

Report of the Working Group on Community Service for Graduates in South Africa

Department of Higher Education and Training

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List of Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHESP	Community Higher Education Service Partnership
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
GCS	Graduate Community Service
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
JUDASA	Junior Doctors Association of South Africa
NARYSEC	National Rural Youth Service Corps
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
NYSZ	National Youth Service of Zimbabwe
PSET	Post School Education and Training

Executive Summary

The question of whether a Graduate Community Service programme is a feasible option in South Africa depends firstly on the clarity of its purpose, and therefore of its design, and secondly on whether the opportunities outweigh the challenges in its practical implementation. This report addresses both these questions based on a literature review and interviews conducted with key stakeholders in government and civil society involved with youth, service and volunteerism.

Possible objectives for a Graduate Community Service programme include that graduates ought to pay back government investment in their higher education with their skills; that graduates would provide a boost to human resource capacity in the delivery of public services; and that community service could provide a supportive transitional period into employment. The success of these aims is not guaranteed but at least in principle there appears to be justification for a Graduate Community Service programme.

There is less confidence, however, on the viability of practically implementing such an initiative. Concerns were raised over the administrative and financial capacity of government or civil society to establish the infrastructure and manage large numbers of graduates. While some service-oriented degrees (such as medicine and teaching) are more easily integrated into public service, others are less likely to have added value. In addition, in a context of high youth unemployment, expecting skilled graduates to perform work in which they themselves are unskilled may be seen to be subtracting job opportunities from the labour market.

The Working Group therefore concludes that large scale implementation of a Community Service programme for all graduates will present serious challenges in the near future. More research is required on the job descriptions of graduate servers, and on how the programme is to be funded and administered. It might then be implemented with a long-term horizon, incrementally and with students well aware of the expectations on them before they start on their higher education studies.

Introduction

This report has been developed for the Department of Higher Education and Training's Working Group looking into the feasibility and possible models for a community service scheme for graduates in South Africa. The report was extensively discussed and adopted by the Working Group at the meeting held on 19 February 2015. The inputs made at the meeting were consolidated into this final report. A feasibility study needs to answer two main questions: first, whether the aims of the proposed programme are justifiable and second, whether the programme under current conditions is viable (or under what conditions can it become viable). The report does not provide a detailed account of how a Graduate Community Service (GCS) scheme might work, it only addresses the principles that need to be considered in deciding whether a GCS programme is feasible or not.

This report has three main components.

- The first section is an examination of the purpose of a Graduate Community Service (GCS) programme since any programmatic arrangements need to be fit-for-purpose. It includes a policy review and some definitional clarifications from academic literature.
- The second section provides an overview of the possible challenges involved in implementing a GCS programme.
- The third section scopes out possible opportunities for implementing a GCS programme taking cognisance of the challenges already discussed.

The findings in this report are primarily based on interviews conducted with key stakeholders, government departments (mainly youth desks), the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and case studies of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) involved in some forms of service or volunteerism. In addition, six focus groups with students were held at three universities and two FET colleges. As such, this report contains the opinions of people involved in the youth sector on the possibilities of establishing a GCS programme.¹

¹ Please note that a review of the model of community service for medical students is still underway.

Section 1: Background, policy and definitional issues

Community Service in Higher Education was on the minds of policy writers from early on after the advent of democracy in 1994. *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* calls for “feasibility studies and pilot programmes which explore the potential of community service in higher education” (Department of Education, 1997, p. 23).

As part of transforming higher education after 1994, Community Engagement became the third tier of what HEIs do, along with teaching and research. The idea was for HEIs to “demonstrate social responsibility and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programme” (Department of Education, 1997, p. 10). It was argued that community service would help enhance the culture of learning, teaching and service; and relieve some of the financial burden on students (Department of Education, 1997, p. section 2.36). HEIs would in turn begin to produce graduates with critical, analytical, problem-solving and communication skills, as well as with the ability to deal with change and diversity. But exactly how HEIs would do this was never spelt out (Maistry, 2012).

Despite the promise of community service as a way of creating civically engaged graduates, it has always been an elective course for law students and only until the Legal Practice Act of 2014 (Department of Justice, 2014), Section 29) has it been made a *condition* for graduation – and it impinges only on law students².

Compulsory community service *after* graduation currently only affects all health science degrees. Currently one year of community service is tagged on after a period of internship. Doctors were the first to be drafted into service in 1998, and since then other medical degrees have been added – dentists, physiotherapists, nurses and vets³. The policies and regulations pertaining to health science graduates are implemented by the Department of Health and the

² Its implementation, however, is still a way away. Regulations still need to be promulgated after further consultations between the government and the Legal Practices Council (which is still to be established).

³ Interestingly, this graduate community service appears to be unusual internationally and is often the only example cited in international literature on comparative community service programme (see for example McBride).

Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (for vets). They are therefore not technically under the auspices of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)⁴.

The idea of a *Graduate* Community Service programme under the authority of DHET was first mooted in 2010 by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande. It was also included in the election manifesto of the African National Congress (ANC) in 2013.

The 2013 White Paper on Post-School Education and Training gives little detail on the proposed graduate community service, but it does make clear that it is not to be confused with service-learning (that is community service integrated into curricula):

Community engagement that has a direct relationship to academic programmes and research, and which is therefore part of the core mission of universities, should be seen as distinct from the proposals for a national graduate community service programme. The concept of a national graduate community service programme is one that has been implemented effectively only within the health sciences and is growing through the Funza Lushaka teacher education programme, although the latter is primarily a bursary scheme (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013, p. 39).

Community or civic service is defined as an “organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to local, national or world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary cost to the participant” (McBride, Pritzker, Daftary, & Tang, 2006, p. 73)⁵.

In order to better understand the distinguishing features of GCS, clarity is needed on its exact purpose.

The clearest statement on the aims of a GCS comes from Minister Nzimande in 2010, when it was first proposed. According to a newspaper report:

“Some of the reasoning behind this is why do we only do this for doctors,” Nzimande said.

⁴ This technical point needs to be clarified: if GCS involves graduates no longer connected with HEIs, will the policies related to it need to be directed through other departments?

⁵ This definition originally traced to Sherradan (2001) is often quoted.

“There are other imperatives as well. Our young graduates can play a whole range of roles from free legal series to accountants to engineers who can be used by rural local government.

“There is an argument for service in terms of skills acquisition. There is also an argument for service in terms of work experience.

