

CHAPTER 13

SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE



This report has provided an overview of facets of South African higher education within a specific framework: the inheritance in 1994, developments over the past ten years to 2004, critical issues that remain to be addressed, and key challenges that lie ahead. This final chapter crystallises key observations and themes within this framework and identifies key challenges for South African higher education in the future.



13.1 The Legacy of the Past

A particular higher education system was inherited from apartheid: one that was deeply divided internally, and isolated from the international community of scholars. It was highly fragmented in structural and governance terms, and was far from being a coherent and coordinated system. It was inherently inequitable, differentiated along the lines of 'race' and ethnicity, and designed 'to reproduce ... white and male privilege and black and female subordination in all spheres of society'.¹ Accordingly, Africans, as the largest South African demographic group, had the lowest participation rate in higher education. While a number of higher education institutions (HEIs) demonstrated their own strengths and made effective educational contributions, the effectiveness of higher education could not be assessed as a whole but could only be related to the designated purposes of HEIs, whether defined by 'race' classification, or by separate institutional functions. Institutional purposes were linked neither to the needs of the broader society nor to consistent conceptions of quality. The efficiency of the higher education system was compromised by duplications, and its sustainability was declining, as public higher education funding struggled to keep pace with growing enrolments.

The effects of a disjointed system were intensely felt at institutional level. HEIs themselves became implicated – willingly or not – in perpetuating the apartheid system of privilege and penalty, of opportunity and stricture, of advantage and disadvantage. Their resources, and hence their capabilities, capacities and outcomes, were related to the social stratification of apartheid.

In sum, the legacy of the past was a fractured system and a set of HEIs bearing the scars of their origins. As South Africa entered a process of social, economic and political reconstruction in 1994, it was clear that mere reform of certain aspects of higher education would not suffice to meet the challenges of a democratic country aiming to take its place in the world. Rather, a comprehensive transformation of higher education was required, marking a fundamental departure from the socio-political foundations of the previous regime.

13.2 The Dynamics of Policy Making, 1990 to the Present

The past decade has seen an extensive range of activities and transformation-oriented initiatives in higher education: definition of the purposes and goals of higher education; policy research; policy formulation and adoption in the areas of institutional structure and provision, governance, funding, academic structure and programmes, and quality assurance (QA); the enactment of new laws and regulations and regular amendments of these; policy implementation on numerous fronts; and occasional policy review.

As South Africa celebrates its first decade of democracy, key questions must be: to what extent has the envisaged transformation of higher education in fact taken place? compelled by what vision? enabled by what means? and constrained by what limiting factors: inherited and historical constraints, constraints arising from changing national economic and social policies, changing political and social conditions, available human capacities, available financial resources, or errors of judgement?

In tracing developments in the transformation of South African higher education from 1990 to the present, a number of commentators have sought to analyse and periodise change through the lens of policy-making, its patterns and nature. A number of analyses are in agreement in defining three principal periods of higher education policy change: symbolic policy-making; framework development, and implementation. In addition, each analysis highlights, in often complementary rather than mutually exclusive ways, its own emphases and interpretation of the dynamics of these periods. A few writings are noted here as a means of providing a summary



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overlay on policy developments as chronicled in the chapters of this report. Key policy processes and initiatives, as commented on to a greater or lesser extent in earlier chapters, are summarised in Appendix 1: List of Policy Initiatives.

The **first period** of policy activity from 1990–1994 was associated principally with ‘**symbolic policy-making**’. In this period, from February 1990, when the National Party government’s unbanning of liberation organisations gave an overt signal of accelerated movement to democracy through a negotiated settlement, the higher education policy process suddenly opened up beyond the apartheid state. The period has been variously characterised as one in which:

- There was a ‘race for policy position’ as contending actors, including the ‘self-reforming apartheid state’, the broad democratic movement, and civil society sought to establish symbolic statements of intent for change in higher education.²
- New policy propositions were forged, as the anti-apartheid movement began preparing to govern. During this period discursive tensions were discernible between ‘popular democratic’ and ‘economic rationalist’ positions, but they were muted by the consensus-building dictates of the day.³
- Policy-making was symbolic, with the primary intention of declaring a break with the past, and signalling a new direction.⁴
- The predominant concerns were principles, values, visions and goals, unconstrained by issues of planning, resources and implementation. Attention focused on the role of the state in higher education transformation, and the relationship between the state and civil society in effecting transformation. Policy debate was characterised by the participation of mass movements and civil society. Outcomes included general agreement on the values and principles that should guide policy-making; and the formation of symbolic policies.⁵

The symbolic nature of developments prior to 1994 was perhaps only to be expected, given that a transfer of political power had yet to be effected and that the detailed conditions of governing higher education in a democratic environment could not yet be known. The inherent dangers of symbolism are however eloquently suggested in these analyses. The term ‘a race for policy position’ implies that the pressure of accelerated social change may have led to policy pronouncements without implications being fully comprehended. Likewise, reference to ‘consensus-building dictates’ hints at the possibility of contestations breaking out once such dictates were set aside. At several points in this report, the ‘symbolism’ alluded to in these analyses has been encountered. In considering the legal and policy context, for example, Chapter 2 noted that the African National Congress (ANC) pre-1994 education policy framework did not explicitly address policy trade-offs that might be needed, and did not yet broach concrete strategies for redress within the higher education system (Section 2.2.1). Chapter 5, in describing the development of policy around teaching and learning, noted that some of the radical ideas of ‘people’s education’ with respect to pedagogy and curriculum, and the ‘political’ formation of citizens and actors, were displaced by other discourses that emphasised skilling and training for the requirements of economic growth and globalisation (Section 5.2.1).



