

University of Western Cape

Colloquium

“Lifelong Learners in Higher Education”

Increasing numbers of students have to seek employment opportunities in order to support themselves; they are enrolled either as ‘full-time’ or ‘part-time’ students, attending classes in the cracks of their working, community and family lives. They may attend in the day-time, after-hours, or in block periods. They are juggling multiple responsibilities of home, work and studies. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are often not equipped to support them adequately. The purpose of the colloquium is to understand the issues of working, ‘non-traditional’ students more deeply and raise questions about ways in which HEIs, both locally and internationally, are responding to their needs in order to promote and support lifelong learners.

Since the 1970s, Lifelong Learning has been identified by international organizations such as UNESCO, OECD and EU as well as many countries, as a new approach to teaching and learning in all educational institutions, including higher education. In South Africa, lifelong learning is part of the purpose of the higher education system. There have been a number of initiatives over the years to attempt to grapple with what this means. At UWC, together with UNESCO Institute for Education, a conference was held in 2000 which issued *The Cape Town Statement: Characteristic Elements of a Lifelong Learning HEI*. This was translated into several international languages and distributed widely. There have been many other initiatives over the last 10 years at institutional, national or international levels.

In general, higher education has been slow to adapt its mission, structures and understandings of ‘knowledge’ and ‘learning’ to the demands for a more open, flexible, supportive system. (Schuetze, H.G. and Slowey, M. (Eds) (2000) *Higher Education and lifelong learners: International Perspectives on Change*. London and New York: Routledge-Falmer.) The slow pace of change is surprising in the light of the socio-economic imperatives, and the growing acceptance that societies require people who have acquired during their formative years, the motivation and the ability for further learning throughout their lives. On the other hand, a system of lifelong learning cannot be introduced overnight as it would not just require far-reaching changes to the formal education system but also to the ways employment and workplaces are organized and how social systems work.

In addition, in South Africa the paradox which higher education has to negotiate is the ongoing imperative for equity and redress in the light of colonial and apartheid history and neo-liberal economics, plus the reality of 50% of people being under 25 years, many of whom are not in education, training or employment. Therefore, the ways that higher education responds to enable bright, financially poor people to gain access, and to successfully complete their studies, while they learn, seek to work and work, are crucially important issues.

This colloquium will be in two parts on **1 and 2 September 2011** (people can elect to come to either or both days) and will be held at School of Public Health Building, UWC, Bellville, Cape Town. The first day will take the form of an extended lunch time public lecture by **Professor Maria Slowey**ⁱ, author of books and articles on the subject, from Dublin City University,

First preliminary notice for diarizing and indicating interest to attend

Ireland, who will situate the issues in wider international contexts. She will address ***Lifelong Learners in Higher Education: International Trends***.

The second day will focus on one critical aspect of the topic, that is, ***Lifelong Learners and part-time studies in Higher Education***. This will include experiences from students, institutional case studies, debates, and discussions both from South Africa and further afield. The two case studies will be of Makerere University, Uganda, which will be led by Prof George Openjuru, Dean School of Distance and Lifelong Learning, and UWC, which will be led by Jos Koetsier, DLL. There will be respondents from various sectors, including Ms Lynne du Toit, CEO, Juta and Co. Ltd.

Day 1:

12h00 – 14h30, arrive for a light lunch and networking; public lecture and discussion led by Professor Maria Slowey on ***Lifelong Learners in Higher Education: International Trends***

Day 2:

8h45 – 17h00, ***Lifelong Learners and part-time studies***, which will be explored through case studies, students experiences, and analysis of local/global trends. It will encourage active participation.

Venue: School of Public Health Building, UWC (follow the signs)

Cost: Total R500 (five hundred rand). This will include R100 for Day 1, R400 for Day 2 and will cover refreshments and background reading.

Please respond to Tania Oppel, Division for Lifelong Learning, UWC, toppel@uwc.ac.za or phone 021-9593339 to inform about your interest in the whole colloquium or Day 1 or Day 2.

Once we hear from you, we will communicate further details, and send readings ahead of time.

ⁱ Professor Maria Slowey is Professor and Director of Higher Education Research and Development at Dublin City University where, from 2004 to 2009, she was also Vice-President for Learning Innovation. She was previously Professor and Director of Adult and Continuing Education and Vice-Dean of Research at the University of Glasgow. She has engaged extensively with national and international policy analysis and development in the fields of adult and higher education, and served twice on the UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) Sub-Panel for Continuing Education and the Strategic Research Board for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). She has been a visiting scholar at a number of universities including, most recently, Melbourne, Stanford and Cambridge. In 2009 she was conferred with the award of Academician of the British Academy of Social Sciences. She is co-editor with Han Schuetze (Eds) (2000) *Higher Education and lifelong learners: International Perspectives on Change*. London and New York: Routledge-Falmer. They are currently preparing a new book on the same subject.