



***Review of Higher Education  
in South Africa***

***Selected Themes***

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***Council on Higher Education***

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PO Box 13354

The Tramshed

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South Africa

Tel. +27 12 392 9100

Fax. +27 12 392 9110

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## FOREWORD

The Council on Higher Education initiated this project in 2003 with generous funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. The original plan was to launch a review of higher education which was to appear every three years to take stock of the most important trends identified in the higher education system in South Africa against the backdrop of trends and changes identifiable in other higher education systems in developed and developing countries.

The transformation and restructuring of higher education in South Africa spans a number of issues, research into which could illuminate the intellectual, political and strategic concerns of a range of stakeholders. This book is a selection of papers on some of those issues, to some extent reflecting the responses of authors to the CHE's call for proposals. The CHE continues to address a number of issues related to the transformation and restructuring of higher education through a range of investigations and publications.

Because each chapter of the review was going to be research-based, the Council on Higher Education proposed to the Rockefeller Foundation that the project should also be used as a capacity development opportunity for a new generation of researchers in the field of higher education. This was agreed to. The funds provided helped to support ten postgraduate students at the masters and doctoral level who were part of the research teams.

The Council on Higher Education appointed an editorial committee consisting of experienced scholars and academic managers from the higher education system. This committee took intellectual responsibility for the direction of the project. A project management team from the Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate of the CHE provided coordination, administrative and technical support to the editorial team and the six research groups which responded to the call for papers made by the CHE.

Special thanks are due to the research teams and the editorial committee for their commitment and hard work and to the CHE appointed manager of the project, Mr Thierry Luescher, for his unfaltering support. The book would not have seen the light of day without the persistence and hard work of Dr Lis Lange of the CHE.

This book is the final product of an exercise which, for many reasons, including capacity, took much longer than expected. The CHE hopes that this publication will generate further discussion and research among higher education analysts, and officials from higher education and government. It is also hoped that the non-specialist public will find it useful to understand specific aspects of changes that have taken place in South African higher education since 1997.

*Dr Mala Singh*  
*Interim CEO: CHE*  
July 2007

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- Prof. Thomas auf der Heyde
- Prof. Cheryl de la Rey
- Prof. Jonathan Jansen
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- Dr Jairam Reddy
- Dr Mala Singh
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- Dr Lis Lange and
- Ms Svava Bjarnason.

We also appreciate the work of the peer reviewers who have commented on the draft research reports and/or draft chapters published in this volume.



## INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITORS

Since the demise of the apartheid order, South African higher education has seen massive changes which have left an indelible imprint on the system, its constituent institutions and practices. The first democratic government established a National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) which charted a programme of transformation for the sector. By 1997, key higher education policy and legislation informed by the work of the Commission was in place to enable the systematic programme for the transformation of higher education to unfold. In the decade since the adoption of the White Paper on Higher Education and the Higher Education Act, change has manifested on many fronts.

The celebration of a decade of democracy in South Africa in 2004 provided an opportunity for the large-scale review of the transformation process in higher education. To this end, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) published the study *South African Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy* in 2004, which accounted for the changes that had occurred in the preceding ten years, indicating the apartheid legacy, continuities and discontinuities in the system, the current situation and remaining challenges, and how these related to national policy. Overall the analysis indicated that by 2004 the foundations had been laid for the single, coordinated and differentiated system envisaged by the NCHE in 1996; a number of new organisations had been established by government and the sector to co-ordinate the higher education system including the Higher Education Branch in the national Department of Education, the Council on Higher Education and its Higher Education Quality Committee, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, and the South African Qualifications Authority and the National Qualifications Framework. New funding, planning and quality assurance instruments had been developed. A new institutional landscape was emerging with the process of mergers and incorporations among public institutions and the regulation of the private higher education sector which became subject to the same governance, qualification and quality assurance regime as public providers. Student enrolments had grown to a participation rate nearing 18 percent and the student body had become representative in terms of its 'racial' and gender composition and included also significant numbers of international students (CHE, 2004: 234-236). However, change did not proceed in a linear manner from policy formulation to implementation. Rather, the ten-year review concluded that the ongoing transformation of higher education was "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." (CHE, 2004: 234)

This new publication of the Council on Higher Education takes its point of departure from the system level analysis done in 2004 but proceeds differently. This Review of Higher Education in South Africa is an edited collection of research papers which analyse key trends in South African higher education in the context of international developments. It consists of

papers which provide succinct research-based analyses of six major issues in the process of transformation and restructuring of the higher education system: public funding, governance, information and communication technologies, institutional culture, access, and change.

In this introductory chapter we summarise the key claims, major findings and conclusions of the papers and point out areas for further research.

**Table 1: A summary of the key issues, question and finding for each theme**

Theme	Question	Claim or Finding
<b>Funding</b>	How has the higher education funding framework changed over time, and with what consequences for institutions?	That the higher education funding framework has evolved gradually over time and the New Funding Formula is more state-centred and less cost-related which creates new uncertainties for institutions
<b>Governance</b>	Does conditional autonomy in policy and implementation reduce university autonomy and academic freedom?	That in the light of the interdependence of the state and universities, a system of <i>deliberative democracy</i> is indispensable for the institutional autonomy and practices of academic freedom in universities
<b>Technology</b>	How do practitioners and researchers working in higher education institutions understand ICTs and their relation to change?	That among practitioners and researchers, and in the absence of national policy on ICTs, there is a diverse set of meanings and uses for ICTs and its relation to change – from improvement, to innovation, to transformation
<b>Institutional Culture</b>	What are the problems inherent in the uses of the term <i>institutional culture</i> in South African higher education?	That institutional culture is an unstable term, not a concept, that has many and complex meanings depending on who is using it and for what purposes; and that its deployment to cover everything limits its value in universities
<b>Access</b>	What are the factors that facilitate or impede access, equity and success for adult learners in universities?	That while the majority of students in higher education are adult learners, they remain poorly and unequally served at all levels of the university, a problem exacerbated by poor information and monitoring of this group
<b>Change</b>	What are the major currents of change in South African higher education and what do they mean, given changes elsewhere?	That change in higher education, whether planned or incidental, takes its pace and direction from a range of complex variables, shaped by particular institutional contexts; it cannot be linear, predictable or uniform even within a single national context

## 1. THE MAJOR RESEARCH CLAIMS

A summary of the major research question addressed in each paper, and the main corresponding knowledge claim of each contribution, is captured in Table I.

### ***Public Funding***

The chapter by Gert Steyn and Pierre de Villiers on *The Public Funding of Higher Education* provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of funding mechanisms for universities and technikons in South Africa over the last 50 years. The authors show how the different funding formulae are reflections of different values and degrees of market orientation of subsequent governments, and how in monetary terms the effective funding allocations were developed for a sample of universities and technikons. Looking beyond the funding formulae to other public funding over time, Steyn and de Villiers make a case both, for the maintenance of funding by formula and for the re-introduction of earmarked public funding for certain capital-intensive projects at higher education institutions.

Further research with a focus on the political economy of higher education funding is needed in order to understand better the political and fiscal context within which the public funding of higher education has evolved. What explains the cautious, evolutionary approach to changes in higher education finance which the authors have observed? There are several possibilities. One possible explanation is that the allocation of public funding to higher education must be understood in relation to the overall fiscal regime. Government's commitment to fiscal discipline within an overall liberal macro-economic framework precluded many of the radical changes to the distribution of resources which had been advocated by the anti-apartheid movement. Thus, for instance, there was no massive funding redirected from the historically white and privileged components of the higher education sector to the largely rural, black and marginalized segments of the national system of universities. Actual redress funding was insignificant in volume to make any impact on the scale of inequality between former white and former black universities; moreover, this small scale funding, even if available on a year to year basis, simply did not have any impact on institutions which were experiencing various degrees of crises of governance. Furthermore, as previously white universities and technikons started to deracialize their student bodies, the binary arguments of 'historically white' and 'historically black' universities became less helpful to analyse the reality of the higher education system. What challenges does this situation pose to the implementation of a higher education funding formula which is responsive to both social justice objectives and the needs of the country in terms of the production of high-level skills and research outputs? Moreover, how effective has funding been as a steering mechanisms to bring about change in higher education, to what extent there has been an alignment between funding and the other two steering instruments chosen for the transformation of higher education: planning and quality assurance? These are some of the questions new research on the funding of higher education will need to engage with to complete our understanding of the impact of funding on higher education.

## ***Technology***

The power of technologies in education lies in the fact that they serve both symbolic and practical purposes. As a symbolic value, the physical presence of information technologies signals progress, advancement and all the trappings of being modern – which explains why computers appear so prominently in the advertising media of schools and universities. As a practical subject, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) offer powerful capacities for linking students and staff, lecture rooms and conferences to people and programmes throughout the planet, in real time.

The chapter by Laura Czerniewicz, Neetha Ravjee and Nhlanhla Mlitwa entitled *ICTs and South African Higher Education*, offers a broad description of the meanings of ICTs in South African universities and maps ICTs in public higher education as an emerging field of enquiry and educational policy. The authors find that the discourses of ICTs in South African higher education are inextricably linked to a discourse of “change”. However, change and the role of ICTs in change processes is viewed in different ways. One prevailing notion of change is that of *improvement*. In this sense, ICTs are linked to expectations of efficiency gains and enhanced learning experiences. A second notion of change in this context is *innovation*. The application of ICTs is embedded in the idea of an emergent knowledge society. Here the emphasis is not, as under the improvement paradigm, on the addition of new elements to make an existing system more efficient, but rather on doing things differently. It is primarily amongst the members of this latter discourse community that attention is paid to the pedagogic implications of the application of ICTs in teaching and learning. The implications of this approach can also be clustered as part of a much more critical discourse of change as *transformation* and the integration of ICTs in teaching and learning as an opportunity to re-think teaching and learning practice.

Computers have become a ubiquitous feature of South African universities and yet there is tremendous unevenness in institutional policy development, physical infrastructure, delivery capability and practitioner understandings of ICTs, their meaning and their potential for educational change. The obvious point is that historical privilege and disadvantage are reflected once again in the observations about who has access to ICTs and who does not. ICT provision offers opportunities to exploit these technologies in teaching and learning, in student administration such as online registrations, as well as to expedite the research opportunities and linkages for academics, and to inform parents and other clients with necessary information about people and programmes. In a poor country, where investments in R&D remain comparatively low and where institutions function competitively and, with rare exception, in isolation of strong partnerships, the great IT divide may remain a fixed feature of the higher education landscape unless a concerted effort is made and ICT policy-makers and developers become mindful of local strengths. There is too little said about perhaps one of the most efficient mechanisms for advancing learning in universities in poor countries – M-learning (i.e. the application of mobile technology in education). Czerniewicz *et al* argue that a national policy framework on ICT and a mechanism to channel funding for the purpose of ICT development could go some way in eliminating backlogs.

The chapter invites for further research in a number of dimensions of the topic. Most apparent is the need for a similar study that explores ICTs in distance education in South Africa, which was beyond the scope of this paper. More theoretical work on the role of ICTs in a national context like South Africa will also be required towards building an understanding of the real potential of ICTs in developing countries characterised by extreme social inequalities.