“We have a lot of unemployed graduates who are unable to find work. Then there is the aspect of graduates giving something back to the country.” (Graham., 2010)

There are four main purposes offered here by the Minister and it is worth analysing these carefully. A fifth aim, ‘civic mindedness’, is not mentioned by the Minister, but added for discussion here because it is a popular reason given in the literature on community service.

1. Fairness

Since medical students are required to do community service, the argument is that it is only fair that it should be extended to all professionals. In other words, all graduates ought to be treated equally.

This does seem instinctively fair. If all graduates are to be treated the same as those in the health sciences, then they ought to carry the same responsibilities. It could also be an intervention that helps rectify the current gender imbalances in the more service-oriented professions, such as social work and education. Compulsory community service might be one way to ensure men contribute to frontline delivery of services.

On the other hand, it could be argued that not all degrees received the same subsidisation from government and not all can expect the same status or remuneration after graduation. If medical students do community service, that is at least partly compensated by the subsidy the state pays towards their education and the relatively higher status they enjoy as doctors. Not all degrees are thus equal and so it is not necessary to treat all graduates on equal terms.

Weighing up exactly what would be fair in terms of time and inconvenience when providing post-graduate service with the inputs and benefits graduates derive could result in an endless cyclical argument. Nevertheless, as long as the principle is one of equal treatment of all

graduates, it may be possible to quantify monetary inputs into getting a degree and therefore fairly working out the amount of time graduates should spend on community service.

2. *Pay back*

A second possible reason for expecting graduates to complete community service is that they need to reciprocate, with their skills and work, the financial inputs that they directly (through bursaries) and indirectly received through post-school education. As one government official in an interview explained:

“[Graduates] have the responsibility as professionals to contribute ... If there is to be community service, government has to be very selfish because it is government that subsidises these institutions and say we need a lot of engineers, we need accountants, whatever it is ...” (BW, DPSA).

Government could therefore expect graduates to work in posts within the public service at a lower rate than market wage levels in order to recoup their investment in the education of individuals. Perold and Omar write that: “the only way in which this can be of financial benefit to government is if there are vacant posts which cannot be filled and which are already funded, or if the students work for less than the going rate” (1997, p. 91).

In addition to indirectly contributing to state resources, the 1997 White Paper sees community service as a “potential component of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)”. Students on a NSFAS bursary would settle their debts through contributing their labour to government or through public service. This is the main reason given in the 2013 White Paper on Post School Education and Training for community service, which points to the Funza Lushaka bursary programme as an example of graduate community service.

Building in a guaranteed means for young people to repay bursaries ‘in kind’ has the potential of improving the throughput rate. The assurance of employment (into a community service programme) could count as a further incentive for students to complete their degree in a context where high student attrition rates can be blamed in large measure to financial pressures (Moeketsi Letseka, Michael Cosser, Mignonne Breier , & Visser, 2009). Students may also be more willing to engage in community service if it is known upfront as a prerequisite to their getting a bursary.

One problem with this explanation is that it would be difficult to insist that those who have self-financed their studies should be required to offer the same service as those who have had fully funded state bursaries. Perold and Omar argue that the possibility that students can ‘buy out’ of community service “might be socially divisive and the programmes would lose much of their potential to generate individual benefits in relation to personal development” (1997, p. 91). In addition, to what extent would foreign students be expected to complete community service? Would students who studied through distance courses be subject to the same community service requirements as those who have had contact teaching? The answers to these questions will need to find some root in principles of equity, justice and fairness. In the end, the basic intention is that those who have benefited from a higher education system ought to give back in return.

3. Provide services to under-resourced areas

The third reason behind a GCS is that in the context of poverty and deprivation, graduate skills are necessary to support a developmental agenda. Graduates ought to fill in gaps in delivering services to communities that are not met by the market or by current public services. Service here is meant as development work – in other words, activity that will lead to improvements in the welfare, living conditions and livelihoods of people in a community. In this way, community service would be supporting the National Development Plan (rather than a disparate set of unrelated projects). Patel (2009) argues that by connecting service with development, it is meant to be people-centred, promoting human capabilities, social capital, participation, and active citizenship.

The Community Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP), a project of JET Education Services, drew on this reason in its definition of community service:

“the mobilisation of individuals, often on a large scale, with the aim of making a significant impact on social and national development. It foregrounds community service as a means of redressing social inequality by intervening directly at community level through the provision of services”

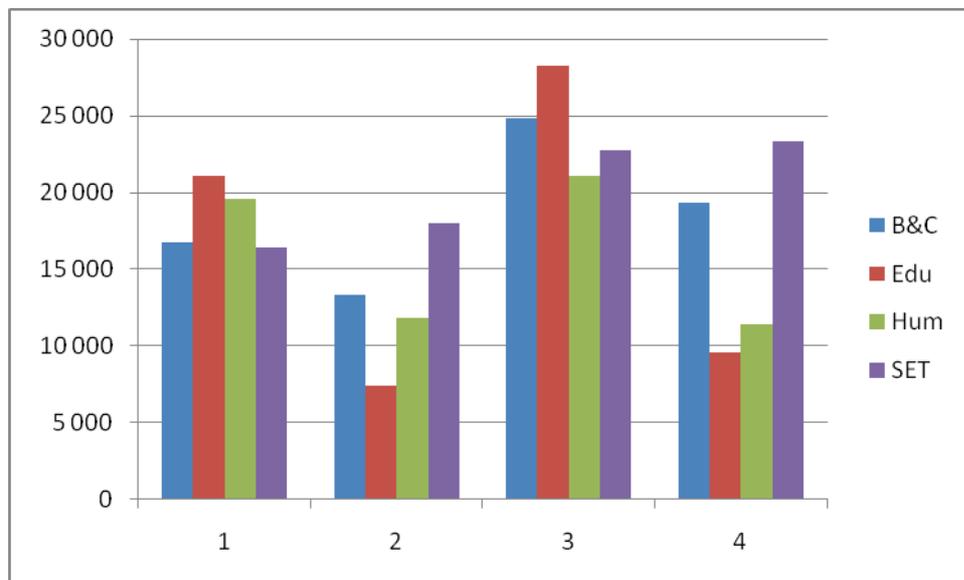
This purpose provides one of the main motivations for why medical students are asked to provide community service. They are deployed for two years to areas where there are shortages in hospitals and clinics mainly in rural areas. The medical graduates are paid a

salary, so what defines it as ‘service’ is that they are constrained by where they would choose to work (and to work in a government institution).

