

# The Academic Textbook Industry and Higher Education in South Africa

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**Publishers' Association of South Africa Academic Subcommittee**

**Position Paper**

13 November 2014

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## Executive summary

The Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA) supports the view put forward by Higher Education South Africa (HESA) as articulated in the presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training (5 March 2014), which outlines the various challenges and opportunities experienced in the higher education system.<sup>1</sup> HESA puts forward the view that South Africa lacks:

the dense networks between universities, state and business that are found in other countries, which facilitates the movement of people, knowledge, expertise and experience between universities and the public and private sectors and innovation.<sup>2</sup>

HESA is making a comment about the current disjunction between what business and state require, and the university graduate as an output of higher education.

PASA suggests in this position paper that Higher Education publishers in South Africa are another private partner which can robustly partner with Higher Education. As such a partner, publishers complement the activities of higher education institutions as full education providers, because publishers offer cost-effective, curated content, instructor materials and additional learning support, which increase the pass rate and support the learning and teaching challenges experienced in this sector.

Case studies and research are offered in support of this position.

## 1. The challenges and paradoxes in the Higher Education system

The challenges experienced in the higher education sector are well documented in various HESA and Council on Higher Education reports.<sup>3</sup> In brief, the top challenges that the publishing industry identifies are:

### 1.1 Inherited challenges from the apartheid legacy

The inequalities of the higher education system, seen post-1994 in socio-economic inequalities, cause low participation, high attrition and an unequal quality of higher education on offer in the public sector.

Funding has not grown sufficiently to meet the demand caused by an increased higher education student intake. The administration and control of that funding, and the socio-economic needs that take precedent over learning needs in the use of that funding, continue to put pressure on the higher education system.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> HESA (5 March 2014) South African Higher Education in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Democracy: Context, Achievements and Key Challenges

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. page 6

<sup>3</sup> See for instance HESA (5 March 2014); Council on Higher Education (2014) *VitalStats: 2011*. Pretoria. Council on Higher Education; Council on Higher Education (2013) *Higher Education Participation: 2011*. Pretoria. Council on Higher Education

<sup>4</sup> Department of Higher Education (Feb 2014) Report of the ministerial committee for the review of the funding of universities. Pretoria

Socio-economic inequalities and other factors in primary and secondary education cause the majority of students entering higher education to be under-prepared for the rigorous international standards and the industry requirements for graduates of higher education.

### **1.2 Language of instruction, teaching and learning**

Under-preparedness is compounded by the language of instruction (predominantly English) being an additional language for the majority of students. This causes difficulties in relation to reading, research, note taking and writing skills.

### **1.3 The paradox of research output versus the role of educator**

While dealing with all of these student-related challenges, the higher education system struggles to attract and retain a new generation of academics. The paradox inherent in the system is that research output is valued over learning and teaching responsibilities in so far as research subsidies and career advancement are tied to the publication of research and citations.

### **1.4 The challenges and opportunities offered by technology**

Faculty struggle to keep up in 'a publish or perish' system, while simultaneously being challenged by their roles as educators. Also, the very nature of the student body is changing. And the technologies of communication, teaching and learning have changed and are changing.

### **1.5 The difficulties of producing employable graduates**

How universities can ensure education for employability is an internationally recognized problem.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, given the changes in the future of work, how must universities adapt to service these needs?

### **1.6 Throughput, pass rate, graduation rate**

South Africa's low throughput, pass and graduation rates, as annually documented by the CHE<sup>6</sup> Vitalstats, reflect many of these problems. While symptomatic of pervasive and historical systemic injustices, these indicators also point to the challenge of sustainability and effectiveness of funding of previously disadvantaged higher education students.

## **2. Recommendations for Publishing to partner with Higher Education**

The South African publishing industry produces textbook products that are not 'just books'. The textbook content and its surrounding student and academic support materials create the opportunity for students to practise their skills and enhance their employability. Textbooks help prepare students for particular professions and support them in their preparation to achieve academic success and employability.

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<sup>5</sup> Barber, M. Donnelly, K and Rizvi, S. (2013) *An Avalanche is coming: Higher Education and the revolution ahead*. Institute for Public Policy

<sup>6</sup> CHE (2012) *Vitalstats: Public Higher Education 2010*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education

PASA members understand the challenges experienced in higher education. They have also conducted independent research to show the efficacy of textbook usage in increasing pass rates and student success.