### ***System Governance and Autonomy***

The ongoing debate on the nature and extent of external regulation of higher education is spawning a rich literature on the meanings of the institutional autonomy of universities, academic freedom, and public accountability in the democratic dispensation. The chapter by Penny Enslin, Felicity Coughlan, Joseph Divala, Mike Kissack and Thokozani Mathebula adds a further contribution to the debate. The authors of the chapter on *System Governance, Public Accountability and Institutional Autonomy* take a normative stance in their discussion of the involvement of government and other agencies in South African higher education. They have chosen to discuss the relevance and practical implications of the principles and practices of *deliberative democracy* for university governance in South Africa and investigate whether the formal provisions for systemic governance in relevant policy and legislation lend themselves to the practice of deliberative democracy.

At the outset, Enslin and her team contrast the tenets of deliberative democracy to those of the “aggregative” model of democracy. Rather than relying on a count of votes to determine who takes decisions or to actually decide on a matter, deliberative democracy emphasizes the free and equal participation of all citizens in the process of public deliberation based on the principles of deliberative publicity. The authors then apply the perspective of deliberative democracy to higher education. In particular, four dimensions for potential deliberative practice in universities are identified by the authors. These include the deliberative practices in a university’s core functions of teaching, learning and research; the internal governance of institutions; the relationship of the university to society in terms of its role as a repository of deliberative resources; and lastly, the external regulation of the university.

The main propositions held by the authors open a number of areas for debate and further research. Can deliberation as an intellectual attitude prevalent at higher education institutions, be equated with deliberative democracy? What would be the practical implications of the application of deliberative democracy for the actual governance processes and structures which organise life at universities? How should a democratic state committed to redress and social justice relate to higher education institutions, and what should be the relationship between these institutions and the state? What is the role of new managerialism at universities themselves in undermining deliberative processes?

The key question that emerges from the chapter – What would the pre-requisites be for deliberative democracy as a culture of governance to emerge in South African higher education? – remains to be answered in such a way that takes into account a differentiated approach to state steering in line with institutional capacity on the ground (Du Toit, 2005: 5).

### ***Institutional Culture***

John Higgins takes on *Institutional Culture* in his contribution to this book. He designates the term 'institutional culture' not as a concept but (following Raymond Williams) as a *keyword* – i.e. “an item of contested vocabulary in a conflictual and disputed social process.” Higgins critically examines the ways in which 'institutional culture' is deployed as a means towards understanding what may be involved in the successful transformation of higher education. Treating 'institutional culture' in this manner is not about selecting a definition as the “‘true’ or ‘proper’ or ‘scientific’ sense and dismissing other senses as loose or confused” (Williams, 1983: 91, cited by Higgins). The difficulty with the term is not the reality it refers to; “it is rather the fact that naming that reality is part and parcel of a series of complex arguments about the future of higher education in South Africa in which there are (in Williams’ terms) ‘fundamentally opposed as well as effectively overlapping positions’.” To start out, Higgins states that 'institutional culture' has become a buzzword which is deployed “to explain or explain away phenomena as different (or as related) as marking and manslaughter”. He argues that the wide range of uses of the term gives the impression that institutional culture “may well be the key to the successful transformation of higher education in South Africa” or, conversely, its main obstacle. Yet, its meaning is perplexingly difficult to pin down.

One sense in which 'institutional culture' has come to be used in South African higher education is as a critique of the ostensible 'whiteness' of academic culture. Institutional culture as 'whiteness' refers to that which is experienced by black staff and students as alienating and disempowering in their encounters within historically white universities. Yet the findings of a study on institutional culture conducted at the University of Cape Town lead Higgins to argue that 'race' which offers itself quite apparently as the most “obvious and immediate factor in the experience of alienation and anomie, may well be a secondary phenomenon in terms of explanation”.

Some of the questions raised by this argument which merit further debate are, whether it is possible to diminish the weight of 'race' in an analysis of institutional culture in South Africa. How is cultural capital defined and constructed and what is its role in shaping institutional culture in colonial/postcolonial situations? What are the conditions of possibility and terms of reference for a debate about institutional culture in South Africa which can examine the very concepts that are used to explain the problem?

Higgins also points to a second sense in which 'institutional culture' is used in South African higher education. In this use, “institutional culture names the contested terrain of power and authority between administrators and academics as South Africa adopts and adapts global initiatives in the neo-liberal reform of universities”. From the perspective of the administrative reformists, the institutional culture has to be brought in line with 'the logic of accountability' and the need for the University to 'pursue excellence'. From the perspective of academics, in contrast, institutional culture is a complex mosaic of disciplinary values and cultures which are constitutive

of academic activity. The ensuing tension between the administrators' instrumentalist view and the academics' constitutive view of institutional culture is a replica of a much larger ongoing debate about the purposes of higher education in a developing, democratising society.

### ***Access and Success of Adult Learners***

The chapter by Michelle Buchler, Jane Castle, Ruksana Osman and Shirley Walters flows from their comparative study of *Equity, Access and Success of Adult Learners* in South African higher education. The researchers have analysed national public higher education data and conducted three case studies of different public universities to arrive at their conclusions. For analytical purposes, the team defined 'adult learner' as students enrolled in higher education who are 23 years or older. Thereby they contrast adult learners from the traditional straight-from-matric university students. The analysis of HEMIS<sup>1</sup> data provides the authors with an incipient system level picture of the participation of adult learners in public higher education institutions.

Case studies of adult learning at the University of the Western Cape, the University of the Witwatersrand and the Vaal University of Technology including interviews with academics, administrators and adult learners go some way in mapping the factors involved in the participation of adult learners (which exceeds 50% of total enrolments), especially such factors which may facilitate or hinder equity, access and success. The authors find that adult education remains unevenly provided within higher education, that institutions are cautious about granting access through the route of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and that "while adult learners are accessing higher education, they are not necessarily 'workers'." The typical adult learner accessing higher education in the three case institutions comes from a lower middle-class background, is black and the first generation in his/her family to enter higher education. He or she has family responsibilities (married or not) and is likely to be in full-time employment. Career progression and job security are the key motivations behind adult learners' educational effort. In effect, adult learning in higher education is less about providing access to the underserved and the unemployed; this group is actually overshadowed by participation of the professional classes in the over-23 years of age category of enrolments. In spite of their difficulty of "juggling family, work and community responsibilities alongside their study commitment", these highly motivated adult learners in all three case studies and selected programmes demonstrate significantly better retention rates and graduation rates than their younger class-mates. This finding is the more significant given that the authors generally found a lack of specific institutionalized support and commitment to this group of students.

At the policy level the question raised by this chapter is what is the place of adult learners in higher education policy? What has been the actual impact of the National Qualifications Framework in facilitating the democratisation of knowledge? What is the place of the different components of the South African education system in producing the skills and knowledge required for equitable socio-economic development?

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<sup>1</sup> The Department of Education's Higher Education Management Information System.

### ***Change in Higher Education***

The final chapter of this book has been prepared by Jonathan Jansen and a team of researchers from the University of Pretoria. *Tracing and Explaining Change in Higher Education: The South African Case* surveys and categorises research on South African higher education; it points out what are considered the five most important changes in South African Higher Education; it then examines policy changes and responses to them in two case studies, one focused on the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework at the University of Pretoria and the other focused on private higher education. Lastly, the chapter seeks to put change in South African higher education in the context of higher education changes at a global level.

The authors start out by identifying five major changes in South African higher education since the middle 1990s: the changing institutional landscape, the rise of private higher education, new modes of delivery, the changing value of academic programmes, and changes in the academic workplace precipitated by the rise of managerialism. Later in the chapter, the authors add the reorganisation of the qualifications system to this list and examine the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework as the key policy instrument in this regard. This and the case study of the regulation of private higher education in South Africa in the chapter offer some counter-intuitive findings and conclusions.

The chapter shows how national trends in South Africa find their parallel in patterns of change in the rest of the world: the massification of higher education, the decline of the humanities, the shift towards mixed modes of delivery (distance and online learning alongside contact tuition, for example), the rise of accountability regimes, and the displacement of the collegial ethos of traditional universities with a creeping managerialism inside institutions. The two most prominent examples of higher education reform are also reflected in international higher education: the rise of national qualifications frameworks and the growth of international private higher education. Is this a case of reform mimicry? Certainly, change in South African higher education has been framed within the wider neo-liberal project that precipitated similar developments elsewhere; yet, there is a significant progressive dimension prompted by the urgency of equity and development in this country which adds qualitatively different characteristics to the change process. Albeit institutional, cultural and political forces within the country have given the various aspects of change and similar-sounding terms, they may have in fact very different features and outcomes here than in other parts of the globe.

The chapter raises questions about the content of a possible theorisation of change in higher education, the extent to which seemingly conservative policy instruments can be used to produce progressive effects. How do local and global pressures for change intersect and with what effect? How do institutional and state agency combine in the terrain of policy implementation to produce change in higher education?



The editorial committee of the Review would like to thank the authors and critical readers who participated in the production of this publication. We hope that their reading will generate much needed debate and critical engagement, and theoretical development among higher education scholars.

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Du Toit, A. 2005. Jansen vs. Jansen. Recasting the Autonomy Debate: T.B. Davie in a Time of Accountability, Managerialism and Mergers. Paper presented at the CHET Seminar: Beginning the “Real Debate” on Changing Governance Relationships in Higher Education. 02 March 2005.

# PUBLIC FUNDING OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA BY MEANS OF FORMULAE<sup>1</sup>

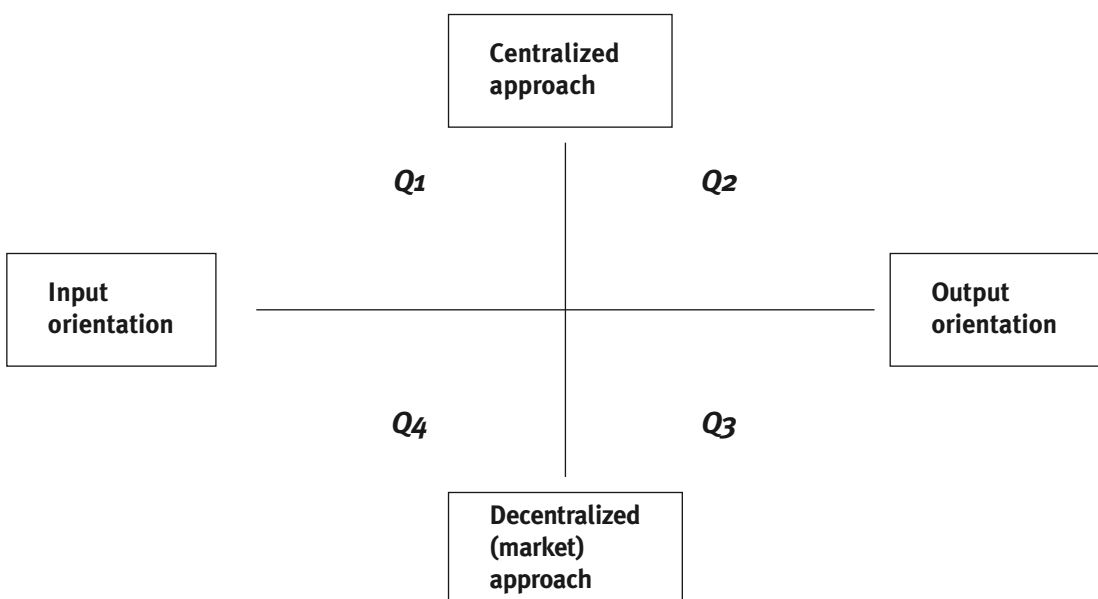
*A G W Steyn and A P de Villiers*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jongbloed (2004) perceives of public funding of higher education (HE) as falling into two categories, namely, the funding base, on the one hand, and the degree of market orientation, on the other. The funding base determines whether the funding allocations are tied to educational outputs of performance or to educational inputs. The degree of market orientation is determined by the degree to which publicly funded students or funded programmes are regulated by central authorities or by the decisions of the clients themselves (students, private firms, research councils). All possible combinations of answers to these two questions define a two dimensional plane containing a wide variety of public funding models for HE as indicated in the schematic representation in Figure 1.