One of the limitations of using a GCS to mobilise graduates into working in under-served areas is that community service for development is clearly more suited to professions that have technical skills than to the social or theoretical sciences (for example). The assumption is that there is a possible match between the skills required in geographic areas of need and all graduates. Nevertheless, the basic premise is that if all graduates are assigned or deployed to solve a developmental problem, then that would result in a concentrated effort that would help accelerate social and economic progress.

The graph below shows the distribution of graduates by field of study. If each graduate was posted to do community service, that would add just over 160,000 people per annum into doing public work.

Headcount graduates by field of study and gender for 2007 and 2012



	2007		2012	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
B&C	16 735	13 361	24 835	19 323
Edu	21 122	7 401	28 284	9 594
Hum	19 603	11 859	21 067	11 415
SET	16 442	18 036	22 765	23 334
Total	73 924	50 691	96 952	63 669

Source: (Council on Higher Education, 2015)

4. Skills and employability

The fourth motivation for a GCS programme is that it will help consolidate graduate skills and improve employability. Graduates have a qualification that signals that they have skills and it is hoped they know a great deal of the profession that they have signed up for. They may be at the bottom rung of a career ladder, and may need some supervision but ought to be able to work semi-autonomously. Nevertheless, many young people exiting TVET colleges and HEIs have still to learn the etiquettes, routines and skills applications in a work environment. Community service can therefore be interpreted as a period of transition to employment. The Legal Practice Bill (2012), for example, proposes compulsory community service for candidate attorneys as part of their practical vocational training⁶.

The 2013 White Paper on PSET, points to the public sector as a training space:

[The government] must make available opportunities for apprenticeships, learnerships and internships in the public service at national, provincial and municipal level, in state agencies such as the defence force and the police, in public educational institutions and in state-owned enterprises. The commitment of some state-owned enterprises to expand apprenticeships and other forms of training is encouraging. They have committed themselves not only to meeting their own scarce skills needs, but also to contributing to the national effort to address skills shortages” (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013, p. 66)(8.4.3).

The Youth Employment Accord, signed in 2013, similarly commits state departments and state-owned enterprises to employing interns and to “develop placement opportunities for FET and University students who need work experience as part of completing their studies” (2013, p.8). Government’s Public Service Graduate Work Experience Programme is the primary vehicle for internships for graduates in a discipline relevant to the public sector. These are meant to provide structured mentorship as new job entrants find their footing in unfamiliar environments and provide basic skills such as office management, computer literacy, interpersonal skills and time management (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2006). Cabinet has targeted 5% of human resources in government

⁶ Although Jeff Radebe, then Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, also punted the Bill as a means of improving access to justice among the country’s poor communities.

departments to be filled by interns and people on learnerships (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2006, p. 6).

The focus on developing individuals (rather than communities) is what differentiates internships from community service. Nevertheless, the possibility that community service has (self-interested) benefits for graduates in terms of developing their skills for employability has become a popular, prevailing cause for community service over the past decade. Community service is therefore often sold as a way of improving skills or a step into an employment opportunity. Focus groups in HEIs agreed that this would be an important motivator for students to participate in GCS.

The main problem with this argument is that graduates are least likely to be amongst the unemployed (and therefore less in need of additional skills to be employable). According to van Broekhuizen and van der Berg (May 2013): “Graduate unemployment in South Africa is neither high nor rising at an alarming rate.” They pin graduate unemployment at 6%, which compares favourably with local unemployment levels and with graduate employment rates in developed countries. According to van Broekhuizen and van der Berg:

“South Africa’s stock of graduates (properly defined) has grown rapidly over the past 15 years. In 1995 there were approximately 463 000 graduates in the labour force. By 2012 this has more than doubled to about 1.1 million. Yet, despite this significant influx of graduates into the domestic labour market, the broad unemployment rate for graduates remains below 6%. Of the approximately 1.1 million graduates in the labour force, only about 66 000 were unemployed (QLFS 2012, third quarter). That simply does not constitute a crisis of graduate unemployment” (2013, p. 4)

There are three caveats that should be noted to the claim that graduate unemployment is low.

First, van Broekhuizen and van der Berg point out that their graduate unemployment statistics are based on a strict reading of the term ‘graduate’ which includes only bachelor degrees. The rate of unemployment of those with diplomas is between two and three times as high as among those with degrees.

Second, black graduates are still almost three times as likely to be unemployed than their white counterparts. While the gap between black and white graduate unemployment rates has

become smaller over time, the difference in 2012 in broad unemployment rates was 8.6% for black graduates versus 3.0% for white graduates (Broekhuizen & Servaas van der Berg, 2013, p. 6).

Third, as Altbeker and Storme (2013) note, the available data does not allow us to assess the nature of work that graduates do. They write: “We cannot tell if it matches their qualifications; we do not know what it pays, etc. But we know from other research that real wages of skilled employees rose between 1995 and 2005 even as wages of unskilled and semi-skilled workers more or less stagnated, so new graduates appear to have entered the labour market at a particularly propitious time (2013, p. 12).

With these caveats, there is therefore scope for an argument that community service may have advantages for helping new entrants to negotiate the job market.

5. Nation-building and civic-mindedness

A popular (and communitarian) idea is that community service is necessary to encourage a sense of citizenship, social cohesion and solidarity. The short-hand in South Africa is *ubuntu* – but it is also perhaps encapsulated in the famous quote from JF Kennedy’s inaugural speech: “ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country”.

The expectation is that involvement in community service will encourage people to behave in a way that shows responsibility towards others. Weaved in with a nationalist discourse, it includes the possibility of building national cooperation and a pride of identity. Service may also raise consciousness and awareness amongst graduates of the socio-economic problems in the poorest and most marginalised areas of South Africa. The idea is to build communities and the nation through solidarity and support. Service is intended to encourage a society in which no-one is indifferent to others.

Civic-mindedness was a central motivation in the immediacy of post-1994 democracy. The White Paper on the transformation of higher education, for example, calls on HEIs to “demonstrate social responsibility [...] and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes” (Department of Education, 1997, p. 10). Moreover, one of the goals of higher education is to “promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education

in social and economic development through community service programmes” (Department of Education, 1997, p. 10). When asked about the aim of a graduate community service, nation-building and civic-mindedness came up repeatedly in interviews with stakeholders and government officials.

There are two dilemmas with using patriotism or civic mindedness as an aim for Graduate Community Service. The first is that it is something of a risky, speculative ambition. There is no direct link or guarantee (or even measurement) between instilling patriotism and its success. Although the communitarian literature is often emphatic that community service will lead to patriotism, the evidence is often based on studies with severe limitations – such as that those who volunteer for community service may be self-selectively civically minded to begin with.

