



# BLANTYRE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

## BIU COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMME

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## Introduction

The vision of Blantyre International University (hereafter the University) is realised through the notion of being a world class university, driven by the pursuit of knowledge and innovation. The university is keenly aware of its social responsibility and, therefore, endeavours to engage with all relevant communities within the ambit of its activities but does this primarily through that which emanates from the pursuit of knowledge and innovation, thereby bringing the results stemming from the process of research/innovation and teaching- learning to the engaged communities in a more direct manner.

Through the ‘scholarship of engagement’, or community outreach, the University strives to attain the status of a ‘community engaged institution’. Our scholarship of engagement is articulated as four overlapping functions: discovery of all forms of knowledge; integration (connections across disciplines and with external contingencies); application as dialogue between theory and practice; and teaching and relevance. As part of becoming a learning organisation, the university does not view its knowledge as the only legitimate form of knowledge and through the process of engagement this approach to the generation of new knowledge will contribute to transformation of the curriculum and the addressing of epistemic biases and prejudice, thereby contributing to social justice.

This policy is intended to ensure alignment with national government policy frameworks and the quality assurance guidelines contained in documents issued by the National Council for Higher Education and, in particular, those guidelines that have a bearing on community engagement (CE) and service learning (SL).

## Premise

The University uses the expression “sharing of expertise” as an overarching term to describe all its activities relating to research/innovation (e.g. consultations, contract research, patents and products, etc.) and teaching- learning (e.g. work-integrated learning (WIL) and service learning (SL) in all of its communities (internal and external). This is broadly referred to as ‘engagement’.

Likewise, this element “sharing of expertise” that contributes to outreach, scholarship of engagement and social justice where the university engages with external parties on the basis of reciprocity and collaboration is generally known as community engagement (CE). Please refer to the definition of community engagement below.

## Objectives of this policy

- a) To guide engagements with communities during research/innovation and teaching/ learning and outreach activities;
- b) To minimise risks;
- c) To maximise outputs and benefits for the University and its community partners;
- d) To ensure strategic alignment with the University’s functions.

## Scope of application

This policy is applicable to activities and actions where the University and its staff engage with



the community. It should be read in conjunction with other related policies such as the Corporate Social Responsibility.

### Policy statement

In order to contribute towards the wellbeing and enablement (empowerment) of all members of society, it is the policy of the University that its staff and students must engage with their respective community/communities when conducting activities related to research/innovation, teaching and learning, community service and outreach initiatives in an attempt to influence policy and address South Africa's developmental challenges and sustainability, thereby sharing its expertise. In short, the structural integration of community engagement into all activities is of utmost importance and underpins all activities undertaken by the University with an emphasis on the sharing of discipline based expertise.

### Definitions

#### Community engagement

Definition: Community engagement is defined as activities performed by the staff and students, primarily aimed at uplifting or supporting society and or individuals in need of assistance or engagement.

Community engagement as a core function of the University exists to nurture and manage partnerships with communities, the intention being to facilitate cooperation between various communities and the university, as well as to provide the means whereby both parties can actively discover knowledge, teach and learn from one another in a reciprocal, mutually beneficial manner.

It is envisaged that this will contribute towards creating an environment in which student learning and research relevance will be enriched. In this way, the institution's commitment to reciprocate, redress, develop and transform will be supported.

Clearly, interactions where the University is contracted to do research or provide services where there is no evidence of reciprocity do not satisfy the above definition of community engagement. To aid the distinction between a CE activity and any other activity that purely relates to teaching, learning and research, the following criteria ought to be applied to determine whether an activity meets the prerequisites for true community engagement:

- The activity should be linked interactively to an identifiable group in a community outside/inside the institution.
- Interaction should be actively linked to identifiable needs of both the University and the community; in other words a clear benefit for both the community and the university must have been identified.
- The interaction should be a sustained activity conducted within a mutually defined relationship/partnership.