These factors allow PASA members to make the following recommendations:

## **2.1 Funding for infrastructural facilities**

We believe that funding and infrastructural facilities need to be in place so that basic physiological needs of students, like accommodation and food, are met. Without these basics, higher education students are unable to make the most of higher study opportunities. We support the recommendations of the Ministerial task team<sup>7</sup> on higher education funding insofar as it identified the requirements for improvements to funding for needy students.

## **2.2 Curated content**

We believe that not all content is appropriate for South African students. In a world in which content is becoming freely available through Open Educational Resources (OERs) which are produced by philanthropic initiatives, international OERs will not adequately address the specific content requirements of South African courses. Nor is all OER material equal, or quality-assured.

The role of South African publishers is to work closely with lecturers and institutions of higher education to identify and meet the needs of Southern African students. Publishers, working with local academics, create, curate, make transparent and accessible, and synthesize content for underprepared students, who require additional academic literacy support.

It is worth stating that publishers do not merely accept content from academics, and then print it. Rather, they conduct research into content requirements of lecturers and students, commission suitable academics to create or curate that content, and engage in a thorough process of adding pedagogy and practice materials before the content is edited and peer reviewed.

South African students also benefit from the provision of Southern African examples and case studies in a global context.

Curated, fit-for-purpose content forms the foundation of learning, mapping to curricula, keeping students engaged, and hence supporting passing and throughput.

Refer to the Publisher case studies appended.

### **2.2.1 Publishers carry the risk**

We know that publishers carry the financial risk of commissioning, developing and testing, and of revising high-quality content and lecturer support material that ensures students and lecturers have access to the most up to date materials, in a global context.

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<sup>7</sup> Department of Higher Education (Feb 2014) Report of the ministerial committee for the review of the funding of universities. Pretoria

### **2.2.2 Ringfenced funding for curated content**

Given the central role that content plays in the access to higher education, we believe that funding for textbook course content needs to be increased and ringfenced, including being ringfenced in allocations by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, to students.

We believe that monies must be ringfenced so that students can acquire the content relevant to their syllabi and prescribed by their lecturers for the courses they enroll for. This content may be in the form of textbooks or other content that matches curriculum, such as reading materials, and assessment materials.

Institutions of higher learning have a role to play by ensuring that content is the compulsory foundation of courses.

## **2.3 Technology-enabled learning and teaching – with the right content**

The publishing sector believes that technology is an enabler of learning.

Where technology is available to students, it can be used to increase access to curated content produced by publishers (including e-books), access to library resources, and as a tool to assimilate knowledge and learning. In their role as partner in teaching and learning in higher education, publishers produce curated content that is commissioned with the challenges of South African higher education in mind.

This content is accompanied by technology-driven teaching and learning tools such as automated question banks, adaptive learning platforms and various other interactive, multi-media resources which can be used *alongside* uncurated Open Electronic Resources and other resources that are available on the world wide web and social media platforms.

The South African publishing industry is able to play a role, partnering with higher education, to increase the quality of undergraduate teaching and learning through the investment that publishers have made in technology. Technology, as an enabler of teaching and learning, opens up new pedagogies, such as computer based testing, the flipped classroom, online learning and mentorship. These pedagogies allow an increase in the number of learning and teaching facilitators in online settings, and can be used to create simulations that increase workplace exposure.

Publishers are able to play a supportive role in training both students and lecturers in how to use technology in order to fully take advantage of the new pedagogies opened up by technology.

## **2.4 Affordability**

We believe publishers who are PASA members create an enabling environment for the distribution of content to students, by ensuring affordable learning materials that are not exposed to fluctuating foreign exchange rates. The average price of a locally produced book is documented in the PASA annual

survey 2011 as R283.50 (VAT inclusive recommended retail price)<sup>8</sup> and if applying usual inflational price increases, can be assumed to fall in the R350 to R400 bracket.

South African textbooks are reasonably priced and made specifically for this market. The price of a textbook is comprised of multiple components such as paying royalties to South African academics, not just the printing cost. By comparison, imported textbooks may be expensive both on account of the exchange rate, as well as due to multinational publishers' student edition policies which have changed as a result of the 2013 *Kirtsaeng v. John Wiley & Sons Inc.* US Supreme Court case, which allows for the re-importation of low cost editions into the USA.

For content to be accurate in a world where new information, new points of view and new academic research are made available frequently, publishers' content must be updated frequently to keep it relevant for students and teachers. Publishers carry the cost and risk of keeping the content up to date, and peer reviewed, in keeping with institutional policies in regards to the age of prescribed material (these range from three to five years) and peer review requirements that put controls in place to prevent self-enrichment by academic authors.

## **2.5 Distribution networks**

We believe publishers provide easy access to content through booksellers, which are able to work closely with NSFAS to provide content via the student bursary system.

