

FOREWORD

The process of the reconstruction and development of higher education in South Africa is part of the wider process of political democratization, economic reconstruction and development, and social redistribution. It takes place in a global context of multiple, interrelated and rapid changes in social, cultural and economic relations, typically referred to as globalization. These changes are largely enabled by a revolution in the development and application of information and communication technologies (ICTs). *The White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* of 1997 acknowledged the key role of the ICT revolution in globalization. The same understanding of the importance of ICTs in supporting and provoking global political, social and economic integration was reiterated by the Ministry of Education in its *National Plan for Higher Education* published in 2001. Moreover, the *National Plan* noted the critical and central role that higher education would have to play in contributing to the development of an information society in South Africa in terms of both skills development and research. Despite the realization of the importance of these issues, higher education as a sector has not really engaged with the implications of introducing ICTs into teaching, learning and research or with the conceptual and political frameworks informing this. At government level, the Ministry of Education has not yet focused on these issues and, in this sense, there has been no central steering of the development and application of ICTs in higher education in South Africa.

This issue of the *Higher Education Monitor* presents to the higher education community and its direct stakeholders, as well as to the interested public, a piece of research that seeks to illuminate some of the challenges presented by the utilization of ICTs in higher education. The work of Prof. Laura Czerniewicz, Dr Neetha Ravjee and Ms Nhlanhla Mlitwa is a first contribution of the CHE towards developing an understanding of the ways in which higher education institutions in South Africa have confronted the challenges posed by the information and technology revolution. In particular, this work reveals the ways in which researchers, practitioners, and policymakers understand ICTs, and how they see the relationship between ICTs and change in higher education.

This research is part of broader project of the CHE Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate focused on higher education and change. The project was made possible with generous funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. While the different pieces of research emanating from the project will be published together in book form later this year, this research report is published in its entirety owing to the topicality of the issue of ICTs in South African higher education and its importance for all public higher education institutions as well as for the broader South African society in a context of a relative dearth of research on this subject.

The CHE hopes that the report will generate further interest, discussion and research among higher education analysts, university and government officials, and also that the non-specialist public will find that it helps them to understand the implications of the information and technology revolution in South African higher education.

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