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A **second period** of policy making in 1994–1998 focused on **framework development**. This was a period in which it is claimed:

- There was a ‘race to establish an overarching legal and policy canopy’, still linked to policy of a symbolic nature.⁶
- Competing discourses were apparently ‘settled’ in the content of the *White Paper* and the *Higher Education Act*, while discursive tensions between equity and development were sustained in the debates of stakeholders. The ‘economic rationalist’ position was endorsed in a policy focus on the development of higher skills to meet the needs of economic development and global competitiveness. (Policy goals of planned expansion and greater responsiveness supported this.) The ‘popular democratic’ position was endorsed in the declared commitment to a programme of redress.⁷
- An ‘implementation vacuum’ followed on the heels of the legislative and policy framework. These broad directions went unsupported by specified policy instruments, and quickly prompted unanticipated consequences at institutional level. Reasons advanced by government for the vacuum (including the need to develop a consultative process, and capacity problems) were unconvincing. A more compelling reason appeared to be political reluctance to make necessary choices.⁸
- The overall framework for higher education transformation was elaborated in greater detail; and strategies, structures and instruments for the pursuit of policy goals began to be defined. The principal outcomes of this period were a defined policy and legislative framework; a number of substantive policies in concrete domains such as governance, financing and funding; and the establishment of an embryonic governmental infrastructure for further policy planning and development, and for policy implementation.⁹

Commentary on the second period suggests that framework policies continued to be largely symbolic, though some substance began to be added, in a sense seeking to integrate the three ‘E’s of policy: equity, effectiveness and efficiency. The Ministry of Education appeared to experience difficulty in confronting competing goals, paradoxes and tensions in policies, with their attendant political and social dilemmas, and in making unambiguous choices and decisions. At the same time, the idealism of symbolic policy had to confront the political limits and other structural constraints facing the new state. As one example, tight fiscal policies accompanying the shift from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to the Macro-economic Strategy for Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), meant that higher education was unlikely to be allocated more financial resources than before. While the causes of the ‘implementation vacuum’ can be debated, the absence of unequivocal policy signals resulted in particular readings of the *White Paper* by HEIs, and various initiatives on their part, that would come to be considered by the Ministry as being in conflict with the intentions of the *White Paper*.

These issues were discussed in Chapter 2 of this report (Section 2.2.1.3), which refers to the four-year gap between the publication of the *White Paper* and the publication of the *National Plan*, and the unintended and unanticipated developments during this period that, if left unchecked, would threaten the achievement of a single, national, coordinated yet differentiated higher education system. The developments emanating from delays in implementing a new funding framework were discussed in Chapter 11 (Section 11.2.4). In this second period of policy-making (1994–1998), the complexity of achieving large-scale higher education transformation in the context of wider social and economic conditions and policies became fully apparent. Apart from representing political and social dilemmas, this complexity also constituted challenges to policy and strategy.



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A **third period** of policy-making began in 1999, as attention turned to **implementation**. This has been a period in which, it is claimed:

- The focus has been on addressing a perceived crisis in delivery through a ‘race for policy implementation’. This has been accompanied by a centralising tendency and the dissolution of policy consensus.¹⁰
- Discursive tensions and political difficulties reached a high point (in 2000), resulting in policy doubt, retraction and reversal.¹¹
- The focus of policy has narrowed down to efficiency, labour market responsiveness and economic development goals, while equity and redress have become secondary.¹²
- A need has emerged for more targeted, differentiated, information-rich policy interaction between government, HEIs and society (given the unintended consequences of ‘unidirectional, comprehensive’ policy that developed in the second period).¹³
- An attempt has been made by the Ministry ‘to make decisive choices and take tough decisions in crucial areas that hitherto had not seen much progress through a relatively hands-off approach or inadequate governmental steering or by leaving it essentially to individual higher education institutions to take the lead’. Transcending the apartheid legacy in higher education by creating a national, integrated and coordinated yet differentiated system has remained the key policy objective.¹⁴

The first theme of these analyses of the third period is that there has been a significant shift in the mode of governance of higher education transformation as the Ministry of Education has opted for stronger state steering. This was noted in relation, for example, to patterns in the development of the legal and policy context (Section 2.2.1); in reactions to proposals for institutional restructuring (Section 3.2.1); and in the implications of the powers given to the Minister of Education through the new funding framework (Section 11.3.2.2). Most specifically, this issue was discussed in Chapter 10, which highlighted the need for a relationship between state and higher education sector that would be sufficiently bi-directional to ensure that the consequences of policy decisions can be negotiated to common benefit. Accordingly, Chapter 10 posed a set of questions to be addressed with respect to the practice of co-existing governance principles, namely: public accountability, institutional autonomy and academic freedom (Section 10.4).