In his paper, Jongbloed identifies the characteristics of the four generic funding models associated with the four quadrants Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 in his graphic classification model. His classification is useful in understanding the different formulae used since 1953 by the South African government to subsidize universities and technikons. Jongbloed's classification is discussed more fully later in this chapter.

**Figure 1: Two-dimensional positioning of HE funding schemes**



<sup>1</sup> This chapter is drawn from a research report prepared for the Council on Higher Education. The report is available from the CHE (2005).

The New Funding Framework (NFF) for Public Higher Education, which has been applied by the South African government since the 2004/05 financial year (Ministry of Education, 2003), could in some senses be regarded as the result of an evolutionary process of formula funding that started more than 50 years ago in 1953 with the introduction of the so-called Holloway formula for universities. This process may even have started earlier, but it is difficult to access the necessary official documentation in order to verify this. Some valuable lessons can be learnt from this evolutionary process, which may influence future developments in and adjustments to public funding of HE institutions in South Africa.

An overview of the forerunners of the new framework for public HE funding, as well as a short exposition and critical analysis of the NFF itself and the consequences of its application will be given in this chapter. Before giving the overview, the benefits accruing from public funding by means of a formula are articulated.

## **2. BENEFITS OF STATE SUBSIDIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BY MEANS OF A FORMULA**

A State subsidy policy based on a well-defined and transparent formula has several advantages, the most important of which are the following:

- A subsidy formula ensures that funding takes place in a fair and objective way, without taking subjective considerations into account. It therefore usually depoliticizes the allocation of funds to a large extent.
- A subsidy formula can be regarded as a contract between two parties, in this case the State, represented by the Minister of Education, and a HE institution. The State provides funds to institutions for specific educational purposes, while the institution renders these educational services to the public.
- Funding based on a subsidy formula gives greater recognition to the autonomy of an institution, as the State usually (except in the case of limited earmarked amounts) does not prescribe how the allocated amount should be spent. This differs radically from the so-called needs-based budgeting with extensive earmarking of amounts.
- A subsidy formula ensures that the rules for funding are known in advance and therefore promotes medium and even long-term planning by an institution.
- Subsidy formulae are designed to be flexible in order to accommodate as many fluctuating factors (input parameters) as possible. Cost escalation is an example of such a factor and needs to be incorporated in any legitimate subsidy formula. However, since a subsidy formula cannot discount all (sometimes institutional specific) factors, it is only an approximation and indicates a funding model for a representative institution.

A disadvantage of any formula-based funding mechanism is that the clients served by the formula will inevitably start to exploit the formula after a year or two by finding loopholes in its composition or in the definition or calculation of the input parameters. It is therefore crucial for the State to

perceive of any subsidy formula as dynamic and while it is contra-productive to revise the formula annually, it should at least be scrutinized every five years for possible revision. External factors, such as the country's macro-economic situation or the country's person power needs, could also necessitate adjustments to the formula.

### **3. THE EVOLUTION OF FUNDING MECHANISMS FOR UNIVERSITIES AND TECHNIKONS SINCE 1951**

Since 1951 and until the NFF was introduced in 2004/05, four formulae have been used as a basis for funding universities. A complete description of these formulae is outlined in the Report of the Holloway Commission (1951), the Report of the Van Wyk de Vries Commission (1974), the Venter Report (1985) and two reports of the former Department of National Education in 1992, namely, the report of the *Departement van Nasionale Opvoeding* (NASOP 02-325[92/11]) and the report of the Department of National Education (NATED 01-326[92/11]). A brief and non-technical outline (and an analysis) of the State funding frameworks for universities and technikons used since 1993 (subsidy formulae and earmarked funding) is included in Chapter 8 of the report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (1996). Steyn and Vermeulen (1997) provide a detailed summary and discussion of the interrelationships among the four formulae.

The so-called Holloway formula, emanating from the report of the Holloway Commission appointed by government in 1951 to investigate university financing, was introduced in 1953 and was used as the State's funding instrument until the early 1970s. The discontinuance of the use of the Holloway formula followed an interim recommendation by the Van Wyk de Vries Commission of Enquiry into universities. Although this Commission was appointed by government in 1968 and completed its final report in 1974, the funding formula for universities that they proposed was only implemented in 1977. After the termination of the use of the Holloway formula, but before the Van Wyk de Vries formula was implemented, universities were funded for a few years in an *ad hoc* way. The so-called South African Post Secondary Education Information System (SAPSE) subsidy formula for universities was implemented in 1984 and revised for implementation in 1993. An adaptation of the earlier (1984) version of the SAPSE formula was introduced in 1987 as a basis for subsidizing technikons. This technikon subsidy formula was completely revised and put into effect in 1993. The SAPSE subsidy formulae for the funding of universities and technikons, respectively, were used for the allocation of subsidies to universities and technikons until the 2003/04 financial year, when the NFF came into effect.

The four subsidy formulae mentioned above were used as a basis for subsidizing both the current expenditure and the expenditure on some types of fixed assets of institutions. The acquisition of land, the erection of new buildings and land improvements other than buildings, as well as some other smaller *ad hoc* expenses of institutions (for example, property rates) were traditionally not funded by these formulae. The history of funding mechanisms for new buildings

and other land improvements (e.g. parking areas and pathways) of universities and technikons over the past 50 years is dealt with later in Paragraph 3.9.

### **3.1. THE HOLLOWAY FORMULA (1953)**

The Holloway formula acknowledges three types of needs of an institution. In terms of the terminology and notation used at the time, it can be written as:

$$F(H) = Sb + Ss + A$$

where:

$S_b$  = Basic instructional (teaching) provision (independent of the number of students).

$S_s$  = Standard instructional provision (depending partly on student numbers).

A = Cost of living allowance allocated to personnel on an ad hoc basis since 1959.

The component  $S_b$  represents the remuneration of the lecturers in acknowledged 'basic' academic departments, as well as the remuneration of librarians. The remuneration of other academic personnel that forms part of component  $S_s$  is determined independently by the total number of student courses (modules) in the different faculties, namely, Arts, Science, Commerce and Administration, Education, Applied Sciences, and Medicine and Dentistry. The remainder of  $S_s$  is determined by the number of full-time students (for funding the library), as well as the number of laboratory courses (for funding laboratory equipment), while a fixed percentage of the provision for remuneration of academics is added for the cost of administration and other recurrent expenditures at institutions. Unisa – for Open and Distance Learning – was funded according to the same formula, but with different cost factors.

An amount ( $k \times S_s$  with  $0 < k < 1$ ), known as the standard student fee income, where  $k$  is determined by the actual number of students of a specific institution, is deducted from  $F(H)$  in order to determine the final State subsidy for a particular institution.

The Holloway formula was used for 20 years to determine the respective subsidies for South African universities. During this period, minor revisions of the formula were implemented in 1959, 1964 and 1969. Problems in the application of the Holloway formula arose when some universities exploited it by artificially subdividing academic courses in smaller units to receive a greater subsidy. A further major deficiency in this formula was that it did not provide for annual cost increases accruing from inflation – a phenomenon that only became significant in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

### **3.2. THE VAN WYK DE VRIES FORMULA (1977)**

Because of the in-depth research conducted by the Van Wyk de Vries Commission, the formula proposed by the Commission introduced some well-considered, new principles, while retaining the best features of the Holloway formula. Two of these features, namely, a basic provision to

institutions (independent of institutional size) and the sharing of the cost between the State and the institution, were retained in both the Van Wyk de Vries subsidy formula and later in the SAPSE subsidy formula. The Van Wyk de Vries formula was clearly related to the Holloway formula, but incorporated a number of significant improvements.

First, weighted student numbers are the basic input parameters of the formula. Two bases of weighting are used, namely, course level (undergraduate students weight = 1, Honours students weight = 2 and Master's and doctoral students weight = 3) and mode of instruction (undergraduate full-time students weight = 1, undergraduate part-time students weight = 0.75 and non-residential (Unisa) undergraduate students weight = 0.33). The weighted student numbers for a given funding year (say year  $n$ ) are projected from observed weighted numbers in years  $n-1$  and  $n-2$ . Secondly, the Van Wyk de Vries formula is more nuanced than the Holloway formula. This can be seen from the following formula equation of the Van Wyk de Vries formula:

$$F(VW) = g \cdot (S_{dep} + S_{adm} + Lib + Lab + Res + RT + CS + MB)$$

where:

$g$  = Government contribution ratio (ranging between 75% and 85%) discounting the economy of scale at institutions. This ratio replaces the practice, used in the Holloway formula, of deducting a standard student fee income from the formula amount.

$S_{dep}$  = Remuneration (salaries plus fringe benefits) of all personnel in academic departments determined by weighted student numbers via student-lecturer ratios, as well as student-support staff ratios (which are different for the Human Sciences, Natural Sciences and Medical Sciences). Fixed post-level ratio norms for the provision of academic personnel are used (professors: 20%, senior lecturers: 25%, lecturers: 40% and junior lecturers: 15%).  $S_{dep}$  also incorporates a basic or minimum provision for all institutions.

$S_{adm}$  = Remuneration of central university administration personnel determined as remuneration of five senior officials (with a maximum of a professor's remuneration) plus a fixed percentage of  $S_{dep}$ .

$Lib$  = Library allocation. Remuneration of Head (a maximum remuneration of a professor) plus fixed percentage of  $S_{dep}$ . Allocations for books and journals are based on weighted student numbers according to groups.

$Lab$  = Allocation for laboratories according to weighted student numbers according to faculty groups.

- Res* = Allocation for research by means of a fixed percentage of  $S_{dep}$
- RT* = Recurrent expenditure for teaching according to weighted student number.
- CS* = Allocation for computer services mainly based on student numbers and a few other factors. (In 1977 this expenditure was still relatively small – only about 3% of total subsidy.)
- MB* = Maintenance of buildings, campus grounds and furniture based on a headcount of students.

National fixed salary scales for academic personnel and annually determined subsidy points (salary level indicators) for the salaries of non-academic personnel are used in the formula for the calculation of  $S_{dep}$  and  $S_{adm}$ .

The Van Wyk de Vries formula introduced a few important, new funding principles, for example, the weighting of student numbers and a standard basket (post-level ratio norms) of posts for academic personnel. Furthermore, it attempted to model the most important expenditure categories of universities. Unfortunately, this formula still had the deficiency of not providing annually for the inflation in HE costs.

### **3.3. THE SAPSE FORMULA FOR UNIVERSITIES (1984)**

The comprehensive SAPSE information system was applied in various policy instruments developed by the former Department of National Education in the 1980s. One of the most noteworthy was the SAPSE subsidy formula for universities.

