education journalists based in 12 countries around the world, and a South African online media company called E-Briefs News that will provide technical and administrative support. The organisation was formed as a private limited company (number 6266400) in June 2007, under UK law and with its registered office in London. The company is called Higher Education Web Publishing Limited, and its first publication is *University World News*. The company’s objective is:

“To publish news and analysis to serve the international higher education community, with earnings generated by advertising, sponsorship and other means where possible.”

U-News will on 15 October 2007 launch an international weekly e-mailed newsletter and active website covering news on, features about and analysis of what is

² CHET (2007) “Funding Proposal: Establish a Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA). February 2007. Cape Town.

happening in higher education around the world. A 'prototype' version of the newsletter has been developed to illustrate the editorial content and format, and the *University World News* website has been constructed. The publication's founder members have invested sufficient capital to get *U-News* launched and operational globally, and will staff the publication as editors, managers and writers.

While *U-News* is registered in the UK, its founder members are based in a dozen countries:

- South Africa
- Britain
- Japan
- Australia
- Canada
- Russia
- Denmark
- France
- Germany
- Spain
- Greece
- Ireland

More founder journalists are soon to join the venture, including from Nigeria, Eastern Europe, the United States and India. The founder journalists are all respected senior reporters with collective experience of more than 300 years. Many have long been correspondents for the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, UK, some have written for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in the US, and all have been prolifically published in international, national and local newspapers and magazines. In addition, *U-News* has recruited, as correspondents, education journalists from more than two dozen other countries. Our reach, which will expand even further in the coming months, now also includes:

- United States
- India
- China (Hong Kong)
- Thailand-Indonesia
- Nigeria
- Mozambique
- Zimbabwe
- Middle East-Africa (roving)
- Israel
- Venezuela
- Argentina
- Italy

One of *U-News*' two editors is based in Durban, South Africa (Karen MacGregor), its IT work is being undertaken by E-Briefs News, an online media company in Cape Town, and *U-News* is recruiting more correspondents to cover higher education in African countries. Karen MacGregor, a journalist for nearly three decades, has a Masters in International Relations from the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK (1998). She is a former foreign editor and current South Africa correspondent for the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, editor of *Study South Africa*, an annual publication on South African higher education, a reporter for *Newsweek* magazine, New York, and a regular writer for UNESCO, Paris, among others. E-Briefs News produces some 15 daily or weekly high quality newsletters for a range of South African and international

organisations and companies in the legal and financial services fields. It will be responsible for the design, uploading and dissemination of *U-News* newsletters and websites, and the construction and maintenance of its e-mail lists and databases.

UNIVERSITY WORLD NEWS – GLOBAL EDITION

There is currently no regular higher education publication that is global in reach and covers higher education news, analysis and research. Existing publications focus on the countries or regions where they are located, and are mostly print-based with 'add-on' online services. The founders of *U-News* believe there is a potentially large global audience for a truly international, quality online publication that will help readers to keep up-to-date with higher education at the global level, among the tens of thousands of higher education institutions and millions of academics scattered around the globe, government ministries and departments, and organisations, councils and institutes associated with universities.

U-News is also a response to the internationalisation of higher education, which proceeds apace and will be a focus of the new publication, along with regional and global round-ups of tertiary news, issues and systems, and research into higher education.

U-News will consist of a free weekly e-mailed newsletter and website comprising original reports by our correspondents around the world, as well as global wrap-ups in headline briefs of higher education news, analysis and features published by reputable newspapers, journals and higher education organisations, with url links to the full articles or materials on the originating websites. The newsletter and website will also include items on research into higher education, regional and international statistics and systemic comparisons, and information on research grants, recruitment advertising and so on. It will be distributed by *U-News* to the e-mail addresses of users (who will choose to opt-in or opt-out of the service), or sent to an organisation (such as a university association) that might prefer to handle distribution itself.

On a weekly basis the *U-News* diary will be conveniently delivered as a quick read (with url links to full articles) to readers' e-mail inboxes. The value-added aspect of *U-News* lies in two services: accurate reporting by respected education journalists, and the journalistic skills involved in the research and selection of articles and reports from the world's leading newspapers and other information sources to provide readers with a far wider range of higher education news, analysis and features than is currently possible from any single publication – just the kind of resource that a busy academic, higher education manager, researcher or policy-maker needs to keep abreast of the field globally and regionally.

Even more information and resources will be available on the regularly-updated website and in its archive. The website will also be a repository for information on research grants, higher education research, the news releases of tertiary-related public and private organisations, associations and departments, new jobs being advertised and other developments, as well as featuring a myriad links to higher education organisations and bodies worldwide.

The *U-News* newsletter will be offered free to any reader who opts to receive it. Given the size of the higher education sector – globally and across Africa – the potential readership of *U-News* is large. The publication will target the following broad audiences:

- Policy-makers, government ministries and departments involved in higher education.
- University leaders and managers.
- Academics in senior positions, such as heads of departments.
- Higher education researchers and institutes.
- Organisations with an interest in higher education such as university associations, funding and science councils, think tanks and advisory bodies.
- Donors and international organisations interested in higher education, for instance UNESCO and the OECD, the Ford Foundation and the British Council.