The second theme is that policy implementation has been characterised by ‘policy doubt, retraction and reversal’ and a ‘secondary focus’ on equity and redress, while a focus on efficiency has moved to the fore. These analyses use institutional redress policy – or the lack of it – as a marker. Chapter 2 noted ‘equity versus efficiency’ concerns that surfaced in relation to the *National Plan*, and the absence of a dedicated redress policy (Section 2.2.2.2). Chapter 11 noted those elements of the new funding framework that support social and institutional redress (Sections 11.3.1 and 11.3.2.1), while Chapter 4 indicated the progress in the achievement of student equity and outcomes (summarised in Section 4.4). Certainly, institutional equity and redress have become strongly linked to institutional restructuring and the Programme and Qualifications Mix (PQM) exercise, resulting in limited financial allocations thus far for institutional redress. On the other hand, social equity and redress have been prioritised and here achievements have been greater. Regarding the emphasis on efficiency, it is not obvious that the goals of equity and efficiency are in inevitable competition with one another. Undoubtedly, fiscal constraints have made efficiency concerns more prominent and have played a part in decisions related to institutional restructuring and public funding of higher education. However, the evidence with respect to ‘policy retraction and reversal’ in the areas of equity and redress in general, is far from compelling.



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In summary, this analysis of higher education in the past decade of democracy concurs in part with other analyses of patterns of higher education policy change since 1990. Higher education transformation in South Africa is best characterised as highly complex, consisting of a set of still unfolding discourses of policy formulation, adoption, and implementation that are replete with paradoxes and tensions, contestations, and political and social dilemmas.

13.3 Achievements of the First Decade

Notwithstanding the considerable flux that has understandably characterised higher education as a result of a comprehensive transformation process and myriad policy initiatives, South African higher education in 2004 retains considerable strengths. It also displays many positive departures from the legacy system inherited in 1994, and these can be linked to the goals set out in the *White Paper* and *National Plan*.

It is to be hoped that these achievements will become enduring features of the higher education landscape, even as key actors will have to continue to address persistent and new challenges. In some cases there are initiatives and processes that are still unfolding. It is too early to declare their outcomes a success (or failure), and they will require careful monitoring.

- Foundations have been laid for a single, coordinated and differentiated system of higher education encompassing universities, universities of technology (technikons), comprehensive institutions, and various kinds of colleges. Progress has been effected through the development of a national higher education plan, benchmarks for higher education transformation, and the establishment of a planning dialogue between the Department of Education (DoE) and HEIs; through the implementation of restructuring strategies encompassing programme-level rationalisation and cooperation, especially at regional level, and the reconfiguration of the institutional landscape; and through the implementation of common governance arrangements across the public higher education system.

Progress has been limited by delays in the finalisation of a new academic policy and delays in decision-making following the review of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The impacts and outcomes of institutional restructuring, which could yield unanticipated and contrary effects, require close monitoring.

- Private higher education institutions have become a feature of the higher education landscape, subject to more or less the same governance, qualification and QA regulatory frameworks as public institutions. Largely effective controls have been put in place to prohibit 'fly-by-night' providers of higher education. An ongoing challenge is to build the capability of the private sector to make its distinctive contribution as part of a single coordinated higher education system, and also to uphold quality standards.



- Student enrolments have grown from 473 000 in 1993 to 675 128 in 2002. Although growth has not been as fast as anticipated, the participation rate is nearing 18% (compared to the medium-term *National Plan* target of 20%). The extent and pace of the de-racialisation of the student body and of many institutions must be a source of pride and should be celebrated as a considerable achievement. Whereas African students constituted 40% (191 000) of the student body in 1999, in 2002 they made up 60% (404 000) of overall enrolments. There has also been commendable progress in terms of gender equity. Whereas women students made up 43% (202 000 out of 473 000) of enrolments in 1993, by 2002 women constituted 54% (363 000 out of 675 000) of the student body. In relation to the benchmarks of the *National Plan*, there have also been positive shifts in enrolments by field of study and qualification level.