The second problem with this aim is that while it is normally justifiable to socialise children and adolescents into developing a sense of identity with their local or national communities and to encourage in them feelings of solidarity, by the time they have reached adulthood, the expectation is that they have autonomy and have cultivated the critical reasoning to make independent judgements. In other words, it might not be justifiable for the state to try ‘socialise’ adults into being patriotic (at least not in a liberal democracy).

To sum up, a GCS promises important benefits for individuals and communities. It could help sponsor tuition in higher education if students knew ahead of time that they would be guaranteed a way to pay-back their fees. It could also inject some much needed human resources into the delivery of public services, particularly in the most under-served areas in the country.

While there is in principle perhaps a strong motivation for establishing a Graduate Community Service programme in South Africa, its exact purpose must be carefully negotiated and explained to all South Africans.

Programmatic recommendations can only be designed once the purpose of GCS is clear since each aim will run on a slightly different operational manual. For example, if skills and employability is the intention, then much more training will need to be built into daily activities than if the purpose is community development.

Having explained the main motivations behind a GCS scheme, the next step in this feasibility study is to look at the challenges that a GCS programme might face in implementation. There are four possible reasons why it may be difficult to implement. These reasons provide the limiting frameworks within which a model might well be developed.

Section 2: Key Challenges to Implementing Graduate Community Service

Aside from questions on how GCS is to be justified, the feasibility of implementing such a programme depends on some practical considerations. Introducing a new programme will require resources, energy and institutions to set it up – even where the benefits have been generally accepted. Problems will inevitably show up and so there is a danger that pessimism will dampen the promise of an innovative programme. As Crabtree predicts of his proposal for a compulsory civic service in Britain: “Critics will attack it as unaffordable, inefficient, illiberal and a destroyer of jobs” (Crabtree, 2009)⁷. Nevertheless, the risks will need to be weighed up against the benefits and if the project still floats up above the criticism, then knowing the challenges upfront will help in planning around them.

The challenges given here regarding the feasibility of community service are drawn from the literature and the consultations with stakeholders and student focus groups. These reasons are speculative since the discussions were open-ended and not based on any specific model of GCS. Nevertheless, these practical constraints do point to the outer limits, the dimensions of a framework in which a GCS might be possible.

Four challenges were raised to the implementation of a GCS programme.

1. Unwillingness amongst graduates to participate

Although the aim of higher education is to inculcate attributes in graduates that would see them recognise and act on their civic responsibilities, graduates may not always nor necessarily behave altruistically. While many students in the focus groups were willing to ‘serve’ (even volunteer) their time or skills to help others for short periods of time, there was

⁷ There have been many international initiatives and campaign promises to establish national services. More rarely have they actually been set up. Geoff Mulgan, a former top Labour adviser, says he knows of “at least three occasions since 1997” in which the UK government has costed a national voluntary scheme. But each time critics beat the proposals back, arguing that money should be spent just on the poor, that young people--and, perhaps, their parents--would reject the idea, or that the voluntary sector would fail to deliver. (Crabtree, 2009).

little enthusiasm for an extended term of service. In addition, although focus group students recognised that they ought to contribute to solving social problems, some argued that community service is not the best means for them to do so. In other words, the argument given was that development impact should be measured by outcome, not by the number of graduates deployed to solve a developmental problem. As one student in a focus group said:

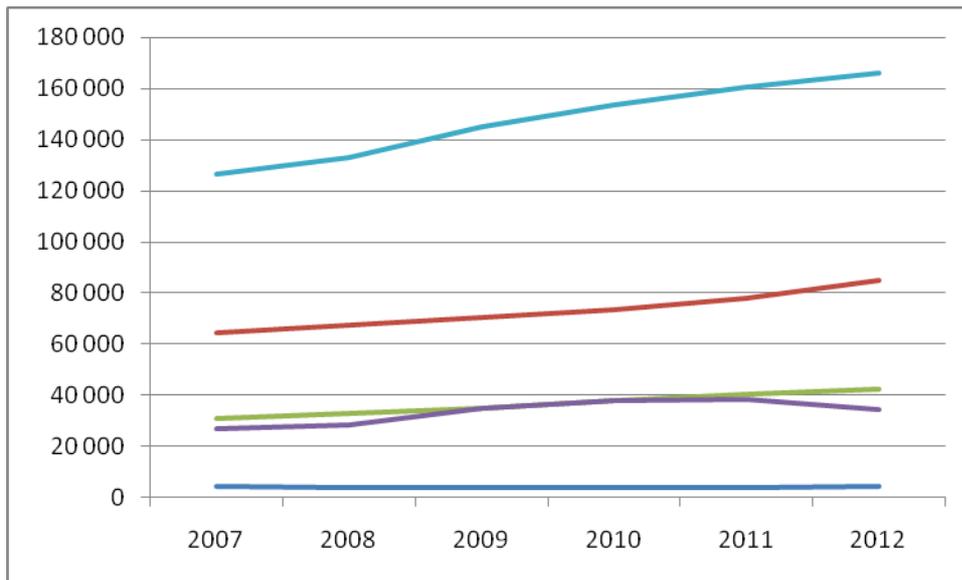
It's not that we are unwilling to build the nation, because we all spoke about kid's education. We want to build a country, but we want to have the people in the right seat, in the right bus. We can't just have people doing things that they are not capable of, or that they are not willing to do. That is not nation building for me.

In focus groups with students, the reasons for unwillingness came from two main directions:

- political motivations – graduates do not want to work for government or may feel that their freedom of choice has been violated
- personal motivations – graduates may be under pressure to start supporting family or they may not want to be separated from family.

In terms of personal reasons, it must be remembered that there is often little correlation between graduation and age. Graduate pertains to someone who has completed a first degree or diploma – but can also include someone who goes on to do back-to-back qualifications or who changes fields of study without completing the first chosen qualification. Young people who start and continue studying at HEIs without interruption might graduate at 22 years of age, but age of graduation at first degree can be much higher. Such wide age ranges, mean that any graduate community service has to account for people at different stages in their life trajectories – from those who are just beginning careers and families, to those who may have returned to study and are already mid-way through their working-lives.