Based on the above criteria, clearly, exclusive teaching and research activities that do not include a reciprocal community component cannot be regarded as CE. Consequently, to satisfy these criteria, those learning activities where students in a particular module are required to conduct community-based research should involve activities where the students or academics actually engage with the community by undertaking activities in conjunction with and within the very midst of the community.

## Communities

Communities range from the University’s internal community, such as its staff and students, to an array of external communities (e.g. “communities of interest” and/or “communities of practice”) in the public and private sectors and can be found either locally, nationally or internationally.

Definition: The term “community” signifies a social grouping of society involved in an interaction at any given moment. Community therefore refers to groups of people united by a common location, or to groups of people who are linked intellectually, professionally and/or politically. In other words, they could be geographic communities, communities of interest and/or communities of practice. This broad definition allows the University to focus on marginalised groupings in society without having to exclude other community formations and their activities.

The following figure explains the various categories of sharing of expertise found within the context of the University. The integration of community engagement into core business shows all forms of engagement, although some activities are ‘for profit’ and some for ‘not-for-profit’. We encourage engagement in all forms, but wish to build our ‘not-for-profit’ sharing of expertise encompassing the principles of reciprocity in order to ensure that we comply to the development imperatives of government as stated within the National Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals.

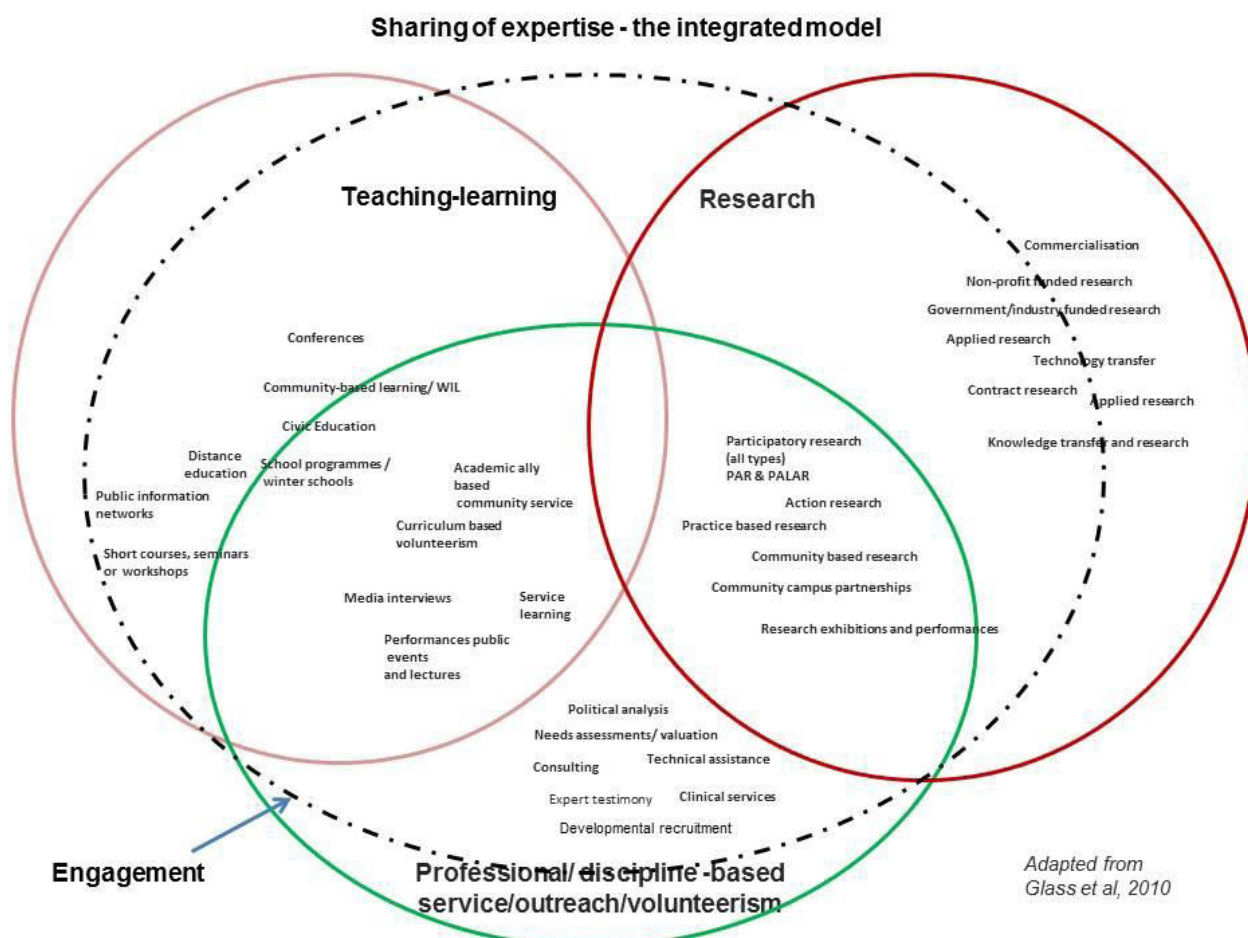


Figure 1: Sharing of expertise –the integrated model.



It is important to note from this figure that there may be ‘outreach-type or service’ activities done for the advancement of the university exclusively or ‘for-profit’ which is bordering on community engagement; if this is unclear, apply the principle of reciprocity.

### Engaged research/innovation

Some of the university’s engagement activities are ‘for-profit’, while many services are ‘not-for-profit’.

Research/innovation-related forms of engagement (mostly for-profit) encompass consultations, contract research/innovation, internal corporate ventures, associate/subsidiary companies and technology licensing.