PASA members support models by which institutions of higher education procure such content on behalf of students so that the cost benefits of scale are passed on to the students.

## **2.6 Bridging/foundations programmes and extended/flexible course programmes**

We believe extended and more flexible course programmes can support under-prepared students by providing a paced, scaffolded and supported approach to learning with specific focus on academic literacy and acculturation to the university. Programmes can also be made more flexible to allow students exit to positions in business and then re-enter the formal education system.

Publishers are able to play a role in facilitating extended and flexible programmes as partners in education solutions, especially through the provision of content that supports academic literacy and workplace skills as well as through the provision of technology-enabled learning and teaching.

While all such initiatives on the part of Higher Education are important and essential, the issue of under-preparedness needs to be addressed simultaneously by the Department of Basic Education so that over time the pressure is taken off academic development programmes in higher education.

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<sup>8</sup> PASA 2012 Annual Book Industry Survey Report 2011. p.156

## **2.7 Employability of students improved through correct application of content**

Curated content includes relevant employability theory, case studies, examples, skills and simulations of on-the-job tasks. If used optimally, we believe such curated content can be used to improve the employability of students as content utilised in class is also used in the workplace. Many publishers seek the endorsement of professional institutes in order to ensure that content and learning activities prepare students for professional examinations and/or workplace demands.

## **2.8 Development of lecturers, tutors and learning facilitators**

The South African publishing industry develops and invests in instructor support content to assist lecturers and tutors in delivering teaching and learning around prescribed content. Publishers also produce specific products and offer services to facilitate the implementation of blended learning, computer-based self-assessment, formative assessment, courseware development and academic and ICT literacy skills.

## **Conclusion: the core value proposition of PASA members and South African publishers**

The South African publishing industry supports institutions of higher learning by partnering to produce graduates as an output.

Publishers are learning companies that employ higher education educators, language experts and subject matter experts.

The South African higher education publishing industry ensures that inclusive education elements are brought into learning, teaching and support materials. Higher educational products contain language support, academic literacy skills, case studies and links to industry. Our case studies and research show that students who make use of textbooks, as opposed to uncurated content (like readers and course packs) show increased pass rates as well as achieving higher marks in the higher education system. Publishers therefore support and work with higher education institutions to produce university and university of technology graduates and to facilitate the new pedagogies that are becoming more available in higher education through the technology-enabled learning.

Importantly, publishers invest in distribution networks (both for physical stock and electronic products) and infrastructure that facilitates the accessibility of materials to students.

As such, publishers support and develop students for whom curated content is essential to their programme, and lecturers in their role as educator, especially in the undergraduate environment. The activities of publishers create communities of practice and maintain the standards of materials development through the consultation, academic collaboration and review practices that are encouraged and maintained by publishers.

In a world where content is becoming freely available and ubiquitous, the power of the academy is being reduced.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, institutions of higher learning need to increase their proficiency in teaching and learning. The development and investment in curated course content, alongside the provision of appropriate lecturer support and technology-enabled learning, offer an important partnership role for publishers to take alongside South African higher education.

## References

Barber, M. Donnelly, K and Rizvi, S. (2013) *An Avalanche is coming: Higher Education and the revolution ahead*. Institute for Public Policy

Council on Higher Education (2012) *VitalStats: Public Higher Education 2010*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education

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HESA (5 March 2014) South African Higher Education in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Democracy: Context, Achievements and Key Challenges

PASA 2012 Annual Book Industry Survey Report 2011

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<sup>9</sup> Op cit. Barber et al. (2013) p.17.

## Publisher case studies

### Independent research commissioned by Juta and Company (Pty) Ltd in 2012

Juta commissioned an independent research company to conduct a student impact study, in the period November 2012.<sup>10</sup>

#### The research objective

The research objective was to assess the correlation between student usage of textbooks and their results and academic performance.

#### Methodology

A quantitative methodology was utilized: 256 personal interviews were conducted with students on and around the campuses of the two institutions which gave ethical clearance for the research to be undertaken. The interviews were conducted by trained interviewers, and respondent agreement was obtained to source university records for academic results. Student attitudes and usage of learning material was analysed in the context of the student results achieved.

#### Summary of research findings in regards to efficacy of student textbook usage

The majority of students surveyed (93%) claimed to be confident of success in their chosen course. However, 49% of respondents actually achieved aggregates below 60%. Among textbook users, the mean result obtained was 62,4% (median of 61,2%; mode in the 60%-64% range). Among non-textbook users, however, the mean was 58,7% (median of 58,5%; mode in the 55%-59% range).