Headcount graduates by age group from 2007 to 2012



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
< 20	4 094	3 927	3 850	3 854	3 946	4 335
20 - 24	64 628	67 789	70 753	73 674	77 872	84 983
25 - 35	30 967	32 943	35 082	37 994	40 230	42 283
> 35	26 951	28 582	35 167	38 219	38 576	34 392
	126	133	144	153	160	165
Total	640	241	852	741	624	993

Source: (Council on Higher Education, 2015, p. 6)

Perhaps not unexpectedly, students in the focus groups were against compulsion. However, there was some agreement that once a new initiative was ingrained and part of the accepted life-trajectory, there would be less resistance. As one student put it:

All policy takes a long time, if you want to try and build it on a national level in terms of patriotism you've got to tolerate some resistance [...]. Start introducing programmes at an earlier stage like in junior schools and high schools, where the kids are introduced to the culture of volunteering, going out into communities and have it ingrained in them, and by the time they reach universities they are so used to volunteering that it becomes a natural process.

Paid graduate community service may certainly improve willingness – and even stipends should help buy support. Payment will however increase costs possibly making it

unaffordable (this is discussed in more detail below). Payment may also undermine the altruistic, community development motivation. Psychologically it can only make sense to serve doing so voluntarily because then others will recognise you as altruistic. Adding a monetary value fundamentally changes the nature of the gesture – since it can no longer arguably be only for the greater good.

There will inevitably be resistance to a compulsory GCS from a number of graduates. Whatever their reasons, resistance could lead to graduates leaving the country to start their careers elsewhere (so-called brain drain) or to litigation. Resistance could also lead to students choosing different careers to avoid service or to ill-discipline, absconding or not working to task while undertaking a service programme. The costs of compelling graduates into service may be very high.

2. Insufficient capacity in government or in civil society to absorb graduates

Keeping graduates busy is an important condition of a GCS. But that takes organisation and management. Graduates who have no clear sense of what is required of them, who drift through the work day with little supervision or support are unlikely to gain from their time in service and much less likely to be of service.

The main problem here is that there does not currently appear to be capacity to absorb, manage and supervise a large number of graduates. Legal Aid South Africa, for example, is only able to recruit approximately 600 candidate attorneys each year because of costs. According to Davis: “At present there are not enough places for graduates to complete a year of community service in a state run legal institution” (Davis, 2014). Omar and Perold report that in the mid-1990s, a survey conducted of 18 legal aid clinics countrywide addressed less than 1% of the estimated need for legal aid. They write: “The impression given by the available information is that the impact is small in comparison to the enormous need in most South African communities” (1997, p. 49).

The Community Law Centre at the North West University in Mafikeng, for example, handles cases mainly related to domestic violence, divorces, child maintenance and human rights abuses. But the clinic is over-stretched in dealing with the constant flow of traffic into its offices. Funding is tight and the clinic is short-staffed the centre only has two attorneys to do the supervisory work.

The director of one NGO providing social services rebuffed the idea that graduates could simply take on roles as professional social workers without proper supervision – even if they have the certification (interview, HP/WC/10.2014). Early career professionals generally need a helping hand and mentoring as they develop their confidence. Interviews with government and civil society organisations indicated that such supervisory capacity was not currently available.

Another concern was that an increase in scale of operations would not only add organisational and administrative burdens, but that it would detract from what NGOs and civil society organisations do well on a small scale – “flexibility, local responsiveness and possibilities for building local partnerships” (Perold & Omar, 1997, p. 49).

There was, however, a counter view which was that government’s reach was far and wide: “It does not matter what poor rural areas there is, you will either find a clinic or a school, these are all government properties” (DPSA). Capacity could always be extended and channelled to areas of need.

The idea that graduates can provide services to under-resourced areas, however, assumes that all qualifications are directly relevant to the needs of those communities. That may not be true. “What are we to do with the philosophers?” joked some in a student focus group⁸.

Several interviewees mentioned that all graduates, whatever their qualification, could be deployed to schools as teachers⁹. It is a model currently used by Teach SA, so we have a test case. Teach SA is an NGO which recruits new graduates who do not have a teaching degree or diploma to work in rural or township schools for a period of two years on a full teaching salary. Teach SA selects their participants very carefully and provides regular support to recruits. While the organisation can tally up successes with some participants going on to choose teaching as a career, it should be pointed out that there is a growing body of literature criticising sister organisation, Teach USA, specifically for undermining the pedagogical skills

⁸ One way around this problem of ‘what to do with social scientists?’ is to argue that all graduates have sufficient skills to be deployed in at least low-level jobs. But that begs the question: why not simply hire unskilled? This possibility is therefore not explored.

⁹ In Nigeria two-thirds of the total corps spend their national service teaching or lecturing at educational institutions. The other third are involved in health, agricultural programmes or working for the private sector such as oil companies (Perold and Omar, p57).

involved in teaching (Blanchard, 2013; Zuckerman, 2013). Graduates may have content knowledge, but a two week crash course on pedagogy is arguably not sufficient to prepare the graduates for the classroom. Nevertheless, the possibility that a surge of human resources into schools could make a significant difference to education performance cannot be discounted. Those with degrees at the very least have experience in succeeding at school.

Another idea was that graduates could be deployed in auxiliary functions – tutors, reading coaches, assistant teachers. But the university students in two focus groups rejected this idea as under-utilising their skills. They argued they might better contribute to development if they were working directly in their respective fields (in their case it was economics and physical science). The students were clear that community service would have to be related to their area of study. As one explained:

That's the difference between an internship and community service. If an actuary is going to just be a book keeper, the guy is going to be so frustrated and ineffective that he is going to leave.

The lesson here seems to be that adding personnel alone may not be sufficient to remedy social problems. The capacity to absorb graduates also depends on the nature of the service being filled. According to Perold and Omar's study:

Our tentative conclusion here is that the relationship between scale and impact may in fact be a function of the nature of the need and the strategies required to meet it. If the need requires labour-based activity, then large numbers may make a big difference, e.g. in the case of immunising large numbers of children against diseases. If meeting the need requires applying skill, technology and specialist knowledge then the numbers are likely to be less important than matching the available human resources strategically with the task. (1997, pp. 75-76).

3. The costs and administration involved

Although one motivation for GCS is to swell the current ranks of the public service with young talent and skills, it will not be without financial costs. And while communitarian altruism may balk at the idea of paying people to do community service, graduates will generally not be in a position to 'volunteer' (work without remuneration). Students in the

focus groups argued that they were already under pressure to support extended families. Medical graduates are paid salaries to do community service – but costs are contained because of the small number of graduates doing community service in a year.

Even stipends will be a constraint on government finances. A minimum monthly stipend of R5000 (to cover food, transport and other basic necessities), with a current output of just over 160,000 graduates a year, would amount to almost R10 billion per year. In addition, there are costs such transport and housing, and unexpected expenditure such as the need for protective clothing.