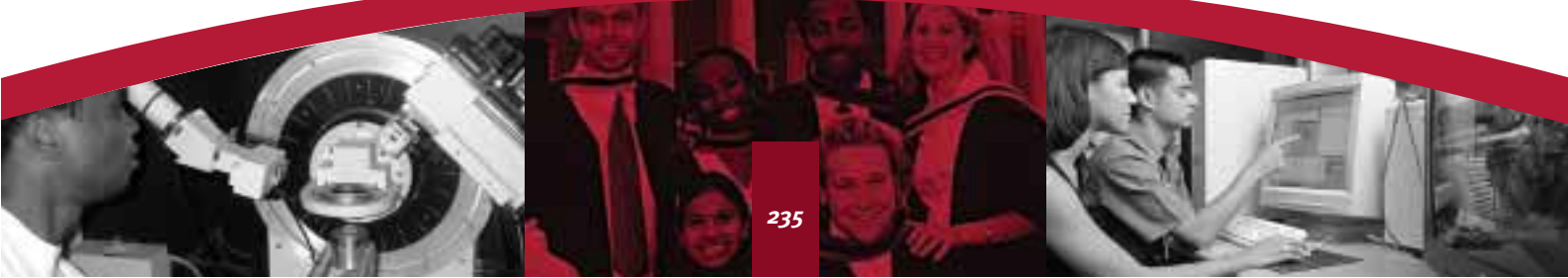
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The progress of women students, however, masks inequalities in their distribution across academic programmes and especially at higher levels of postgraduate training. Women students tend to be clustered in the humanities, and in teacher education programmes in particular. They remain seriously under-represented in science, engineering and technology (SET) and in business and management.

The rapid increase in African students again masks inequalities that are similar to those of women students. Large proportions of African students are enrolled in distance education programmes, most of which are humanities and teacher-upgrade programmes. The numbers and proportions of African students in programmes in SET, and in business and management, remain low. Postgraduate enrolments across most fields are also extremely low.

Finally, the improvement of overall higher education efficiency in terms of throughput and graduation rates, which have remained static over the past decade, remains a key challenge.

- There has been considerable progress in the deracialisation of the leadership of institutions. However, academic and administrative staff overall, at senior levels and especially at the historically white institutions, remains overwhelmingly white and male.
- In a number of areas of teaching and learning, institutions offer academic programmes that produce high quality graduates with knowledge, competencies and skills to engage in occupations and professions locally and anywhere in the world.
- Various areas of research are characterised by excellence and the generation of high quality fundamental and applied knowledge for scientific publishing in local and international publications, for economic and social development and innovation, and for public policy.
- In a variety of areas, there are also important and innovative community engagement initiatives that link academics and students and communities.
- A national QA infrastructure has been established and key policies and mechanisms with respect to institutional audit and programme accreditation are being implemented from 2004. These developments have significantly raised the profile of quality issues across the sector, and have linked notions of quality in delivery of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, to the goals and purposes of higher education transformation. There has also been a concomitant emerging institutionalisation of quality management within HEIs.
- To address changing economic and social and educational needs, there have been efforts on the part of various institutions to be more developmentally responsive and to build a greater outward focus, including a greater internationalisation of activities.
- System-level and institutional-level governance structures have been formally democratised – if not always substantively – through representative structures such as new councils (constituency representation) and institutional forums (stakeholder representation) at institutional level. Given the goals of higher education policy, democratisation of governance structures is an intrinsically positive development. Yet the absolute contribution of democratisation to effective governance is difficult to assess, given the difficulties that have arisen over the nature of participation. For example, at system level effective stakeholder participation has declined, and central steering has strengthened; and at institutional level difficulties have been encountered in rendering stakeholder participation effective through institutional forums.



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- New organisations at system level, such as the Higher Education Branch (HEB) of the DoE and the Council on Higher Education (CHE), as an advisory and QA body, have been institutionalised. A process is also under way to create a unified higher education association from the existing South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA) and Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP).
- The design and implementation from 2004 of a 'goal-oriented, performance-related' funding framework can be viewed as an achievement, given the complexity inherent in the task.

No further claims can be made for the framework until such time as its effects on the public higher education system and institutions are revealed. Much is likely to depend on the interpretations that are made respectively by state and sector, and the extent to which any required adjustments can be negotiated to the satisfaction of both.

- The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has been successfully established and expanded as a means of effecting social redress for poor students. The number and average amount of NSFAS awards has increased steadily over the past decade, while NSFAS funding as a percentage of overall government appropriations for higher education has settled at around 6%. It is clear that the financial needs of students from working class and rural poor social backgrounds remain a pressing challenge and that effective social equity and redress will require the expansion of funding through the NSFAS.
- In the face of declining levels of public subsidies, some institutions have successfully embarked on a range of innovative activities to tap new sources of income for financial sustainability, while seeking to remain true to the fundamental purposes of higher education.
- There has been a welcome internationalisation of the higher education student body overall, and especially at some institutions. Foreign student enrolments increased from 14 124 in 1995 to 46 687 in 2002, constituting 7% of the total student body. Students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) bloc increased from 7 497 in 1995 to 31 724 in 2002. Students from other African countries increased from 1 769 in 1995 to 6 317 in 2002.

Overall, to the extent that key actors face up to the critical issues and challenges that are discussed below, South African higher education holds great promise for contributing to social equity, economic growth, social development and democracy in South Africa, as well as to the economic and social development needs of the Southern African region and the African continent.