Mostly, ‘not-for-profit’ research activities are conducted in collaboration with external community partners, focus by and large on addressing broader needs in society and barely succeed in recovering costs. (CE cannot always be provided ‘free of charge’ as the mutually beneficial principle must be applied.) In this type of research, the inputs of the community are participatory in nature and must be negotiated and valued – a methodology which is supported by an array of techniques aimed at ensuring reciprocity and partnerships. New knowledge is generated collaboratively and shared widely in the public domains. This form of ‘engaged research’, sometimes also referred to as participatory action research, falls well within the ambit of CE and has the potential to feed back into the curriculum as well as to be linked directly to aspects of a student’s training.

In some instances, engaged research could be on phenomena found within communities and is then termed community-based research. Here, too, the principle of respectful and ethical access to and inclusion of communities with feedback is essential. Even though the use of participatory methods to conduct this type of research is not a required premise, researchers nevertheless often resort to these techniques. Before communities can be included in any type of research, though, access to such communities must be negotiated in line with validated ethical principles. These principles will be governed by the policy for ethics. See rules below.

Special provision must be made to ensure feedback to broader society of the knowledge generated, not only through formal scientific channels but also through professional community service and popular (public) communication.

### Engaged teaching-learning

Teaching-learning-related community engagement activities, all of which are mostly not-for-profit, include professional community services and outreach as well as developmental activities with a recruitment focus. It can also include subsidised development engagement involving work-integrated learning and service learning.

- a) Professional community services and discipline-based outreach include advice and sharing of expertise as well as similar but voluntary and uncompensated activities provided under the auspices of the University:

It encompasses those activities where the institution places his resources, services and expertise at the disposal of the public outside the context of the institution’s teaching and learning and research programmes and that are generally sponsored and controlled by the institution itself. These include activities organised and carried

out to provide general community services, excluding instructional activities. Examples are discipline-based general advisory services, members serving on advisory boards and editorial committees, consultation services offered free of charge; testing services offered free of charge (e.g. soil testing, carbon dating, structural testing); sport outreach programmes; putting the institution's facilities/equipment or services at the disposal of external bodies or individuals free of charge; and concerts, recitals, and exhibitions for the public (unless aimed at and held primarily for formal instruction purposes or for students).