The assured, regular payment of stipends would be an absolute condition of the functioning of the programme. The payment of stipends had become a headache for administrators of youth service programmes in some government departments. Officials in the Department of Human Settlements who run a skills development and community service project for unemployed youth warned that where financial pressure of young people is extreme, managing expectations is crucial otherwise youth in the programme threaten revenge when payments due to them are not made. For the officials community service had to have advantages built in for the graduates:

“For a year you expect them to club back in the community. The expectation might be let it not be at my expense, rather meet me half way, I am prepared to settle for something as it will able to get me moving and once they have that they will be able to commit to the project in full.”

The fact that large-scale projects will be unwieldy and expensive to manage is perhaps an obvious point. The larger the project, the more difficult it is to keep people on a single track and keep clear on its purpose. The National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) programme, for example, has had to establish a chief-directorate to do the co-ordination, which includes its own procurement and finance section, three directors and nine provincial directorates and district officials in some provinces to do the daily over-sight.

Growing bureaucracy to contain youth service is mentioned as one of the main challenges leading to the demise of youth services in southern African countries (Patel, 2009). Moreover, there will need to be thought put to Human Resource policy and management,

related to issues of compensation for injuries at work; managing leave; contracts for graduates etc.

To give a sense of the intensity of organisation involved, here is a description of preliminary preparations for the Department of Human Settlement's Youth Build project:

You start with your meetings with the province and the municipality, get the council resolution. And then the municipality will start mobilizing the young people. That will take about a month to six weeks where you are engaging in meetings, council resolution, briefing with the young people. And then let's say two month to get your 100 young people, which will be your target in the specific area and then thereafter you start to roll out. But then we must indicate that a lot relies on the participation and ownership that is taken by a municipality or a province. Certain areas you will find a contractor is appointed by a province and some instance by the municipality. And sometimes people embrace the programme, so the pace, from our side we are there to provide the support. But the pace to say how fast we are going are determined by the other stakeholders. Again municipality will have to provide a facility like a hall to do the training, so if the municipality is not able to do that, then you might have all your young people, NHBRC will be ready for training, but no facility, then you can't start. There are areas where it can be dragged out for years, over two years, over two years you will find you have done your resolutions, but you find you can't move because of other issues.

4. GCS may not work because of corruption

One final concern with the feasibility of a community service project is that it is not the lack of skills or opportunities that prevent service delivery from reaching areas of need, but rather that hiring practices have become conflated with patronage and corruption. A focus group with TVET college students, vociferously argued that there was little chance of finding the workplace experience necessary to get their qualifications if they were not card-carrying members of a political party. The only chance of being guaranteed a prized position in a government department, the students explained, is if you have family tied into a network that can pull strings.

The issue of corruption or patronage was not a widespread view as an obstacle to community service amongst interviewees. Nevertheless, if community service is attached to payments and opportunities, the possibility of corruption in recruitment is present. In one government youth service project:

“because of the reality of political opportunism of some of the councillors, they want to sustain themselves, there are elections coming, and all of that – we have a lot of people piggy-backing, taking advantage of the recruitment process. We also have issues of even the ruling party itself in other provinces literally wanting to control who comes in and who comes out in terms of the recruitment” (JN).

In this same project, communities became resentful and refused to be part of the project after there were controversies over the recruitment process.

There is some evidence of youth service being corrupted for political purpose in Leila Patel’s (2009) review of five Southern African countries. She records that in the cases of the Malawi Young Pioneers (in the latter part of President Banda’s rule), Zambian National Youth Service and the National Youth Service of Zimbabwe (NYSZ) (established in 2001), service became highly politicised, even militarised. She writes: “Herein lies the danger of national youth service programs in many African countries—political alignment with ruling parties that use youth to entrench their power, dispense patronage, and oppress local populations” (2009, p. 13).

At the same time, if community service is meant to strengthen a sense of civic mindedness, then it might be hoped it will counter corruption and a sense of entitlement. But the challenge is there that where corruption creeps in, it will lead to despondency.

Section 3: Lessons from Community Service for Health Professionals

Prior to the establishment of a Working Group on the Feasibility of a Community Service Scheme for Graduates in South Africa, the Minister of Higher Education and Training sought advice from the Council on Higher Education (CHE) on the establishment of a community service scheme for graduates. The Council advised the Department to conduct impact studies of the current schemes as a basis for informing the establishment of a National Community Service scheme for Graduates. The Community Service Scheme for health professionals,

under the Department of Health, was chosen to conduct some impact studies since it is the only scheme that can be considered to meet the criteria of a national graduate community service. The fact that all graduates in the health sciences/professions (irrespective of source of funding for their studies) have to undertake community service makes the scheme a good basis for comparison. Additionally, the fact that all graduates in the scheme receive some form of payment/salary and assist in the employability of these graduates does support the notion that a community service scheme for graduates should also be based on this model.

The community service programme in the Department of Health started in 1998. The programme has three objectives, namely:

- to ensure equitable distribution of health workers with an emphasis on rural and underserved populations
- to provide young medical professionals with the opportunity to develop skills and experience to improve their professional development
- to enable and encourage community service officers ¹⁰to remain in public service, particularly in rural and underserved areas. (Hatcher et al, 2014).

When it was introduced in 1998, the programme focused specifically on medical doctors, and was expanded to include interns in 1999, and dentists in 2000. Pharmacists were included in 2002, whereas physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech, language and hearing therapists, clinical psychologists, dieticians, radiographers and environmental health practitioners were incorporated in 2003. A community service programme for nurses was implemented in 2008.

In terms of professional development, community service is intended to help health professionals develop “skills, knowledge, behaviour patterns and critical thinking that will