13.4 Critical Issues and Future Challenges

The concluding sections of each of the preceding chapters crystallised critical issues and key challenges for higher education in the years ahead. These are summarised in Figure 43.

“...South African higher education holds great promise for contributing to social equity, economic growth, social development and democracy in South Africa, as well as to the economic and social development needs of the Southern African region and the African continent.”

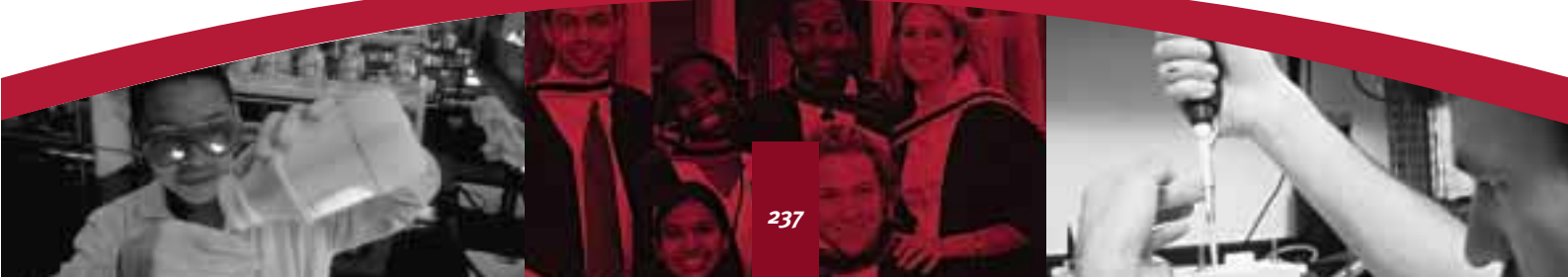


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Figure 43: Summary of Critical Issues and Challenges Ahead, as Identified by Chapter

Chapter	Focus	Critical Issues and Challenges Ahead
2	Legal and Policy Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring sensitive processes of monitoring and evaluation provide early warning of unanticipated policy consequences, identify policy gaps, and so serve to condition interrelated policy elements Re-examining core governance concepts and system-level governance dynamics to support outcomes achieved through an appropriate mix of centrally-driven measures, as well as 'softer' steering mechanisms, incentives and opportunities for participative self-regulation by the higher education sector
3	Institutional Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating the progress and impact of institutional restructuring, including with respect to: institutional cultures; cost-effectiveness; outcomes in terms of equity, effectiveness and efficiency; academic provision appropriate to institutional types; quality and responsiveness of core business; change management issues and unintended consequences
4	Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustaining and consolidating progress made towards student equity in enrolments, opportunities and outcomes, while addressing significant weak points (e.g. overall efficiency, SET enrolments, postgraduate enrolments) Transforming institutional and academic cultures as a means to achieving staff equity
5	Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalising a new academic policy and resolving the NQF review Ensuring teaching and learning support policy goals such as student equity in throughput and success rates Formulating guides for good teaching and learning practice
6	Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locating higher education centrally in ongoing processes of research policy development and implementation Exploring fully the impact of new funding drivers on higher education research and the sustainability of the system Finding sustainable ways of reproducing the capacities and traditions of higher education research, while simultaneously transforming its equity profile Effectively sustaining or developing research cultures in HEIs with demonstrable research capacity or potential
7	Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalising a policy framework which will facilitate community engagement on the part of HEIs Utilising the knowledge and skills of those HEIs with experience in community engagement as a core function, to build the capacity of others Stretching the traditional boundaries of the academy to support meaningful community engagement
8	Quality Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effecting strategic and operational links between planning, funding and QA in the higher education system Determining quality standards in a system in flux (e.g. new academic policy awaited, institutions still merging, emergence of universities of technology and comprehensive universities) Guarding QA against 'checklist compliance' Sustaining a proper balance between equity and quality Engaging academics and students in the QA process Institutionalising quality management and continuous improvement in HEIs
9	Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying mechanisms for constructive collaboration between higher education and public and private sectors Monitoring and addressing at institutional level the extent to which an HEI makes its economic, social, cultural and intellectual contribution to South African society Guarding against reduction of HE responsiveness in all its dimensions to 'market responsiveness'



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Chapter	Focus	Critical Issues and Challenges Ahead
10	Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing appropriate models of governance at institutional level (including in the process of merger) Re-examining system-level governance dynamics, in particular the interrelationship of the principles of public accountability, institutional autonomy and academic freedom
11	Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring closely the adequacy of public funding for higher education Monitoring closely and critically the impacts of the new funding framework, in particular its effects on: institutional redress, institutional autonomy, institutional behaviours, enrolment patterns Expanding funding through the NSFAS to deal with access and success for poor students
12	Internationalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussing the need for and possibly developing national policy on internationalisation of higher education Developing national policy on the application of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to higher education Collecting well-defined and accurate information about student and staff mobility in relation to South African higher education (incoming and outgoing) Developing institutional-level internationalisation policies linked to core functions

Over and above the critical issues and challenges that are summarised in Figure 43, it is possible also to advance a number of propositions regarding critical issues and challenges related to the context of higher education transformation, the higher education transformation process and the values, principles, goals of South African higher education transformation.¹⁵

- *Context*

It is essential that there is an acute awareness of the contemporary and changing context within which South African higher education transformation takes place.