The SAPSE formula for universities was originally designed for the universities falling under the House of Assembly in the so-called tri-cameral government system of the 1980s, that is, the formerly white universities (or the HAUs), in an era when there was large-scale fragmentation of the university sector. The SAPSE formula of 1984 was based on the assumption that students are the best judges of their own welfare and therefore are best informed in deciding which programme to enrol for. The SAPSE formula and the later revised SAPSE subsidy formula of 1993 were therefore (like the Van Wyk de Vries formula) enrolment driven with funding following students as they enrolled at institutions of their choice. It can therefore, in the context of Figure 1, be considered as a market-driven formula.

Soon after the development of the SAPSE formula, this formula was also applied to the other universities, namely, the historically disadvantaged universities (HDUs), which politically and administratively fell under the administration of the House of Representatives, the House of Delegates (both within the tri-cameral system) and under the Minister of Education and Training

(a “general affairs” ministry responsible for universities for black South Africans). Following an agreement between the Republic of South Africa (RSA) government and the Ciskei government in the 1980s, the University of Fort Hare was also funded by means of the SAPSE subsidy formula via the portfolio of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Effective Subsidy Students (ESS) form the basic input parameter of the SAPSE subsidy formula. ESS combines full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolled and FTE degree credit students (i.e. the total credits of all the modules successfully completed by enrolled students) in equal proportions (weights), and weighs the resultant figures by course level, then adds 1000 so-called set-up cost students to the result. The course level weights are an extension of the weights used for enrolled students in the Van Wyk de Vries formula, namely, the first three years of a first Bachelor’s degree have a weight of 1, further years of a first Bachelor’s degree, as well as the Honours degree, have a weight of 2, the Master’s degree a weight of 3, and the doctoral degree a weight of 4. In the calculation of ESS for distance tuition, one subsidy student counts only 0.67 of the corresponding value for contact tuition.

All instructional “offerings” or modules on offer are divided according to the category of their field of study in the Classification of Education Subject Matter (CESM) into either Natural Sciences or Human Sciences, and ESS are calculated separately for these two groups. The 1000 set-up cost ESS are also divided – 400 for Natural Sciences and 600 for Human Sciences. These two ESS values are represented in short by  $S_N$  and  $S_H$ , respectively. The two ESS calculations for year  $n$  are determined by means of a projection formula based on the ESS for year  $n-2$  and  $n-3$ . The projection formula takes into consideration the fact that the most recent FTE student numbers available in year  $n-1$ , when the State budget for year  $n$  is drafted, is for year  $n-2$ . The projection formula provides protection against widely fluctuating ESS numbers.

Research output (indicated by  $A$ ), measured in terms of units calculated by the former Department of National Education on the basis of approved publications (in the form of articles in accredited journals, patents and books for the subject specialist), also generates subsidy (over and above the so-called blind research provision component based on  $S_N$  and  $S_H$ ) to universities.

The SAPSE formula can be broken down into more than one hundred components according to HE activities (Programme Classification System [PCS] in the SAPSE system) and HE expenditure categories. It is thus a much more refined formula than the Holloway and Van Wyk de Vries formulae. Only a simplified/summarized version of this detailed formula is discussed here, starting with the formula as the product of three factors:



$$F(\text{SAPSE}) = a.g.R$$

where

- $a$  = Scale factor in the subsidy formula, known as the *a factor*, (with  $a \leq 1$ ) representing the capacity of the State to fund the subsidy formula
- $g$  = Government contribution ratio, based on a sliding scale, to ensure a significant institutional contribution (mainly from tuition fees) to the institutional budget
- $R$  = Total (theoretical) amount needed by a university to function in a specific year. It can be summarized as follows –

$$R = B_N S_N + B_H S_H + D_N I_N + D_H I_H + E_1 L + E_2 M + F_1 V + F_2 W + H.A + J.X + K.Y$$

Provision is made in the formula for additional equipment and library collections for institutions if one or both of the projected  $S_N$  or  $S_H$  values in year  $n$  increases to a level or levels exceeding the previous maximum values of  $S_N$  or  $S_H$ .  $I_N$  and  $I_H$  are the growth in  $S_N$  and  $S_H$  above these previous highest values. This is a new and very important principle in HE formula funding.

$R$  also includes subsidy components for maintaining the institutional housing (mainly residences), for infrastructure (buildings, furniture and equipment) and for the provision of new furniture and equipment when FTE students using institutional housing  $L$  and the FTE students not using the housing  $M$  increase.  $V$  and  $W$  are the respective growth in  $L$  and  $M$  above their respective previous highest values. The inclusion of residential and non-residential students as input parameter to the subsidy formula is also a new principle in HE funding.

For institutions with Veterinary Science training (that is, only the University of Pretoria following the amalgamation of the two faculties of Veterinary Science at Medunsa and Pretoria in the middle 1990s), the number of experiential training students ( $X$ ) and the increase in these students above the previous maximum ( $Y$ ) also generate subsidy.

The coefficients in  $R$ , namely,  $B_N$ ,  $B_H$ ,  $D_N$ ,  $D_H$ ,  $E_1$ ,  $E_2$ ,  $F_1$ ,  $F_2$ ,  $H$ ,  $J$  and  $K$ , are all linear functions of 10 cost units  $C1$ ,  $C2$ , ... ,  $C10$  that relate to current or fixed asset expenditure and reflect unit costs of specific types of expenditure in HE institutions in the funding year. The cost units are:

- $C1$  = Remuneration of instruction/research personnel
- $C2$  = Remuneration of other personnel (all personnel excluding instruction/research personnel and service workers)
- $C3$  = Remuneration of service workers
- $C4$  = Supplies and services
- $C5$  = Building and other land improvements
- $C6$  = Equipment
- $C7$  = Books (Human Sciences)
- $C8$  = Books (Natural Sciences)
- $C9$  = Journals (Human Sciences)
- $C10$  = Journals (Natural Sciences)

As the above-mentioned cost units have been updated annually by means of projections based on nationally determined indicators to provide for cost escalation at universities, the SAPSE formula is self-adjusting from year to year as far as inflation is concerned. It is important to note that, with the implementation of the SAPSE formula for universities in 1984, State subsidization was for the first time not only based on input parameters, but also on institutional output, that is, courses successfully completed by students (degree credits) and research output of personnel.

The fact that the SAPSE subsidy formula was a linear function of the ESS and that great emphasis was placed on the provision of new fixed assets on account of growth in the ESS led to a significant decrease in the  $a$ -value for the university sector and in the respective  $a$ -values for individual institutions during the years 1986 to 1992. These  $a$ -values are shown in Table 1. The reason for this was that some universities' FTE students increased annually during this period to such an extent that government was compelled not only to decrease the  $a$ -value for the university sector as a whole, but also to introduce unequal  $a$ -values for institutions. This effectively suspended the formula (albeit temporarily) and led to an acknowledgement by the government at the time that the SAPSE subsidy formula has the unforeseen negative consequence of provoking unrealistically high student growth. The revision of the formula in 1993 mainly addressed this problem. Apart from the downscaling of some coefficients in the SAPSE formula, ceilings to the annual growth in student numbers to be subsidized were set for both contact and distance education students.

### **3.4. REVISED SAPSE SUBSIDY FORMULA FOR UNIVERSITIES (1993)**

As a result of the aforementioned problems with the SAPSE formula of 1984 and other criticisms against some aspects of the formula, a revision of the formula was undertaken by the Advisory Council for Universities and Technikons (AUT) in 1991. The approved revised formula was used for the first time to calculate university subsidies for the 1993/94 financial year. A complete exposition of the revised SAPSE formula for universities is set out in the report NASOP 02-325 (92/11) of the Department of National Education (1992). The most important alterations of the 1984 formula were:

1. The subsidy per ESS in the Natural Sciences was increased relative to the subsidy per ESS in the Human Sciences.
2. The subsidization of new fixed assets based on growth in the ESS in both the two science groups was decreased significantly.
3. The projection formula for the ESS was revised in such a way that, as far as current expenditure was concerned, only an annual projected increase in ESS of 2.5% for contact tuition and 5% for distance tuition would be subsidized. This modification ensured that the State was no longer liable for the funding of irresponsible growth in the university sector. It also paved the way for equal and stable  $a$ -values from year to year as can be seen in Table 1.

The SAPSE subsidy formula for universities as revised was used unaltered by the State for 11 years from 1993 until 2003.

**Table 1: *a*-Values of State subsidy allocations to universities for the years 1986-2003 according to institution and year**

UNIVERSITY	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Unisa	0.833	0.696	0.748	0.806	0.658	0.726	0.814	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Pretoria	0.833	0.833	0.744	0.772	0.792	0.712	0.626	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Witwatersrand	0.833	0.833	0.703	0.838	0.857	0.778	0.730	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
RAU	0.833	0.834	0.703	0.791	0.744	0.649	0.623	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Potchefstroom	0.833	0.834	0.815	0.784	0.893	0.869	0.851	0.752	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Orange Free State	0.833	0.833	0.736	0.800	0.761	0.761	0.697	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Port Elizabeth	0.833	0.834	0.773	0.817	0.825	0.749	0.732	0.662	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Rhodes	0.833	0.833	0.723	0.831	0.812	0.737	0.671	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Stellenbosch	0.833	0.833	0.807	0.812	0.832	0.756	0.724	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Cape Town	0.833	0.833	0.725	0.740	0.737	0.711	0.628	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Natal	0.833	0.834	0.745	0.785	0.775	0.686	0.599	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Durban Westville	0.853	0.900	0.886	0.767	0.832	0.683	0.642	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6735	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Western Cape	0.913	0.834	0.990	0.495	0.670	0.458	0.505	0.658	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Medunsa	1.956	1.823	1.536	1.522	1.587	1.189	1.033	0.803	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6930	0.7347	0.8500	0.8374	0.8300	0.7500	0.6029
North	1.031	0.992	1.149	0.785	0.736	0.399	0.505	0.658	0.668	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Zululand	1.655	1.433	0.948	0.802	0.603	0.822	0.758	0.751	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Vista	0.859	0.758	0.704	0.801	0.817	0.620	0.675	0.659	0.663	0.628	0.6617	0.6432	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Fort Hare	1.245	1.092	1.248	1.444	0.696	0.570	0.661	0.658	0.669	0.759	0.7430	0.7059	0.7053	0.6953	0.6700	0.8500	0.7500	0.6029
North West									1.720	1.600	1.4180	1.1781	0.8001	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Transkei									1.008	1.100	0.9990	0.8392	0.7488	0.7388	0.6900	0.6900	0.6512	0.6029
Venda									0.688	0.700	0.6960	0.6612	0.6430	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029

### **3.5. THE SAPSE SUBSIDY FORMULA FOR TECHNIKONS (1987)**

As the organizational and operational systems of technikons showed many similarities to those of universities, the Minister of National Education decided in 1987 to use an adapted (scaled down) version of the SAPSE subsidy formula for universities to subsidize technikons. Report NATED 02-131(89/01) of the Department of National Education (1989) gives a complete exposition of the formula developed in 1987. This development evolved naturally, as the technikons had, at that stage, already submitted information to the Department of National Education according to the SAPSE information system for technikons. Apart from the necessary changes to provide for the technikons' different qualification structure, the information submitted by the technikons was similar to the information submitted by universities.