- b) Developmental recruitment falls under this rubric and is aimed more directly at learners with a view to attracting them to the University. The impact is wide-ranging, though, and not restricted to potential students. This includes activities in the field of sports development, teacher-development programmes and science and engineering weeks (mostly funded by the university) as well as leadership development programmes for professionals sponsored but free of charge for participants and at low or no cost to the University.
- c) Subsidised developmental community engagement refers to the priority that is afforded to the transfer of knowledge to and enhancing the learning experiences of students. In this regard, processes that encourage civil responsibility amongst students by exposing them to the realities of society in preparation for their participation in a democratic society are important. Subsidised developmental community engagement aims, therefore, to add value to the development of students' critical thinking skills and other soft skills in synergy with teaching and research, thus contributing to their preparation for active participation as South African citizens in their future careers. The term encompasses the somewhat limited notion of SL, while simultaneously taking other service-oriented academic and non-academic community interactions into account. An example would be the prescribed practical experience as is sometimes required by professional councils such as WIL in the community or at private sector institutions. It also allows the University to give expression to alternative forms of social responsiveness through curricular activities in the form of service to the community which go beyond standard practical courses and which, in some cases, include WIL taking place in communities. The word "subsidised" is used to indicate that some of the costs incurred are recovered from class fees. (See Work-integrated Learning and Service-Learning Policy.)
- d) Voluntary skills transfer is where a skill is shared or transferred without any instruction from the University but where this transfer takes place in the name of the University – for example students or staff who volunteer to train learners in after-school maths classes at their church. (Another example would be the extra classes that are run by "the University's students or staff".) If there is no academic oversight, it is volunteerism. If it is regulated by academic oversight and students are evaluated for curricular purposes, it is service learning. (See Work-integrated Learning and Service Learning Policy.)

### Volunteerism

Additional services by staff and students to, especially, the local communities in which the University's campuses are based are also forms of engagement. This includes voluntary-based 'enablement /empowerment /development/non-discipline based outreach' activities such as services that are short-term, repetitive and mostly philanthropic in nature and that are not regulated by the University. Any formal linkage with the NWU will require adherence to the rules of engagement.



## Rules

### General rules of engagement

- a) All research/innovation and teaching-learning activities must obtain ethical clearance from the respective faculties based on prescribed risk-assessment criteria to be determined within faculties according to the requirements and guidelines of the specific environments.
- b) All University engagement activities must be registered on the institutional database for community engagement. All University-branded volunteer activities must be registered as BIU projects with clear outcomes, and an exit strategy must be negotiated before the interventions occur.
- c) Engagement activities must preferably be set up as a formal partnership in order to regulate expectations, manage risks and ensure role clarification. Informed consent forms are used to cover some of these regulatory steps and understanding on an individual level; however, such forms must be signed off via the scientific and ethical committees at faculty level.
- d) Formal partnerships must be cleared by and submitted to the Institutional Legal Office and must be signed in accordance with the Policy on Delegations and Schedule of Authorisation Levels.
- e) Evidence of shared planning and ensuring that the partnership is mutually beneficial is essential. Regular feedback must be provided to all stakeholders involved to ensure that recognition is given to participants and that the principles of reciprocity are adhered to.
- f) Engagement activities must be evaluated by community partners and evidence of feedback is important as part of the reciprocity principle.
- g) Quality assessment, risk management and impact assessment must be conducted by relevant management structures.
- h) Fundraising for community engagement will be done in compliance with the rules regulating the specific aspect of community engagement fundraising in the Development and Fundraising Policy and in collaboration with the Advancement Committee of the University.

### Procedures

The BIU will ensure the provision of effective, efficient and equitable support for community engagement through the community engagement support structures.