The **barriers to text book usage** are less physical (e.g. expense) than perceptual – with stronger collective reference to the sufficiency of alternatives and implied lack of perceived value. Conversely, text book users mainly enjoy the convenience of easy access to the core material.

Findings of this study suggest a **correlation between text book usage and academic performance**, albeit more distinct on some measures than others. For instance, although the difference between the average (and median) academic performance of the two sample groups (text book users and non-users) appears slight, it remains significant at the 97% confidence level. In other words we can be 97% confident (based on chi squared test) that students using text books will achieve higher marks than non-text book users. Furthermore, two-thirds of the top achieving students claim to usually use text books prescribed for most/all courses versus half of those with aggregates below 50%.

Twice as many of the top achievers claim to use text books recommended by lecturers, relative to the lowest scoring student sample.

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<sup>10</sup> The study was conducted at two contact institutions. One a comprehensive university, and the other a traditional public institution. Students in the sample were evenly distributed by gender and year of study (from 1<sup>st</sup> year to 4<sup>th</sup> year), and courses ranged from commerce, engineering, humanities, psychology, education, law, communications and media and other.

## Research undertaken by Van Schaik Publishers in 2009

### Description

Two questionnaires were developed – one for lecturers and one for students. Five hundred and one (501) students and two hundred and three (203) lecturers participated in the survey which was conducted at all Universities and Universities of Technology. Students from 12 Universities and Universities of Technology and lecturers from 19 Universities and Universities of Technology participated in the survey.<sup>11</sup>

### The research objective

The research objective was to determine how publishers can enhance the training experience of undergraduate students at South African tertiary institutions to improve their pass rate in the Business Sciences, Social Sciences and Nursing Fields. Furthermore, the research aimed to determine how publishers can assist lecturers in achieving an improved throughput by adding value to current product.

### Findings

The majority of lecturers prescribe textbooks and it is clear that the textbook still plays a significant role in teaching and learning at all institutions. Lecturers rely on publishers to keep them informed of the most recent publications in their subject area. This is an invaluable service that acts as an effective filtering aid and enables them to focus on academic research as well as the teaching aspect of their work.

Content relevance and being up to date are the main reasons lecturers select a textbook.

Publishers are also able to cater to lecturer and student needs by developing additional resources relevant to the topic in the form of websites, workbooks, test banks, e-learning tools, etc. Lecturers and students find this adds value to the teaching and learning experience.

The overall response from students was that instructional design elements in their learning material is a key enabler.

### Conclusion

There is considerable value offered by South African publishers that consider the institutional context, student context and requirements when commissioning and developing learning and teaching materials for higher education.

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<sup>11</sup> Most lecturer participants were from Unisa (37) and Durban University of Technology (33). In total lecturers from 19 Universities and Universities of Technology participated and 9 did not participate. Students from 12 Universities and Universities of Technology participated and 14 did not participate. Most student respondents (76.8%) are full time and 20.4% are part time.

## Research undertaken by Oxford University Press Southern Africa (Pty) Ltd in 2014

From July to September 2014, Oxford University Press Southern Africa conducted the first phase of a longitudinal study involving lecturers at SA universities and universities of technology who prescribe textbooks.

The research tool used was interviews conducted using a questionnaire. The population was all lecturers who prescribed an Oxford University Press Southern Africa textbook for the first time in July 2014, at 16 public South African higher education institutions.

The research questions explored the reasons lecturers gave for prescribing a textbook and their expectations regarding the effect of textbook use.

The interviews also explored conditions prior to the textbook being prescribed, and the lecturers' expectations as to how the course outcomes would be affected by the students' use of textbooks.

The first phase of the research highlighted that 60% of lecturers felt their new textbooks would change the way their students learn.

They chose textbooks that were South African and provided a South African context, where content was correlated with learning outcomes, which contained relevant case studies and practical examples, and used simple, accessible language.

A qualitative research tool was used deliberately so as to obtain qualitative data and opinions from lecturers who chose to prescribe an Oxford University Press Southern Africa textbook. Opinions expressed in 2014 included:

- 'I need something accessible for my class because there's nothing homogenous about it. It's a big class.'
- 'The information is a point of departure. As a lecturer you need to build on it. The textbooks are vital.'
- 'It's a subject they have a fear of. We're looking for a textbook that makes things less frightening and more accessible for the students.'
- 'From a psychological point of view, [South African textbooks] sit better with students. Foreign textbooks can be alienating.'

The second phase of the research will address whether the pass rates in courses where lecturers prescribed a textbook, increased, and to what the lecturers attribute this.