The most important difference between the SAPSE formula of 1984 for universities and the SAPSE formula of 1987 for technikons was in respect of the (non-earmarked or so-called blind) research allocation. The provision of instruction/research personnel for technikons in respect of research was fixed at only one third of the corresponding provision for universities. Some other provisions as far as research was concerned were also lower for technikons than for universities. The net result of these adjustments was that the allocation from the subsidy formula for technikons amounted to about 82% of the subsidy formula allocation to universities for the same ESS. An adapted measure for the calculation of high-level research output of technikons was also applied as part of the SAPSE formula for technikons. This factor came into effect in 1992. The  $a$ -values for the individual technikons for 1987 to 2003 are shown in Table 2.

*Table 2: a-Values of State subsidy allocations to technicians for the years 1987-2003 according to institution and year*

TECHNIKON	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Border								0.639	0.850	0.814	0.7326	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Cape	0.902	0.908	0.622	0.900	0.712	0.684	0.653	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Natal	0.904	0.714	0.721	0.835	0.673	0.700	0.606	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Free State	0.901	0.663	0.601	0.700	0.687	0.687	0.606	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Port Elizabeth	0.901	0.736	0.804	0.894	0.723	0.683	0.606	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Pretoria	0.902	0.775	0.812	0.761	0.699	0.684	0.606	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
SA	0.729	0.785	0.534	0.605	0.648	0.300	0.367	0.602	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Vaal Triangle	0.899	0.597	0.848	0.700	0.509	0.683	0.606	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Witwatersrand	0.900	1.059	0.845	0.897	0.708	0.683	0.606	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
M L Sultan	1.072	0.600	0.824	0.627	0.898	0.799	0.606	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Peninsula	1.056	1.151	0.627	0.658	0.877	0.683	0.606	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Northern Gauteng	0.897	1.486	0.837	0.439	0.798	0.683	0.606	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Mangosuthu	0.896	0.579	0.588	0.745	0.505	0.683	0.606	0.605	0.611	0.6816	0.6431	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
Eastern Cape								0.610	0.760	0.745	0.6705	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029
North West								0.706	0.700	0.697	0.6521	0.643	0.6411	0.6285	0.6285	0.6312	0.6029

### **3.6. REVISED SAPSE SUBSIDY FORMULA FOR TECHNIKONS (1993)**

Following criticism of various aspects of the SAPSE subsidy formulae for universities and technikons, and also criticism from the technikon sector on the large discrepancies that existed between the SAPSE formulae for universities and for technikons, a revision of the SAPSE subsidy formula for technikons was undertaken concurrent with that of the SAPSE formula for universities by the Advisory Council for Universities and Technikons (AUT) in 1991. The approved revised formula for technikons was first used for the 1993/94 financial year. A complete exposition of the revised SAPSE formula for technikons is set out in the report NATED 01-326 (92/11) of the Department of National Education (1992). The most important changes to the 1987 formula were:

1. The subsidy per ESS in the Natural Sciences was increased relative to the subsidy per ESS in the Human Sciences.
2. The subsidization of new library collections based on growth in the ESS was decreased significantly.
3. The provision for the replacement and renewal of equipment based on the ESS was increased.
4. The provision for the replacement and renewal of library collections based on the ESS was decreased.
5. A new mechanism (based on estimates of the per capita annual income of students' families) to determine the government contribution ratio  $g$  for each technikon was implemented.
6. The projection formula for the ESS was revised in such a way that as far as the then current expenditure was concerned, only an annual increase in the projected ESS of six per cent for contact tuition and eight per cent for distance tuition would be subsidized. These higher allowable growth rates of technikons in comparison with universities were the result of a deliberate attempt by the government to increase the size of the technikon sector relative to the size of the university sector. The higher growth in the technikon sector than the university sector during the years 1993 to 1998 can be partly ascribed to these "allowable" differential growth rates. Under the revised SAPSE formula for technikons, the  $a$ -values of the annual allocated subsidies to institutions were, as was the case for universities, equal and stable. See Table 2 in this regard.
7. The subsidy formula was enriched to provide for experiential (cooperative) learning in the technikon sector.

The revised SAPSE subsidy formula for technikons was also used by the State for 11 years from 1993 until 2003.

### **3.7. EARMARKED FUNDING DURING 1984 TO 2003**

Apart from the State's subsidy allocations by means of a formula, as described above, the following expenses of universities and technikons were funded separately per institution in an earmarked way during the years when the SAPSE formulae were used as the primary source of public funding for universities and technikons:

*Capital projects (including the subsidization of interest and redemption):* Earmarked funding for the acquisition of land, for new buildings and for land improvements other than buildings was instituted. The policies in this regard are discussed in Paragraph 3.9 in more detail.

*Municipal assessment rates:* As a result of various factors, the most important being that there were vast differences in the value of the land owned by HE institutions, these rates were always (until the implementation of the NFF in 2004 when subsidy in this regard was terminated) paid in full by the State upon receipt of the actual accounts from institutions.

*NSFAS:* The National Student Financial Aid Scheme was established in 1995. The NSFAS was administered by the Tertiary Education Fund of SA (TEFSA), which was founded in 1991 as a not-for-profit company to provide loans to HE students. In 2000, TEFSA was legally reconstituted as the NSFAS. Since 1995, the State has annually made earmarked allocations for NSFAS to each HE institution.

*Redress funding:* Amounts of R28m, R60m and R30m, respectively, were allocated in the financial years of 1998/99, 1999/00, and 2000/01 to universities and technikons for redress purposes. While all historically disadvantaged HE institutions benefited from the 1998/99 redress allocation of R28m, the division of the allocations for 1999/00 and 2000/01 was not disclosed in the Department of Education's (DoE) official budget documents.

*Incorporation of Teacher Training Colleges:* *Ad hoc* allocations for the incorporation of colleges were made available to HE institutions that were incorporating these colleges in 2001/02 and 2002/03. These allocations were, *inter alia*, for institutional compensation for the relatively low tuition fees traditionally paid by teacher training students.

*Other earmarked allocations:* These allocations entailed, *inter alia*, payments for motor vehicle schemes for medical specialists on the payroll of some institutions, and leave gratuity payments and the amalgamation of the two faculties of Veterinary Sciences at the University of Pretoria and Medunsa. The total amounts varied from year to year, but were relatively small in comparison with other earmarked amounts.

The total earmarked funding for universities and technikons, as a percentage of total State funding of universities and technikons, has decreased from 15.6% in the 1996/97 financial year (which was an indication of the established level) to 10.0% in 1997/98. This was mainly a result

of the termination of allocations for the purpose of the erection of new buildings at institutions. Although there was some increase in the allocation of earmarked funding during the subsequent three years, it declined gradually to 10.3% in 2003/04, if the funding allocations for new initiatives, namely, the incorporation of teacher training colleges into universities and technikons and HE institutional restructuring, are disregarded. This trend was not in accordance with the Education White Paper 3 (WP3), which stated that earmarked funding as a percentage of total State funding to universities and technikons should increase to levels well above the 1996/97 level of almost sixteen per cent.

Apart from the redress allocations referred to above, some allocations were also made by the Department of Education to institutions with specific (*ad hoc*) financial problems during the post-1994 period. These allocations were made from savings on the higher education budget by the Department and represent an *ad hoc* form of institutional redress. No information is available on these presumably small amounts.

### **3.8. THE FUNDING OF TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES**

Until 2001, the funding of teacher training colleges was the responsibility of provincial education departments. Different funding models for these colleges were used by the respective provincial departments, mostly based on the assessment of the individual needs of the colleges. During the 2001/02 and 2002/03 financial years, the teacher training college sector was incorporated into the university and technikon sectors. This incorporation has increased the HE sector by about 12 000 ESS.

### **3.9. PUBLIC FUNDING OF LAND, BUILDINGS AND LAND IMPROVEMENTS OTHER THAN BUILDINGS AT HE INSTITUTIONS SINCE 1951**

State support for the erection of new buildings, land improvement other than buildings, as well as the acquisition of land (all jointly referred to as capital expenditure) at universities since the 1950s was by means of earmarked allocations. This was completely separate from the subsidy formula funding as discussed in previous paragraphs. A summary of the history of the subsidization of capital expenditures at universities is given below. For a more detailed version of the subsidization of capital expenditure during the pre-1997 period, see Steyn and Vermeulen (1997).

Up to 1955, capital expenditure at universities was subsidised at a rate of fifty per cent for academic buildings and thirty per cent for buildings for institutional housing (mainly residences for students). As a result of the proposals by the Holloway Commission, the National Treasury approved the principle that the State could subsidize building projects (including residences) at universities on a pound for pound basis if private donations were available. In the case of insufficient donations, the State would annually subsidize forty per cent of the interest and redemption on the private building loans of universities. Since the



other sixty per cent of loan service cost could be discounted within the standard provision of the Holloway formula, the effective State subsidization of the servicing of the long term, private building loans of universities was calculated as approximately eighty-two per cent. In the light of this anomaly, the pound for pound basis of subsidization of capital expenditure was terminated by the State in 1961. In 1964, a fixed subsidization ratio of fifty per cent was implemented on interest and redemption of long term, private loans for the erection of residences, while a corresponding fixed ratio of eighty-five per cent for academic buildings was implemented in 1967. With the exception of the long term, private loans of the historically disadvantaged universities, these two contribution ratios remained intact, and were also applied to technikons until 1991, when the system of the subsidization of payments of interest and redemption on long term loans of HE institutions by the State was replaced by a system of direct capital allocations for the erection of new buildings, and for land improvements other than buildings. Most historically black universities were established in the 1970s and the erection of their buildings was initially subsidized on a one hundred per cent basis by the State until the rates of eighty-five per cent and fifty per cent were also phased in for these institutions in the early 1990s.

The approval of capital projects of universities by the Minister of National Education (and the consequential issuing of State guarantees to ensure the securing of long-term loans by institutions) was on the advice and prioritization of the projects by the Advisory Council on Universities (ACU), replaced in 1983 by the University and Technikons Advisory Council (AUT). A comprehensive system of space and cost norms for new buildings and land improvements other than buildings (parking areas, open air recreation areas, streets, pavements, landscaping, etc.) was developed in 1979 and adjusted in 1985 (Department of National Education, Report SAPSE-101 (1985)). Separate space and cost norms applied to universities and technikons and differed also for residential and non-residential institutions. These norms ensured that new buildings erected at HE institutions satisfied minimum space requirements, but at the same time were not so luxurious that they were unaffordable for the institutions and the State. These norms also formed the basis of the annual SAPSE information returns by universities and technikons to the Department of National Education up to 1998 on the utilization of space. The space and cost norms for new buildings and other land improvements were revised by the Department of Education in 1996, but were never officially published. In the revision, the norms for universities were scaled down by about 20%, and equality between universities and technikons was established to a large extent. Since the termination of the SAPSE information system in 1998, institutional space utilization information is no longer required by the Department of Education.

To ensure a just and equitable system of allocations for capital projects, the so-called capital provision formulae for the erection of new buildings and other land improvements for universities and technikons came into effect in 1987. In accordance with these formulae, institutions earned building cost units as a result of an increase in the projected ESS. A distinction is drawn in the formula between cost units for the educational and general

programmes (activities), on the one hand, and the auxiliary enterprises programme (mainly residences for students), on the other hand. These capital provision formulae complement the SAPSE subsidy formulae that, as part of their allocations, provide for the maintenance of buildings and other land improvements at universities and technikons.