Three dimensions of the contemporary context are pertinent. First, globalisation – of communications, of trade, of production, of culture – is a defining feature of the epoch. Second, inequality, poverty and injustice remain rife in the world, and fault lines between the rich and powerful and the poor and powerless continue to deepen within and between countries. Third, higher education itself is increasingly subject to pressures of transnationalisation, marketisation and commodification, as those seeking new sources of profit see higher education as a multi-billion-dollar industry independent of sovereign national purposes.

In combination, these three dimensions of context will condition and shape policy and practice, as South African higher education struggles to transform in ways that meet the challenges of its own developing democracy, and the globalising knowledge society and economy.

It should also be noted that higher education and its institutions exist at the intersection of state, market and civil society, each with its specific, varied and different expectations and demands. A common experience of all institutions, therefore, is an exceptional ‘demand overload’ – that is to say, institutions must:

- Cope with a vast array of varied and differing national goals and imperatives, policy initiatives, market pressures, public expectations and institutional stakeholder demands.
- Do this without any significant increase in public finance, with limited scope for increased finance from student income, and with various difficulties raised by income from other sources.

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- Do this in the face of problems in securing and retaining specialist personpower, which is increasingly attracted to the public service and private sectors.
- Remain faithful to the 'public good' ideals of national policy and the social purposes that define an institution as a higher education institution.

As a result, higher education is in considerable flux, and an ambitious transformation agenda and different and conflicting imperatives, expectations and demands severely test the capabilities and capacities of national bodies and individual institutions and actors. Many factors – the implementation of government policies, the dissimilar historical development paths of institutions, their diverse institutional choices and decisions – are producing institutions with different orientations and cultures, different strengths and weaknesses, and different absorptive capacities and capabilities.

- *Purposes and Goals*

The defined purposes and goals of higher education, and of higher education change, should be continually examined to see whether they are appropriate to higher education and to the South African context. This means evaluating the extent to which they are substantive; how, if they are symbolic, they could be made more substantive; and what it will entail in terms of time, human and financial resources, and system and/or institutional endeavour, to achieve them.

As one important example, the notion of 'responsiveness' as a purpose and goal of higher education requires ongoing attention. It cannot be denied that higher education must contribute to the needs of the economy through the production of graduates and knowledge. However, the manner in which it must do so, and the appropriate modes for doing so, must be addressed. Higher education in South Africa as a developing country is part of the larger process of social and democratic reconstruction. The intellectual, knowledge and graduate production of higher education cannot be confined to economic goals alone, but must also address the needs of social, intellectual and cultural development.



- *Consensus*

Developing a national democratic consensus after 1994 on the fundamental values, purposes and goals of higher education was a challenging process. It may nevertheless have been relatively easier than achieving and maintaining consensus on the actual policies, strategies, instruments and procedures for transformation. Even if the goals are not at issue, the means and time frames for achieving these goals, or the application of agreed strategies, could be sources of contestation, conflict and even resistance.

It is clear that a national democratic consensus on higher education transformation is not a one-off activity, but one that has to be renewed periodically. Relationships between role players must be robust enough to allow for continuous review and revitalisation of approaches so as to ensure progress.

- *Paradoxes, Choices and Trade-offs*

The principles and goals of higher education, or their related policies and strategies, may sometimes stand in a relationship of intractable tension, especially where they are pursued simultaneously.



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As one example: if policy goals and challenges are formulated as both global competitiveness and redistributive national reconstruction and development, how is higher education as a whole to orient itself towards both these



imperatives? What does this mean for individual HEIs? Are all to be oriented towards both poles or is there to be functional differentiation and specialisation? Should these choices be left to HEIs themselves or must government steer choices? As another example, the pursuit of social equity and redress on the one hand and quality on the other creates political and social dilemmas, and raises the question of trade-offs between principles, goals and strategies.

In the face of paradoxes, 'simplifying manoeuvres' are possible. One would be to refuse to accept the existence of a dilemma. A second would be to elevate one goal over others, to help determine policies and choices. A third would be to rank values in advance. An alternate path is to accept that, for good political and social reasons, paradoxes exist and trade-offs will be inevitable as the attempt is made to balance competing goals and enable the pursuit of equally desirable goals.

For the foreseeable future, government and HEIs are likely to be impelled to pursue simultaneously goals and strategies that stand in severe tension with one another, and will need to negotiate and renegotiate the implications of doing so. Where trade-offs are made, they should not be hidden: rather, their overall impact on the achievement of goals should be confronted.