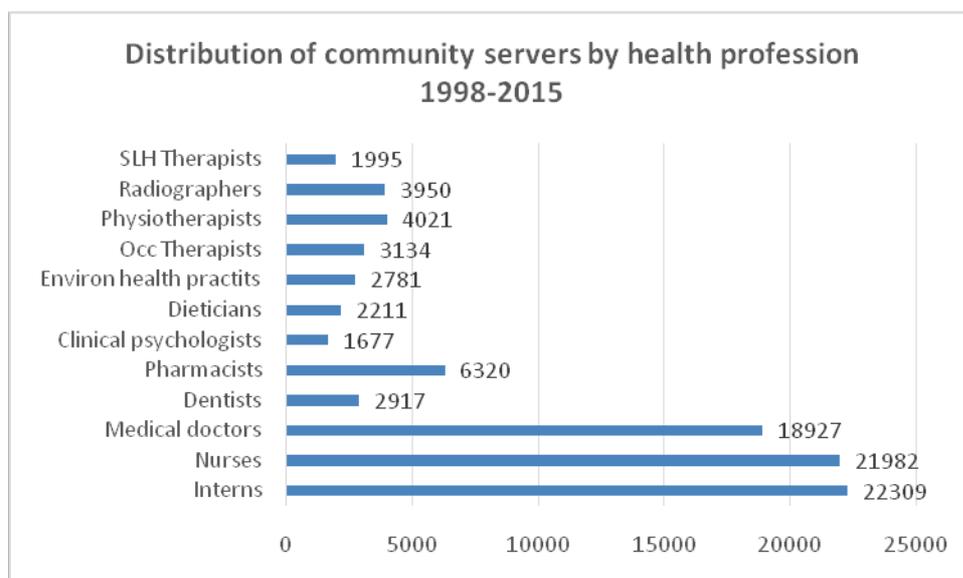
¹⁰ The term “community service officers” used by Hatcher et al is interesting, but is not explained in the article cited. Various interpretations of the term are possible. For example, the word ‘officers’ suggests that for the duration of the year, the health professionals are serving in some type of medical corps created by the Department of Health, possibly viewed along military lines. The term could also be understood as denoting that the health professionals undertaking their community service year are ‘officers’ of the health department for the duration of the year, rather than as individual doctors, dentists, psychologists, dieticians, etc providing a service to the communities in which they are placed. Further exploration is required to clarify the use of this term and examine community perspectives on the health professionals engaged in their year of community service.

help them in their professional development” (Hatcher et al, 2014). At this point in the research, however, it is not evident how these attributes are specifically defined or measured.¹¹

These notes capture initial findings from an ongoing literature review on community service for health professionals in South Africa. The findings noted here deal with the profile of community servers, placement, cost or sustainability of the scheme, administrative concerns and the retention of health professionals in the public service.

Profile of medical community servers

According to data supplied by the Department of Health, a total of 92 224 health professionals have undertaken community service in the 17 years since the inception of the programme (1998 – 2015). Across this period the largest categories of participants are, in order of magnitude: interns, nurses and medical doctors. The distinction between ‘interns’ and other categories of health workers is not explained.



Placement

Placement procedure

¹¹The study conducted on the 2009 cohort of health professionals in community service (Hatcher et al, 2014), devised a Supervision Satisfaction Scale to interpret a number of interrelated supervision factors. The components of the scale were: receiving orientation upon placement, experiencing good clinical supervision, receiving ongoing mentorship, finding clinical leadership accessible, and feeling that concerns were addressed. However, these are input descriptors rather than indicators of the desired outcomes of professional development gained through community service.

The process of placing health professionals into community service is coordinated nationally, but there appears to be room for provincial health departments to engage strategically with the national department around placements, as is the case with KwaZulu-Natal. In January 2015 the media reported on difficulties that approx. 200 doctors were having in securing community service placements. The Health Department responded that it could not place doctors until all the provinces had submitted information on which hospitals still had vacancies. A hospital staff member indicated that a medical facility is unable to directly hire community service doctors and must wait for instruction from the provincial Department of Health (*The Times*, 16 January 2015).

Each applicant is allowed an initial choice of five preferred placement locations drawn from a list of public health facilities approved for community service by the Department of Health. Approximately 85% of applicants are placed in this first round. The remaining 15% need to choose another five locations and these go into the second round of placements. Of these, approximately 5% who are not placed in the second round are allocated to the remaining posts around the country, wherever these may be. In some cases candidates may decide to avoid their community service rather than be placed in these rural positions.

In 2009 the majority of participants (55%) were assigned to their first choice of placement, after which 28% were placed within their top two to five choices.

The largely rural provinces tend to have the largest number of unfilled community service posts, often in the rural areas that are most needy. By contrast, community service posts in urban provinces are all filled by the second allocation. This raises questions as to whether community service is achieving its objectives in providing staff for underserved areas.

Spread of placements

The Hatcher et al (2014) survey of medical community servers shows that in 2009 more than half of participants (55%) were placed in rural facilities and 45% were placed in urban facilities. Across this landscape:

- Sixty five percent of medical community servers were placed in district or regional hospitals (39% and 26% respectively).
- Eighteen percent were placed in central or tertiary hospitals
- Four percent were placed in to military hospitals
- Three percent were placed in specialized hospitals.
- Ten percent were allocated to community health centres or clinics.

This data is already six years old. Nevertheless, given the Department of Health's focus on primary health care as a primary objective, it is an interesting question as to why 90% of servers were placed in hospitals and 10% in community health centres or clinics.

Other features of placement

The 2009 study shows that in that year:

- Female community servers were less likely to be placed in rural facilities than males.
- Unmarried applicants were less likely to receive their first choice compared to applicants who were married¹² and were more likely to be placed in rural facilities than their married counterparts.
- Race was a significant predictor of where community service participants were placed: Compared to community service participants stating black as race, white, indian and coloured participants were disproportionately less likely to be placed in a rural facility. However, the study did not investigate extent to which this racial variability was linked to home language or place of birth.
- Dentists had greater odds of being placed in a rural health facility.
- Gender did not seem to affect placement.

Perceived value of rural and metro placing

JUDASA (the Junior Doctors Association of South Africa) suggests that working in rural health facilities means that it is difficult to refer patients for treatment since referral hospitals are often far away and that there are few facilities available for special investigations. At a personal level, small town living can result in boredom and loneliness, and few amenities are available.

The benefits of working in larger facilities located in metro areas include the availability of senior staff who can assist with difficult cases; facilities for special investigations are easily available, even after hours; and it is easier to refer patients to other facilities. In terms of professional development, community servers may be allowed to rotate through a chosen speciality at a large hospital and may be able to pursue diplomas in these specialist fields.

The disadvantages of metropolitan life were said to be: living in a busy, stressful environment, and not receiving an allowance that is paid to rural placements.