In 1987, an important investigation into the backlogs and surpluses in buildings (separately for the education and general programmes and the auxiliary enterprises programmes) was done by the AUT. The establishment of the technikon sector in the 1980s, as well as the diverse policies in the approval and funding for buildings at universities, made such an investigation necessary to ensure a level playing field as far as the provision of funds for buildings at all higher education institutions was concerned. Table 3 contains the results of this investigation. The backlogs and surpluses are given in the Table in terms of so-called building cost units, a measure independent of time or currency. The result of this investigation and the annual application of the capital provision formula since 1987 was that only the institutions with large backlogs in buildings and other land improvements were entitled to take up State approved, long term loans or, since 1991, to receive direct capital allocations from the State for the erection of new buildings and other land improvements. With the exception of the contractual responsibility to make annual capital allocations to the University of Pretoria in respect of their new academic hospital until 2003/04, no capital allocations to HE institutions for the erection of new buildings have been made by the State since the 1996/97 financial year. The subsidization of interest and redemption on State guaranteed, long term loans taken up before 1 April 1991 on the eighty-five or fifty per cent basis is, however, still continuing until these loans are paid off. Earmarked subsidy amounts to HE institutions for this purpose obviously decrease annually.

Following a recommendation by the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (1996), the Education White Paper 3 states (par. 4.57) that one of the categories for earmarked funding in HE is capital works:

The expansion and diversification envisaged for the HE sector requires new capital works projects. The existing capital stock needs to be adequately managed, efficiently utilized and maintained. Funding for capital works will be contingent on institutions developing a capital management plan, which describes the total floor area, its condition and usage, its replacement value, and planned expenditures for maintenance and refurbishment and cash flow requirements for new construction projects. (Department of Education, 1997)

Contrary to this undertaking in the White Paper, no provision is made in the NFF for the funding of new buildings and land improvements, other than buildings. As part of earmarked funding, the State will, however, fulfil its obligation in subsidizing the interest and redemption payments (presumably still at the 85%- and 50%-basis) of HE institutions regarding State guaranteed, long-term loans taken up by institutions before 1 April 1991. The status of the revised space and cost norms of 1996 is unknown, because the Minister of Education has, since their approval, shown no interest in either funding new capital projects at HE institutions or in upholding minimum standards in respect of new buildings erected by HE institutions from their own funds.

The annual calculation of the so-called cost unit balance sheet, indicating the annual backlogs and surpluses in buildings at HE institutions, was presumably deemed unnecessary by the Department of Education and was discontinued in 2000. Table 3 shows the most up-to-date calculations of surpluses and backlogs at HE institutions, that is, for 1999. The surpluses/backlogs for 1990 and 1994 are also shown in Table 3. All the calculations in Table 3 were made on the basis of the 1985 space and cost norms. No official recalculation in terms of the new space and cost norms has yet been made. Such a calculation will substantially decrease the calculated size of the total backlogs in HE. In terms of the unrevised norms, the State's contribution to eliminate the backlog of 2 176 471 cost units that existed in 1999, as indicated in Table 3, would have been almost R7 billion (in constant 1999 prices).

The utilization of the cost unit balance sheet as a management instrument by the State has been severely hampered by the fact that with the incorporation of the universities and technikons of the former Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (TBVC) states into the Republic of South Africa (RSA) HE system in 1994, no official investigation was undertaken into the backlogs and surpluses in buildings at these institutions. The possible needs of these institutions, as far as physical facilities are concerned, are therefore still unknown.

The possible astronomical cost associated with the elimination of the backlogs in buildings and other land improvements at universities and technikons makes it important to determine the actual situation at each institution. The latest information available (for 1999) is unreliable in many aspects since:

- The cost unit balance sheet does not reflect the fact that most institutions have erected many new buildings from their own funds since the base line position for backlogs and surpluses had been determined in 1987. The balance sheet was adjusted annually by only taking account of building needs (according to the capital provision formula) of institutions and the actual capital allocations by the State to institutions.
- Since the SAPSE requirement of the reporting of space utilization at universities and technikons was terminated in 1998, whole teacher training college campuses were transferred to some HE institutions. The effect of these additions and the possible enhancement of substantial inequities in an already skewed distribution of building stock in HE is therefore totally unknown.
- There was a sixteen per cent increase of Further Training and Education (FTE) student numbers at universities and technikons from 1999 to 2003. Despite this, no allocations for new capital projects have been made since 1996.
- As indicated above, the space and cost norms for new buildings and other land improvements were revised by the Department of Education in 1996. Backlogs and surpluses calculated by means of the revised norms will lead to different numbers from those recorded in Table 3.
- Although the space and cost norms for contact and distance tuition differs, the proliferation of types of instructional modes for both contact and distance tuition will have a definite impact on space utilization.

**Table 3: Backlogs/surpluses<sup>1)</sup> in cost-units for new buildings and other land improvements for HE institutions according to institution, programme and year**

UNIVERSITY	1987		1990		1994		1999	
	Educational and general	Auxiliary Enterprises	Educational and general	Auxiliary Enterprises	Educational and general	Auxiliary Enterprises	Educational and general	Auxiliary Enterprises
<b>All universities: Total</b>	<b>-434 367</b>	<b>- 8 137</b>	<b>-168 465</b>	<b>+159 367</b>	<b>+324 070</b>	<b>+329 016</b>	<b>+813 772</b>	<b>+459 464</b>
Effective backlog <sup>2)</sup>	+ 37 665	+5 768	+151 656	+195 345	+485 000	+334 336	+883 070	+460 696
Unisa	+ 4 827	- 27	+ 25 823	+ 6 646	+ 28 871	+ 8 076	+ 57 190	+ 10 084
Pretoria	- 1 881	- 3 521	+ 26 887	- 2 123	+ 77 183	- 979	+126 044	+ 25 400
Witwatersrand	- 41 745	- 6 055	- 21 499	+ 11 709	- 19 288	+ 23 278	+ 17 912	+ 23 672
RAU	- 10 916	+ 3 320	+ 16 498	+ 4 286	+ 48 112	+ 23 169	+ 97 741	+ 24 299
Potchefstroom	- 8 481	+15 021	+ 250	+ 13 298	- 728	+ 4	+ 25 526	+ 551
Free State	- 37 029	-1 073	- 26 700	- 651	- 12 802	- 483	+ 5 342	+ 182
Port Elizabeth	- 20 843	+ 2 242	- 10 549	+ 4 659	- 2 666	+ 4 852	+ 7 374	+ 5 078
Rhodes	- 23 201	- 9 103	- 20 412	- 9 044	- 10 022	- 3 858	+ 4	- 1 232
Stellenbosch	-110 650	+ 5 802	-110 567	+ 7 542	- 94 845	+ 7 550	- 69 298	+ 18 869
Cape Town	- 43 661	-12 571	- 22 492	- 6 504	+ 2 176	+ 12 751	+ 24 610	+ 28 132
Natal	- 84 071	- 4 430	- 53 432	- 3 380	- 20 579	+ 7 291	+ 10 684	+ 15 242
Durban-Westville	- 30 197	- 519	- 22 390	+ 2 555	+ 24 134	+ 7 925	+ 51 089	+ 25 991
Western Cape	+ 21 254	-17 025	+ 52 182	+ 25 213	+ 91 765	+ 36 330	+113 924	+ 47 448
Medunsa	- 8 264	-19 581	- 9 014	- 14 276	+ 24 777	+ 0	+ 38 385	+ 15 311
North	- 18 072	+10 068	- 13 897	+ 68 933	+107 579	+122 653	+162 165	+128 185
Zululand	- 16 452	+12 301	+ 6 053	+ 27 489	+ 4 499	+ 26 124	+ 14 667	+ 28 614
Vista	+ 11 584	+ 238	+ 23 963	+ 862	+ 67 515	+ 3 398	+170 909	+ 9 731
Fort Hare	- 16 569	+16 776	- 9 169	+ 22 153	+ 8 389	+ 50 935	+ 28 800	+ 55 132
<b>TECHNIKON</b>								
<b>All technikon: Total</b>	<b>+10 121</b>	<b>+ 9 920</b>	<b>+88 133</b>	<b>+69 939</b>	<b>+281 238</b>	<b>+124 387</b>	<b>+656 383</b>	<b>+246 852</b>
Effective backlog <sup>2)</sup>	+50 880	+24 733	+98 864	+76 750	+281 238	+144 090	+656 383	+246 852
Cape	+10 732	- 47	+18 573	- 483	+ 26 604	+ 4 227	+ 43 705	+ 5 059
Natal	-13 044	-1 222	- 4 523	+ 2 730	+ 2 731	+ 3 290	+ 38 381	+ 10 107
Free State	+14 912	+ 9 677	+18 160	+16 305	+ 22 966	+ 17 831	+ 39 845	+ 17 605
Port Elizabeth	+ 9 536	- 638	+ 7 416	+ 2 782	+ 24 935	+ 4 766	+ 50 212	+ 13 534
Pretoria	- 6 560	+ 6 118	+ 4 420	+ 6 602	+ 45 771	+ 18 724	+ 96 073	+ 29 419
SA	- 49	+ 361	+ 4 089	+ 1 170	+ 53 988	+ 4 359	+ 80 149	+ 5 559
Vaal Triangle	+ 7 308	+ 1 554	+12 747	+ 8 991	+ 27 946	+ 23 781	+ 82 739	+ 26 819
Witwatersrand	+ 4 842	+ 2 987	+ 5 172	+ 4 650	+ 16 032	- 19 703	+ 38 986	+ 2 889
M L Sultan	- 2 921	- 1 101	+17 912	+ 1 547	+ 17 739	+ 2 593	+ 59 397	+ 19 277
Peninsula	+ 3 550	- 9 092	+ 8 524	- 6 328	+ 23 383	+ 15 256	+ 43 512	+ 25 591
Northern Gauteng	- 5 586	+ 4 036	+ 1 851	+ 22 889	+ 12 589	+ 31 586	+ 46 573	+ 73 352
Mangosuthu	-12 599	- 2 013	- 6 208	+ 9 084	+ 6 554	+ 17 677	+ 36 796	+ 17 642

Key: 1) Positive values indicate backlogs and negative values indicate surpluses; 2) Sum of positive values (backlogs)

Many buildings at institutions are totally run down as a result of poor or completely absent institutional building maintenance strategies. The funding of the maintenance of the buildings formed an identifiable part of the SAPSE subsidy allocations to institutions. By contrast to this, the NFF does not suggest any specific allocations towards the maintenance of buildings (or any other specific expenditure items for that matter). Hence building maintenance cannot be a priority for most institutions.

It is clear that, if it is deemed necessary for the State to once again become involved in the funding of new capital projects (for example, after the HE merger exercise has been completed) or if the State wants to protect the public against the erection of inferior buildings at HE institutions, it will be very difficult to pick up the threads of the very sophisticated and broadly accepted former system of capital project funding at HE institutions. A body like the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) will, in future without a doubt and as part of its institutional audits, have to express a view on the necessity for the State to play a more active role in the funding of capital projects or at least to maintain minimum building standards for physical facilities at HE institutions.

## **4. THE NEW FUNDING FRAMEWORK (NFF) FOR PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **4.1. UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY OF THE NFF**

On 9 December 2003, the new funding framework for higher education institutions was published in terms of the Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997, in the Government Gazette (No. 1791). The new funding framework was implemented in the 2004/05 financial year. The documentation made available by the Ministry of Education to Vice Chancellors on 5 December 2003 comprised:

1. Funding of Public Higher Education, the formal policy framework.
2. Statement on Higher Education Funding 2004 to 2006, which explains how the higher education budget will be divided, which includes an appendix indicating the implementation of the Migration Strategy (from the SAPSE formulae to the NFF) for 2004/05 to 2006/07.