It should be stressed that *University World News* will be about higher education itself as opposed, for instance, to covering scholarly subject fields (although it will report on developments that affect areas of study, such as new language policies or national research strategies that prioritises certain fields). Our belief is that academics will look to specialist publications, such as scholarly journals or *Nature* and *Science*, for in-depth information that impacts on their teaching and research fields. *U-News* will cover research into higher education, as well as news, policies, events and other developments that are of direct interest to universities. It is for this reason that the publication will target higher education leaders, managers, senior members of departments, policymakers and other stakeholders as opposed to all academics or, indeed, students.

U-News will also operate as a higher education news and reports agency. The *U-News* Agency will place the original articles of its writers in 'mainstream' newspapers in many countries, ensuring even wider dissemination of its work. For instance, if our correspondent in Montreal writes an article on the international activities of Canadian universities, once the story has appeared in *U-News* we will try to place it in the *Globe and Mail*, which will enable it to reach a general audience and increase its advocacy potential. Our journalists will, in addition, be available to assist with special commissions or preparing reports on particular issues – several of us have considerable experience in report writing, including for UNESCO. We will also collaborate to compile information and data from the countries and regions in which our journalists are located.

UNIVERSITY WORLD NEWS – AFRICA EDITION

U-News would also like to produce 'special edition' newsletters that focus on regions that are not served by (regular, easily accessible, affordable) higher education publications – such as Africa – also comprising: e-mailed newsletters sent to higher education policy-makers, managers, senior scholars, researchers, institutions, organisations and associations; and a regularly updated dedicated website.

Arguments outlining strong reasons for a higher education news and information service for people working or interested in African universities have already been outlined, although it is worth repeating that such a service could play a significant role in the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA), and that it could help to improve the media coverage and advocacy of higher education across the continent.

More generally, the idea is that some regions, perhaps especially Africa but arguably also parts of Asia and South America, are not as well served as others with comprehensive coverage of higher education by their general and specialist media. *University World News* will try to alleviate this vacuum by generating higher education

news, feature and analytical articles in these regions, which might otherwise not be produced. As importantly, *U-News* will in so doing also improve coverage in its global newsletter of regions such as Africa, which might otherwise be under-represented, and help to improve the 'south-south' sharing of higher education news and information between 'marginalised' regions.

The *U-News* global and Africa editions would articulate along the lines of existing print-based international publications such as *Newsweek* and *Time*, which publish American, Europe-Africa and Asia editions of their weekly magazines. Some of the content is shared between all editions, but some of the content is of special interest to the region that the particular edition serves. Like these publications, *U-News* would publish some of the content of its global edition in its Africa edition, which will otherwise focus on African higher education; and some of the content of its Africa edition will appear in the global edition, which will try to achieve a balance of higher education coverage across all regions of the world.

It is proposed that *University World News* produces a fortnightly *Africa Edition*, on every second Monday. It would be sent out overnight on Sundays, so that it has lands in the mailboxes of readers by the time they arrive for work on Monday. E-Briefs News recommends Mondays, as research into usage of its daily diaries shows highest readership on Monday mornings – people are 'fresh', usually go straight to their e-mail inboxes when they get to work, and often have more time in the early than in later stages of the week.

The argument for a fortnightly Africa edition is three-fold. First, reasonable coverage of higher education news and issues in more than four dozen African countries (plus global news) on a monthly basis could result in a long, unwieldy diary, which would discourage readers (who should be able to read the newsletter fully within 20 to 30 minutes for practical reasons, although they could spend longer engaging with full articles that are of particular interest or relevance to them). Secondly, it could take a while for *U-News Africa* to build a network of experienced African journalists able to generate accurate, quality news coverage. Thirdly, a decision to publish weekly could be taken in future, if that is warranted by the volume of appropriate news and information to be disseminated, and if it is financially viable – but to start out weekly and then publish fortnightly might imply problems.

A *U-News Africa* newsletter and website would feature:

- Original articles on higher education in African countries, written by *U-News*' string of African journalists.
- A wrap-up of reports on higher education that have appeared in major newspapers and publications across Africa (with url links to the originating websites).
- Coverage of African higher education events, journal articles, research reports, books and surveys.
- A global wrap-up of higher education news, features and analysis – a selection of the most important and relevant articles in the global *U-News* newsletter.
- A clearly demarcated 'portal' that publishes announcements by higher education stakeholders (such as CHET, PHEA, the Ford Foundation, the Association of African Universities and governments) on important developments in African higher education including: research and survey findings; higher education policies and reforms in African countries; and workshops, forums and conferences.

- Announcements of new research, grant, tender and employment opportunities available to African academics, universities and organisations.

In addition, *U-News* could publish Africa editions on issues of special interest, for instance: on higher education policies and reforms in African countries; gender issues in African universities; higher education management and leadership; access to higher education; and comparisons of African higher education systems.

A large readership base will be built for *U-News Africa*, by gathering lists of individuals working or interested in African higher education, and inviting them to become registered readers – at no charge. Readers will also be able to register, free of charge, to receive the weekly global *U-News* newsletter. Once the Africa edition is launched, there will be continual marketing efforts aimed at expanding its readership base, and registered users will be encouraged to help build readership by word of mouth.