- **Priorities**

Priorities must be established with respect to goals, domains and levels of change. While the principle is easy to assert, the practice is less easily accomplished in the face of multiple priorities, or priorities in tension with each other. In South African higher education, prioritisation must therefore be matched to proper planning and a realistic pace of implementation. The establishment of ranked and ordered priorities seems imperative if government is to steer change effectively, and if institutions and other role players are to engage effectively around policy and implementation.

- **Principal Actors and Roles**

The roles of the actors in higher education – the state and government, HEIs, academics, students, business and other constituencies – need to be defined more clearly in relation, for example, to the phases of the policy and change process, and the arenas of higher education (e.g. governance, financing, teaching and learning, research). Such definition is shaped by history and tradition, by access to resources, by differing absorptive capacities and capabilities, and so forth. It is also shaped by notions of autonomy, academic freedom and accountability; by ideas about the appropriate balance in specific areas between institutional self-regulation and central state prescription and regulation; by the mechanisms and modes of debate, discussion and consensus-building; and by the determination of the pace and time frames of change.

- **'Pulleys and Levers'**

Successful higher education change requires bold, imaginative and innovative 'pulleys and levers'; i.e. policies, strategies, instruments and mechanisms (institutional restructuring, planning, funding, QA). All the same, there must be caution about elevating policies and policy instruments to the status of religious commandments. They are products of human agency and historical conjunctures, and the extent to which they remain relevant and appropriate must be constantly offset against concrete conditions (e.g. changes in the macro-economic and fiscal environment, the capacities of HEIs, available human and financial resources). There have been changes both in higher education and in the wider political and economic environment since policy was framed in the *White Paper*. This requires an interrogation of whether and how existing 'pulleys and levers' are adequate, or whether they need to be supplemented, modified or replaced.

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- *Teaching and Learning, and Research*

The core activities of higher education and HEIs – teaching and learning, research and community service, and innovation and renewal in these areas – cannot be sidelined in the clamour over changes to governance, financing and other areas. Focus must be sustained on ensuring that HEIs address their core function: fulfilling the needs of students and society.

The issues are complex and wide-ranging. Teaching and learning, and research programmes, need to be conceptualised, designed and planned for a diverse student body. Opportunities need to be presented so that students can develop and succeed as intellectuals, professionals and researchers; can think theoretically, can analyse with rigour, and can gather and process empirical data; and, finally, can do all this with a deep social conscience and sensitivity to the development challenges and needs of our society. Students also need learning environments and cultures that are safe, secure and respectful, intellectually nurturing, and engage them as partners. Finally, critical questions with respect to the transformation of teaching and learning and the curriculum, and the discourse of responsiveness prevailing in academic departments today, must be continuously posed and answered. The orientation of academic programmes, their outcomes, curricula, modes of teaching and learning, and assessment all require evaluation. Further, the question must be asked whether academic programmes are narrowly directed at technical mastery in a discipline or field, or whether they also address issues of critical citizenship, and the context and needs of a transforming society in which knowledge must be applied.



- *Quality*

A serious higher education transformation agenda must prioritise quality as a key policy driver. However, significant challenges associated with implementing the quality objectives of policy must be recognised.

One of these challenges is to manage the difficult balancing act between quality and equity: equity without quality is meaningless, while quality cannot be pursued in isolation from the goal of equity in higher education. A second challenge is to develop, in a differentiated system, a variety of standards appropriate to specified educational objectives and purposes. A third is to resist the tendency to see investment in QA as an expense that could be better utilised elsewhere.

While quality is ultimately the responsibility of the institution, it cannot be left to institutional endeavour alone. Going forward, a principled partnership will be required between HEIs, academics, students, other stakeholders and external QA agencies, to enable an optimal mix of self-regulation of quality by HEIs, and external validation.

- *Creative Change Leadership and Management*

Creative change leadership and management are critical for successful initiation, steering and management of higher education transformation. They are also crucial for ensuring that current strengths be maintained, so that new dysfunctions are not added to an already complex change landscape.

Conceptualising, managing, legislating, regulating, planning and implementing a comprehensive transformation agenda, is a demanding undertaking that requires sober, detailed and realistic planning at both system and institutional levels.



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One major test will be whether the Ministry of Education and other elements of government and the state can function in a genuinely developmental manner, not only within higher education but also at the *confluence* of higher education, the wider science and technology system, and economic and social sectors. A second test will be the simultaneous management by government (and HEIs, at institutional level) of system restructuring, system innovations and system maintenance. A third challenge will be the development at both system and institutional levels of consistent strength across the spectrum of areas.

- ***Reproducing and Transforming the Social Composition of a New Generation of Academics***

An issue that merits special attention is the reproduction and transformation of the social composition of the next generation of scholars and researchers.

From one angle – that of the current social composition of the South African academic labour force – there is a serious and immediate ‘crisis’ in employment equity. The roots of this crisis are well known. From another angle – a complex of factors including the age profile of the academic labour force; the remuneration of academics; the pull of the public (government, public enterprises and science councils) and private sectors, that offer considerably better remuneration; the opportunity costs for first-generation black graduates in terms of family expectations and deferred income; competition from knowledge-producing institutions; and the emigration of experienced and emerging scholars – the crisis is not immediate, but one that is looming. Over time it will become more pressing, unless action is taken in the near future.