The introduction of the NFF completed a very long and arduous process of developing a new formula that started with the funding proposals of the National Commission on Higher Education (1996), followed by the refinement of these proposals in Chapter 4 of WP3 (1997). During the following six years, a large number of investigations into various funding models (within the broad framework defined by WP3) were commissioned by the Department of Education, by the South African Universities Vice Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA) and the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP), as well as by some Non-Governmental Organizations. The different models were fervently debated by experts, by SAUVCA, the CTP and other HE stakeholders until the first draft funding framework was published for comment in March 2001 by the Department of Education (DoE). The final (policy) version of the NFF,

to be implemented during three ‘migration’ years differs significantly from the draft published in 2001. Although it was anticipated that further changes in the NFF will only be effected after the three migration years have expired, that is, with effect from 2007 to 2008 onwards, some significant changes have already been announced, to be applied from 2006 to 2007 onwards. This is discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

A very useful summary of the underlying philosophy, context and composition of the NFF can be found in a presentation by the Department of Education to the Portfolio Committee on Education on 24 August 2004:

- The central premise that underpins the policy framework for the transformation of higher education in the Education White Paper 3 is that the higher education system must be planned, governed and funded as a single national coordinated system.
- The emphasis on planning is informed by the fact that if the higher education system is to respond to the national development agenda in terms of access, redress and human resource development needs, the size and shape of the system cannot be left to the vagaries of the market, in particular, uncoordinated institutional decisions on student enrolments and programme offerings.
- In the market model, the role of the Government is limited to funding student demand and to correcting any market failures that may occur. However, under apartheid the market model itself was distorted by ideological factors, which restricted and constrained institutional and student choices and decisions.
- The higher education system therefore needs to be steered to meet national goals and priorities through a combination of instruments, namely, planning, funding and quality assurance. The role and inter-relationship between these three instruments is outlined in the diagram (Figure 2) below.
- The planning model of higher education funding therefore involves three steps; (i) the Ministry determines national policy goals and objectives; (ii) institutions develop three-year rolling plans indicating how they intend to address the national goals and objectives; (iii) interaction between the Ministry and institutions result in the approval of institutional plans, which would be the trigger for the release of funds based on the quantum of funds available.

#### **4.2. THE IMPLICATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE NFF**

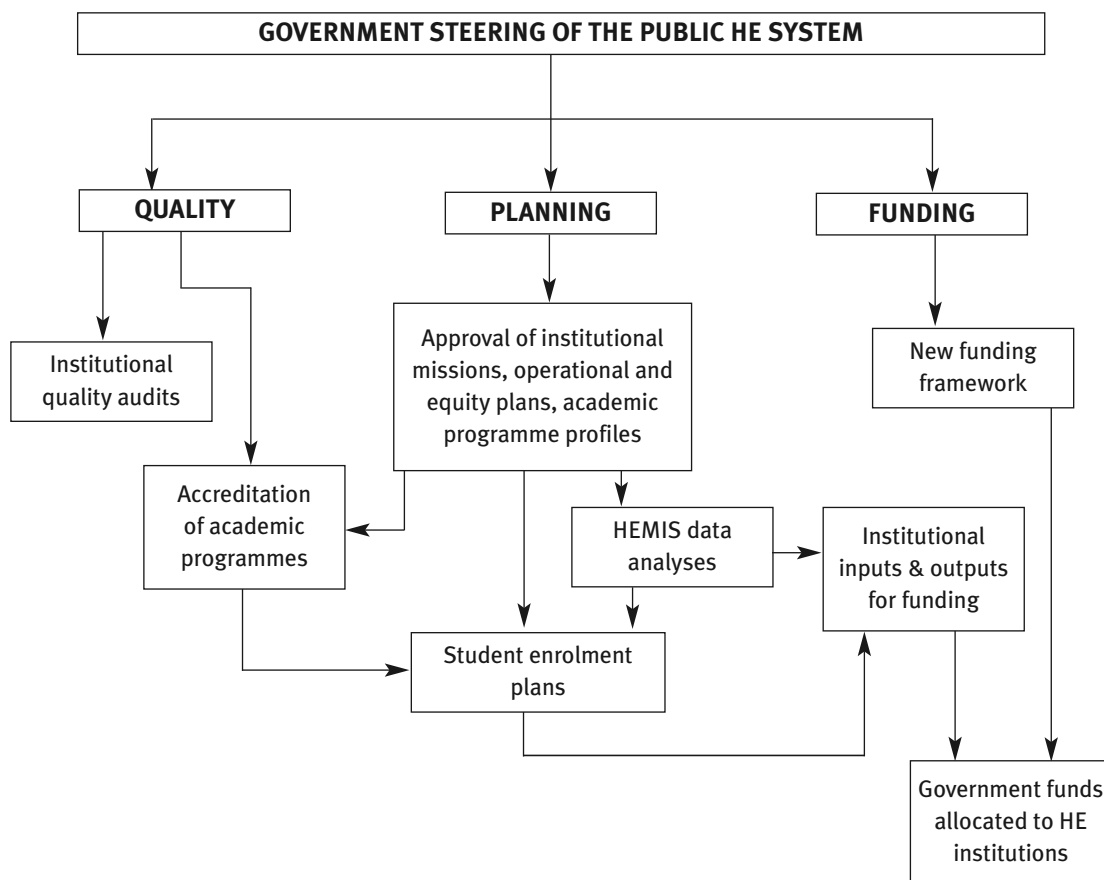
According to the Department of Education, the new funding framework is goal-orientated and performance-related, and this enables the distribution of government grants to institutions in line with national goals and priorities and approved institutional plans. According to the Department, the NFF departs from the assumptions of the old SAPSE formulae in two key respects:

- (i) The size and shape of the higher education system cannot be determined by student demand and institutional decisions alone.
- (ii) The starting point for determining the allocation of funds cannot be institutional costs. In the old formula, the allocation of funds was linked to the generation of an 'ideal income' for individual institutions based on the determination of actual costs, irrespective of affordability criteria or whether the costs are linked to the principal activity of higher education institutions, that is, teaching, research and community service.

The Department of Education stressed in its presentation to the Portfolio Committee that the funds allocated to institutions are not designed to meet specific kinds or levels of institutional costs, but are intended to pay for the delivery of teaching and research-related services and outputs linked to approved institutional three-year 'rolling' plans.

According to the DoE, the fact that costs are not the starting point of the model does not mean that they are unimportant or that it would not be possible to determine the underlying unit costs underpinning institutional activities. It is crucial for institutions to monitor costs, as it is their responsibility to decide how they design and manage their academic activities with the available funds.

**Figure 2: The system of government steering of the public higher education system**  
 (Source: Department of Education (2004))



The NFF has two main elements. First, block grants, which are undesignated amounts to cover the operational costs of higher education institutions linked to the provision of teaching and research-related services. Secondly, earmarked grants, which are designated for specific purposes.

Block grants for year  $n$  are based on student numbers and institutional graduate and research outputs in year  $n-2$  and consist of four sub-categories. The four categories are discussed briefly:

*i. Teaching input grants (64.1% of total block grant for 2004/05)*

The grant for year  $n$  is based on ‘approved’ FTE enrolled students in year  $n-2$  weighted according to funding group and course level as indicated in Table 4. The funding groups are defined in terms of the 22 Classification of Educational Subject Matter (CESM) categories as set out in Table 5.

**Table 4: Weighting factors for teaching inputs: 2004/05 to 2006/07**

Funding group	Course level							
	Undergraduate & equivalent		Honours & equivalent		Master’s & equivalent		Doctoral & equivalent	
	Contact	Distance	Contact	Distance	Contact	Distance	Contact	Distance
<b>1</b>	1.0	0.5	2.0	1.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0
<b>2</b>	1.5	0.75	3.0	1.5	4.5	4.5	6.0	6.0
<b>3</b>	2.5	1.25	5.0	2.5	7.5	7.5	10.0	10.0
<b>4</b>	3.5	1.75	7.0	3.5	10.5	10.5	14.0	14.0

The weights in Table 4 (the so-called funding grid) represent an approximation of relative costs that were determined by a SAUVCA/CTP task team in a study of HE institutions’ expenditures in 1997. The approved FTE students of a HE institution in year  $n-2$ , classified according to the funding groups and the course levels, can be converted to a single figure (known as the total teaching input units). This is done by multiplying the FTE students in the 16 cells by the corresponding weights of Table 4 and then aggregating the 16 products. The rand value of one teaching input unit for 2004/05 was about R6 300. It is important to note that the weights for contact and distance tuition do not differ for Master’s and doctoral programmes.



**Table 5: Funding groups 2004/05 to 2006/07**

Funding group	CESM categories included in funding group
1	07 education, 13 law, 14 librarianship, 20 psychology, 21 social services/public administration
2	04 business/commerce, 05 communication, 06 computer science, 12 languages, 18 philosophy/religion, 22 social sciences
3	02 architecture/planning, 08 engineering, 10 home economics, 11 industrial arts, 16 mathematical sciences, 19 physical education
4	01 agriculture, 03 fine and performing arts, 09 health sciences, 15 life and physical sciences

*ii. Research output grant (13.1% of total block grant for 2004/05)*

The research output units of an HE institution for year  $n-2$  are determined in the following way –

Research output units =

DoE approved publication units + Research Master’s graduates + 3× doctoral graduates

By using norms of 1.25 and 0.5 for the research output units per permanently appointed instruction/research staff member for universities and technikons, respectively, each HE institution’s actual research output units per staff member for year  $n-2$  determines whether the institution is under-performing (compared to the norm). The State’s research output grant for year  $n$  is divided into two parts, the bulk being distributed among all institutions according to their actual research output in year  $n-2$ , and a research development grant being distributed only among institutions that have under-performed. The size of the under-performance determines these development grants.

The utilization of different research output norms for universities and technikons, as well as the introduction of research development grants were necessary to safeguard technikons and universities that were under-performing in research from huge subsidy losses when the NFF was implemented in 2004/05. However, the Minister of Education has indicated that from 2007/08 onwards formal applications (possibly with an accompanying business plan) will have to be submitted before these development grants will be made on a three-year basis.

*iii. Teaching output grant (16.0% of total block grant for 2004/05)*

The teaching output units of an HE institution in year  $n-2$  are determined by weighing the number of qualifications awarded in year  $n-2$  according to the weights in Table 6 before aggregating the products.

**Table 6: Weighting factors for teaching outputs**

Type of qualification	Weight
1st certificates and diplomas of 2 years or less	0.5
1st diplomas and Bachelor's degrees: 3 years	1.0
Professional 1st Bachelor's degree: 4 years and more	1.5
Postgraduate and post diploma diplomas	0.5
Postgraduate Bachelor's degrees	1.0
Honours degrees/higher diplomas	0.5
Non-research Master's degrees and diplomas	0.5

Utilizing the teaching output benchmarks given in Table 7, each HE institution's actual teaching output units in year  $n-2$  is compared with the normative output (norm  $\times$  enrolled students) to determine whether the institution is under-performing (according to the norm) in teaching. The State's teaching output grant is divided in two parts, the bulk being distributed among all HE institutions according to their actual teaching output, and a teaching development grant being distributed only to the institutions that have under-performed in teaching in year  $n-2$ . The size of the under-performance determines these grants.