¹² In 2003 a special dispensation was introduced for those interns married to someone studying at a particular place, those who had children at school, those with chronic diseases, and Muslims who need to be near a large mosque (*Cape Times* July 17, 2003)

Administrative concerns

Concerns that have emerged around the management and administration of the community service placements include the following:

- Initially there were some administrative problems e.g. Some hospitals were not aware that community service dentists were being posted to their hospitals until their arrival.
- Press Reports in 2003 indicated that in line with a new health department policy, the majority of medical interns would not be able to do community service in the Western Cape and Gauteng the following year (in 2004). Gauteng and Western Cape hospitals were first choice hospitals for about 80% of candidates for community service. The Department of Health sent out service notices which did not list any hospitals in Gauteng as options. Some Western Cape hospitals were listed with a proviso that only doctors who were bursary holders should apply. At the time only about 20 of the 1200 interns in the province were bursary holders.
- Media reports (*The Times*, 16 January 2015) indicated that approximately 180 graduates are experiencing difficulty in obtaining community service placements. One doctor questioned why there were no jobs for community service if it is a compulsory programme; another said she phoned the Health Department on a daily basis to enquire about placement opportunities, but struggled to get any information from it. She had also been regularly visiting hospitals to see if there were vacancies for community service placements, and located a Pretoria hospital that had 10 such vacancies. One doctor moved back in with her parents because she cannot afford to live on her own while she is unemployed. She said two friends had volunteered at a hospital in the hope that they would be paid and offered contracts. She said that they, like her, were finding it hard to live without a salary. Another said she had not heard anything about placement, adding she had been trying to phone the department but got no reply. Three different doctors were told by officials in three provinces last week that the number of doctors awaiting jobs was between 180 and 200.

In line with these experiences, the 2009 survey showed that 50% of respondents were concerned about the management of the programme and that addressing issues about accommodation, personal safety and remuneration could incentivize community service.

Retention of health professionals in public service

The 2009 study challenges the perception that community service drives health professionals away from working in the public health sector. On the contrary, it argues that the vast majority of participants (95%) felt good about the contribution they have made to the communities in which they worked, that more than two thirds (69%) intended working in the public sector after registration, and that 25% intended working in rural or under-served communities:

- Black participants were more likely than their counterparts to report intentions of working in the public sector.
- University of KwaZulu-Natal medical school graduates were more likely than graduates from other universities to plan on public sector work.
- Gender and marital status did not seem to correlate with intentions to work in the public health sector.
- Participants who were placed in rural facilities were significantly more likely to plan for public sector work in the future, as were those with provincial bursary obligations.
- Those intending to specialize were more likely to have intentions of working in the public sector.

The results show that, unlike previous surveys, very few participants (6%) intended to work overseas during the coming year. It also found that a third (34%) of participants intended remaining at the same health facility.

The cost and sustainability of community service for health professionals

Funding for community service is drawn from provincial budget allocations and the salaries are calculated according to DPSA classifications and provisions; including due consideration of the Occupation Specific Dispensation for the different professional groups. The availability of funded posts dedicated for community service therefore varies from year to

year, and is influenced by the economic situation that the respective provinces finds itself in. In recent times, the programme has experienced challenges in securing a sufficient number of posts for professionals that qualify to do community service – due to financial constraints in Provinces.

Section 4: Conclusion

It is clear from the preceding discussions that the implementation of community service scheme for all graduates in South Africa will present some opportunities and challenges for government and policy makers in general. On the positive side, it has potential to enable government to draw from a large pool of young people to assist with the provision of services especially in rural and under-resourced areas. It also provides an opportunity amongst young people to develop a sense of solidarity and responsibility towards fellow citizens. However, there are numerous challenges that seem to outweigh the opportunities.

Concerns over incentives for graduates to voluntarily participate in community service have been highlighted in the report. There seem to be reluctance amongst students to render compulsory community service unless perhaps such initiatives are tied to employability. In other words, unless graduates are given assurance that participation in community service will guarantee them employment. This is more so for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who are under constant pressure to find employment immediately after obtaining a qualification so that they could be able to financially provide for their families.

There are other more practical potential challenges to the implementation of mass community service for graduates in South Africa. These relate for instance, to issues of capacity, placements, possible administrative burden, sustainability and cost of managing the scheme. The lessons from the community service programme in the Department of Health show that public sector or state capacity to absorb (new) graduates is key in the overall success and sustainability of any community service scheme. There should be spaces available both in the public and private sector to ensure proper placement of graduates, otherwise the whole exercise will inadvertently result in frustration and despondency among graduates. Other

community service initiatives such as the National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) programme administered by the Department of Rural Development and Land Affairs, and the Legal Aid South Africa highlights similar challenges.

The issue of stipend for students has also come to the fore. Graduates would need to be paid stipend to cover necessities such as food and transport when engaging in community service. Related to this are issues of human resource policy and management, such as employment contracts covering issues such as compensation for injuries sustained at work, leave provisions amongst others.

It is evident that if it is to be implemented effectively, graduate community service should follow a more gradual, phased-in approach, that is, an incremental approach recommended by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). It could for instance, start out as a volunteer programme, target only certain professions rather than being rolled out across the board. However, the incremental approach and a model to target certain professions would defeat the purpose of having a community service scheme for all graduates in South Africa. The challenge of youth unemployment in the country, especially for new graduates, cuts across all professions or fields of study and therefore, a selective approach would result in a public outcry should certain professions be target over others.

Having considered all the arguments above, the Working Group concludes that a mass roll-out of community service scheme for all graduates is not feasible as there is no capacity within the public sector to both absorb and train all graduates; the fiscal constraints faced by government will not allow for such additional financial burden (approximately R10 billion); and the administrative burden related to human resources policies will be insurmountable. A more gradual, incremental approach as advised by the CHE should be considered.

Recommendations

In light of the challenges highlighted in this report, the following recommendations are put forward:

- A more gradual, phased-in approach to graduate community service should be considered as opposed to a mass implementation of the scheme. The implementation should be targeted at selected professions and should be attached to the relevant government departments.
- Student placements should be tied to the disciplines that students studied for. In other words, students should not be expected to do community service in fields of study they are not trained or qualified in.
- Graduates should be remunerated at the rates of the current internship programmes or be benchmarked against the salaries provided to health professionals at the time of undergoing their community service.
- If a more generic approach to graduate community service is preferred, there should be consideration for central coordination of the schemes. Such coordination should reside within a government structure that has the authority and oversight of other government departments. The proposal is that central coordination should reside in the Presidency.
- An alternative to compulsory community service could be the strengthening current government internship programmes and learnerships.
- In line with the Youth Employment Accord, all government departments and state-owned enterprises should be encouraged to introduce focused internship programmes, aiming at employing interns over a period of time equal to 10% of the total employment of departments.
- Similarly, there should be an increase in the number of young people employed in the public sector, through the coordination and scaling up of existing programmes under the “youth brigade” programme coordinated within the National Youth Service Programme. The programmes include, i) the Expanded Public Works Programme; ii)

NARYSEC; iii) the Green brigade; iv) Health brigades; v) Literacy brigades; and vi) Maintenance Brigade.

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