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The PhD conundrum

Africa is rising, and with it has come a significant expansion of higher education opportunities led primarily by the private sector. The public sector is stuttering along, but there is a serious obstacle to progress at the top end of the academic apex as there are not enough PhD holders to lead the new faculties and departments. And to train and mentor a new generation of doctoral achievers of course requires PhD supervisors, but as they don't exist in sufficient numbers, so the expansion is slow. It is a difficult one. Public sector purses remain constrained, and while higher education is rising up the agenda, doctoral training hasn't found its way onto the priority list as yet.

And if you can find a supervisor, can you find funding to complete your study within a reasonable time period? It is really tough, but there are sources of funds if you are prepared to search hard and submit multiple applications. This issue includes an extended summary of a report by the Association of Commonwealth Universities providing some useful guidance on opportunities.

But it really only serves to highlight the need for some dedicated thinking. There are some excellent organisations on the continent (such as the Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) but unless they can attract the funding to take a decisive lead on issues such as this, it will remain a conundrum that can only hold Africa's emergence back. Africa needs a new generation of quality academics to lead the next phase of its industrial emergence.

Is there political will to drive this? One fears not. In Nigeria for instance, the latest budget reflects another real term reduction in health expenditure for 2014, despite it being issued from the home of the African Union's Abuja Declaration in 2001 when many of Africa's presidents

came together to pledge a commitment to allocate a minimum of 15% of the annual budget to the health sector. Today, Nigeria is not even half way towards achieving this. And alas the education sector fares no better. Until this changes, frustration is going to remain the order of the day, and Africa will continue to shoot itself in the foot as denying its citizens the opportunity to flourish academically is simply naïve.

And before I close, allow me a moment of introspection. For the last 16 years, the real engine behind putting this journal together has been my assistant editor, Penny Lang. She has been the constant presence in the office, the dependable rock who has ensured that deadlines are met, that house style is adhered to, that quality is sustained... and that the Editor is doing what he needs to do... wherever he is. But Penny is retiring, and this is the last issue she will work on before officially hanging up her red pen at the end of March. I owe her a huge debt, and I am sure the same can be said for those of you reading this. I hope you will join me in wishing her a long and happy retirement. She deserves it.*

Hopefully we'll manage the next issue!

All best
Bryan

* Anyone wishing to communicate with Penny. Just write in to: penny@fsg.co.uk. We'll pass messages on.

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