The question can also be posed whether South Africa is nurturing future generations of critical scholars: the historians, sociologists, philosophers, educators and other scientists who are passionately committed both to justice and to honest, critical and independent scholarship; and who must be the critical voices and public intellectuals of our society. Unless higher education reproduces critical academics and researchers, its institutions will be impoverished, and South Africa will be poorer as a society.

- ***Monitoring and Evaluation***

Continuous and effective monitoring and evaluation of higher education is imperative both under conditions of intensive change and in ‘steady state’ conditions. Monitoring and evaluation should encompass the achievement of progress towards defined goals, the efficacy of instruments and mechanisms of change, and the processes of change themselves. A key challenge will be the buttressing of monitoring and evaluation processes by necessary investment in effective higher education management information systems for recording, analysing and presenting data on a variety of issues and areas of work.

- ***The Role of the State***

The successful transformation of higher education and HEIs cannot be left uniquely to the ‘market’ and ‘market forces’; nor will it be the result of individual and collective efforts of HEIs alone. The state has an indispensable role to play, while the mode of its involvement requires careful modulation.



The involvement and role of the state should be predicated on a fundamental commitment and respectful adherence to the principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom as necessary conditions for optimising the contribution of higher education to economic and social development. This is so notwithstanding the concomitant necessity for public accountability on the part of HEIs. Optimally, the state’s role should constitute a mode of involvement that is thoughtful and supervisory, creating an enabling higher education policy framework that includes appropriate substantive policies, predictability of policy and adequate public funding.

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It is necessary to comprehend the limits of Ministry of Education action in higher education change and transformation, and that of other national agencies. This is particularly the case when it comes to far-reaching goals such as the creation of 'a single national coordinated system'. The market, civil society and social forces internal to higher education and HEIs (not to mention other state departments), also impact on higher education and HEIs. This is especially the case where public subsidies to HEIs may be declining and new sources of revenue have to be found, and where considerable and even competing claims may be made on HEIs by the market and civil society (and other state departments).

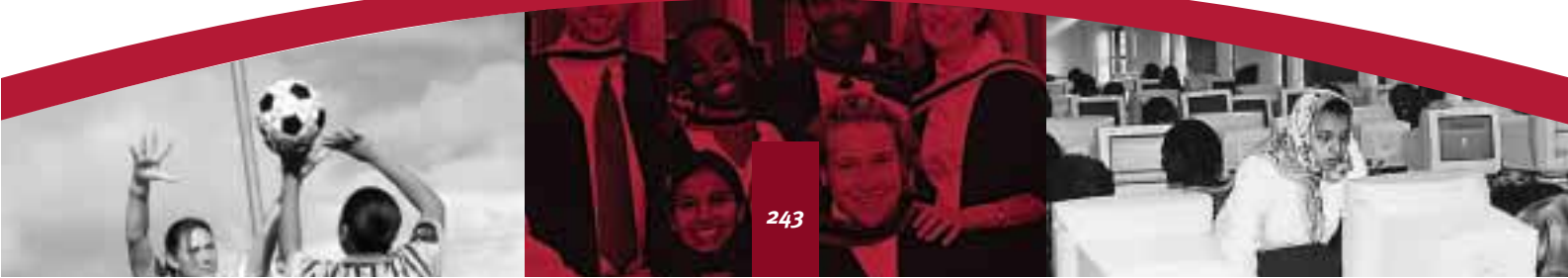
- **External Environment**

Notwithstanding political will, higher education cannot on its own transform society. Nor can it make an optimal contribution without an enabling external environment.

As a key example, internal changes in higher education will be limited, and the contribution of higher education to social equity and economic and social development reduced, if the fiscal environment is unduly constraining. The Ministry of Education's commitments to increasing enrolments, to a higher participation rate, and to access, equity and quality in higher education, will be handicapped if the state budget devoted to higher education is not adequate to achieve these goals. With the best will in the world, HEIs cannot become equitable, responsive and excellent in the quality of their teaching and learning, research and community engagement in the absence of the requisite resources and enabling environments.

Chapter Notes and References

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- ⁴ Cloete, Fehnel et al. 2002: 449-451.
- ⁵ Badat 2003: 13.
- ⁶ Jansen 2001: 42-43.
- ⁷ Kraak 2001: 86-96.
- ⁸ Cloete, Fehnel et al. 2002: Chapter 13; also see sections 2.2 and 2.4 of this report.
- ⁹ Badat 2003: 13-14.
- ¹⁰ Jansen 2001: 51-2.



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- ¹⁵ The following sections are adapted and summarised from Badat, S (2004). *Strategising Higher Education Transformation: 19 Propositions Suggested by the South African Higher Education Change Process*.