

South Africa's tertiary institutions launch Foundation Phase Teacher Education Programme at UJ



Mr Richard Young (European Union delegation); Prof Saartjie Gravett; Dr Dianne Parker; Dr Whitfield Green; Dr Berene Kramer (European Union delegation) Prof Elbie Henning; Mr Nils Jansons (European Union delegation)

The state's national Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Department of Basic Education launched a Foundation Phase Teacher Education Programme at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) on Wednesday, 13 July 2011. The initiative is designed to strengthen Foundation Phase teacher education in South Africa's public universities. The project is funded by the EU to a total of R41m. The Department of Childhood Education on the university's Soweto campus participates in the programme. The UJ programme of research and pre-service teacher education development is led by Prof Elbie Henning of the Centre for Education practice Research at UJ.

The programme has two main objectives. Firstly, to increase the number of graduates who specialise as Foundation Phase teachers, particularly teachers specialising in African languages; and secondly to increase the number of public universities that offer Foundation Phase initial teacher education programmes. The foregrounding of the role of foundation phase teaching as a profession is an important objective of the programme.

There is thus a focus on a recruitment campaign that will enhance the status and image of Foundation Phase teaching as a career, a bursary programme that will support 200 high achieving African language school leavers from rural areas in South Africa, and establishing a Childhood Education Research

Association which will sustain and take forward the gains made in this three year programme. Coupled with this is the support for the UJ-founded SA Journal of Childhood Education, which publishes research on learning and teaching of young children. This journal is situated in the CEPR at UJ and the first issue was handed to the Childhood Education community at the gala dinner by the editor.

“This programme is part of a broad and rich relationship that the European Union and South Africa have developed over the years. The level of support we are providing to this programme, reflects on the one hand our appreciation of the severity of the problem we are supporting the South African Government to address, and on the other hand, the confidence we have in its education policy and the concerted efforts it is making to improve the implementation of this policy,” said Mr. Nils Jansons, Deputy Head of Delegation: European Union.

The initiative involves 20 South African universities. The first series of meetings and workshops were linked to the UJ Literacy Education Winter School. In 2012 the meetings will be linked to a Numeracy education Winter School at Rhodes University.

According to Dr. Parker, Acting Deputy Director General: DHET, by 2014 all the 20 universities will be teaching education programmes in the Foundation Phase. “We need to ensure that at the end of this programme we have trained knowledgeable educators in Foundation Phase and the Childhood Education programmes. This has to increase the quality of teaching methodologies in universities. The Department [DHET] fully supports the initiative,” emphasised Dr. Parker. She added that the teachers that will come out of the programme have to understand the Foundation Phase practice and should conduct research that will help improve the country’s basic education.

UJ dignitaries that welcomed the initiative with harmony were, amongst others, Professor Sarah Gravett, Executive Dean: Faculty of Education, and Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Derek van der Merwe. The launch was held at the School of Tourism and Hospitality (STH) at UJ as part of the Literacy Education Winter School event.