**Table 7: Graduation benchmarks for contact and distance programmes**

Qualification type	Contact	Distance
Undergraduate: up to 3 years	22.5%	13.5%
Undergraduate: 4 years or more	18.0%	9.0%
Postgraduate: up to Honours	54.0%	27.0%
Postgraduate: up to Master's	30.0%	22.5%

The introduction of teaching development grants was necessary to safeguard institutions that under-performed in teaching from significant subsidy losses when the NFF was implemented in 2004/05. The Minister of Education has indicated that from 2007/08 onwards formal applications (possibly with an accompanying business plan) will have to be submitted before these development grants will be made on a three-year basis.

*iv. Institutional factor grants (6.7% of total block grant for 2004/05)*

There are three institutional factor grants. Only A and B, discussed below, are applied at present:

### **A: Grant for disadvantaged students**

Within the context of the NFF, disadvantaged students are defined as black (African) and coloured students. All HE institutions with more than forty per cent disadvantaged students (calculated by taking only the FTE contact education student enrolments) in year  $n-2$  will receive this grant in year  $n$ . A disadvantage factor value varying between 0 and 0.1 for each institution is determined as follows –

- % disadvantaged students smaller or equal to 40%: Factor = 0;
- % disadvantaged students equal to or larger than 80% : Factor = 0.1; and
- % disadvantaged students larger than 40% but smaller than 80%: Factor increases linearly from 0 to 0.1.

The grant for disadvantaged students for an institution in year  $n$  is calculated as the disadvantage factor for the institution, multiplied by the teaching input grant for that institution.

### **B: Grant related to the size of the institution**

The principle involved here is that economies of scale are evident when the FTE student enrolment (un-weighted contact plus distance education students in year  $n-2$ ) is increasing. An institutional size factor varying between 0 and 0.15 is determined for each institution as follows –

- Size of institution smaller or equal to 4 000: Factor = 0.15;
- Size of institution equal to or larger than 25 000: Factor = 0; and
- Size of institution larger than 4 000 but smaller than 25 000: Factor decreases linearly from 0.15 to 0.

The grant for the size of the institution in year  $n$  is calculated as the size factor for the institution multiplied by the teaching input grant for the institution.

### **C: Grant for multi-campus institutions**

It is indicated in the Statement on Higher Education Funding: 2004/05-2006/07 of the Minister of Education (2004) that a grant will be devised to assist institutions that are required to deliver teaching services on more than one official campus. This promise is reiterated in the Statement on

Higher Education Funding: 2005/06-2006/07 of the Minister of Education (2005). This grant is especially important for the newly merged institutions. Presumably, this grant will be introduced in the allocations to HE institutions for 2007/08 when the migration period for the new formula has expired.

*v. Earmarked grants*

Apart from the block grants discussed above, earmarked grants are also allocated by the NFF. These allocations are for specific or designated institutional purposes. In 2004/05 earmarked funding represented thirteen per cent of the total allocations made to HE institutions. The earmarked categories are (the percentages in brackets refer to its size relative to the total earmarked grant for 2004/05):

- The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (44.1%);
- Teaching (including foundation programmes), research and community development (independent of the teaching and research development block grants) (6.5%);
- Interest and redemption payments on loans approved and guaranteed by the State before 1 April 1991 (11.1%);
- Institutional restructuring, including mergers and the re-capitalisation of institutions (38.3%); and
- The higher education quality assurance framework (0%).

After the applications of the NFF for the 2004/05 and 2005/06 financial years, it has become evident that the combined effect of the high growth rate in student enrolments in HE (especially since 2001), the substantial differences between the growth in enrolments at institutions, as well as the relatively low but constant State funding of HE (in terms of the percentage of the Gross Domestic Product means that the real funding per teaching input unit decreases annually. In a first step towards solving this problem, growth caps on 'funded' FTE student enrolments for 2003 (five per cent for contact students and three per cent for distance students) were imposed by the Minister of Education in respect of the 2005/06 block grants to HE institutions. This was followed by a rather radical strategy proposed in March 2005 in the discussion document entitled 'Student enrolment planning in Public Higher Education'. The proposed strategy entails the freezing of the institutional shares of the total teaching input units on the level of 2003 (used for the 2005/06 block grants) for the application of the NFF for the financial years 2006/07 to 2008/09. Furthermore, differential growth caps on 'funded' student enrolments of HE institutions until 2009 are also proposed. The average allowable annual increase in funded enrolled students (both for FTE students and a head

count of students) in the HE system for the years 2005 to 2009 will, according to this proposal, be only 0.6%. The Statement on Higher Education Funding: 2005/06-2006/07 of the Minister of Education (2005) has indicated that the freezing of the institutional shares of the total teaching input units will be imposed for the 2006/07 HE allocations. The NFF will therefore, after a life span of only two short years, effectively be suspended for 2006/07 and possibly also for the years 2007/08 and 2008/09. As far as the further capping of FTE student numbers is concerned, the Ministerial Statement on Enrolment Planning (September 2005) indicates that apart from the implicit capping on student growth in 2004 by freezing the institutional shares of the teaching input units on the 2003 level, no direct capping of FTE student enrolments will apply for 2005 and 2006. Funded head count and FTE student totals will, however, be determined for each HE institution for the period 2007 to 2009. This will be done during 2006 in consultation with each HE institution.

#### **4.3. A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NEW FUNDING FORMULA**

An analysis of the NFF shows that many of the characteristics of the SAPSE subsidy formula (and even those of some of its predecessors) have been retained in this formula. FTE student enrolments as primary input parameter, as well as student output (degrees) and research output (publications), are the main drivers of the NFF. These parameters were also the building blocks of the SAPSE formulae, although student success, in the form of degree credits, as a measure of teaching output had much more emphasis in the SAPSE formulae. The differentiation in the NFF of FTE students according to four funding groups compared to the two funding groups used in the SAPSE formula has broad support and is a definite improvement on the SAPSE formulae.

Some important omissions in the NFF when compared with the SAPSE formula are: no funding for residences; no funding for additional fixed assets in the case of student growth; no funding for experiential training (Veterinary Sciences) at the University of Pretoria; and no funding of capital projects. Furthermore, the funding of municipal assessment rates, as well as some smaller *ad hoc* annual payments made under the SAPSE dispensation have been incorporated into the total block grant. The effect of these omissions, especially the abdication of the State in subsidizing new buildings at HE institutions, may have far reaching consequences as was indicated in Paragraph 3.9 and will without doubt become clear over the next few years.

Many stakeholders have criticized the economic/philosophical basis of the NFF, in particular, but also some of the other characteristics of the NFF. Some typical comments extracted (and summarized) from SAUVCA's official response on the NFF (April 2004) illustrate this point:

- One of the basic assumptions of the economic model underlying the SAPSE subsidy formulae is that students are the best judges of their own welfare and therefore are best placed to decide what study programmes to follow. Accordingly, the SAPSE formulae were enrolment-driven

with funds following students as they enrolled at institutions of their choice. The NFF is based on central enrolment planning via approved institutional enrolment plans. Unfortunately, no clearly articulated theoretical basis is provided for the NFF. Although in some respects the NFF is orientated towards the market model, particularly in its emphasis on outputs, that is, on the graduates needed by the economy, in other respects it is simply a mechanism for dividing the pool of funds that the National Treasury has provided.

- The SAPSE formulae were based on the assumption that university and technikon autonomy is an essential ingredient of a successful higher education sector – an approach supported almost universally. The SAPSE formulae were therefore devised as a method for providing funding that would ensure an arm’s length relationship between government and the university and technikon sectors. According to the NFF, the Minister, subject to having engaged in some consultative measures with the HE sector and subject to having sought the advice of the CHE, is given complete freedom to change the values assigned to the NFF’s components. The funding of HE will therefore in future be very similar to the funding of government departments.
- Few of the NFF’s elements are related to the actual costs incurred by higher education institutions. The running of universities and technikons entails costs and, to be efficient, their subsidies should be related to reasonable costs. The funding grid (teaching input grant) in the NFF weighs the FTE students according to relative costs but, as is also the case with the other three grants of the NFF, serves only as a division mechanism of a predetermined total grant allocation. Furthermore, since the NFF is only a distributive mechanism, in contrast to the SAPSE formula, it makes no structured provision for inflation. The Minister of Education can therefore not use the NFF to substantiate the HE needs in negotiating for funds for HE with the Minister of Finance.
- The framework purports to provide incentives for institutions to become efficient, by subsidising the outputs of research and teaching. It does this by setting norms for research outputs per member of permanent academic staff and norms for graduation rates. However, the way that these norms are to be applied may have the effect of neutralising the incentives to increase efficiency. This can occur, because the money not allocated to ‘under-performing’ institutions that have not met the norms, will be re-channelled to the same institutions in the form of development grants. The setting of output norms therefore appears to have some effects that seem to be adverse and that can have a detrimental effect on institutions where more research is done. With the New Funding Framework, the higher the norms are set, the lower the amounts going to institutions that will meet or exceed these norms. Setting higher standards therefore has the inverse effect: it channels money away from institutions producing the research that the high standards are supposed to encourage.
- Provision is made for two ‘institutional factors’ in the new funding framework: subsidies will be paid according to the racial composition of an institution’s student body, and according to the size of the institution. A perhaps unintentional or unanticipated consequence of coupling funding to an institution’s demographic composition could be that thousands of black students,

enrolled at formerly 'white' institutions, will be funded by government at levels lower than those applicable to their peers at formerly 'black' universities. If this is eventually reflected in different levels of fees, the financial incentive of this element of the funding framework, on the one hand, and the stated intention to de-racialize institutions, on the other, will be in contradiction. Soon after the advent of democracy in South Africa, government acknowledged that the optimal way to assist indigent students was to establish a National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), already mentioned, through which funds are allocated to all needy students, identified with a means test and irrespective of race. It is not clear why the NFF deviates from this salutary principle. Unfortunately, the division of the NSFAS funds among the HE institutions is still based on the racial composition of student enrolments at the respective institutions and not on the actual numbers of students with financial needs. Perhaps it can be argued that this practice and the additional funds can be seen as redress funding. However, this divisional mechanism needs to change because, although the principle of redress is supported, it should be identified directly, quantified and allocated for a specific period that is agreed upon to be long enough for correcting the inequalities of the past.

- The second institutional factor is the assumption that universities and technikons experience economies of scale as they become larger. Although it is true that economies of scale exist in distance education institutions, and to some extent in residential institutions, it appears to have been overestimated in the new framework. No empirical work has been done to support the assumption of economies of scale, in other words, that average costs decrease as the size of an institution increases. Before being implemented, empirical cost studies should be undertaken to determine the validity of this assumption and the degree to which such savings actually occur in practice.
- There is a need for a further institutional factor: a multi-campus factor which would apply to those institutions affected by the government's present higher education restructuring programme whereby mergers would be creating large institutions operating on a number of campuses with consequent cost increases for them. The Department of Education has indicated its willingness to consider developing such a factor. This should be a top priority.
- The introduction of earmarked funding for the running of so-called foundation programmes is welcomed, although the information provided in the policy documentation from the Department of Education is not clear. No criteria for the allocation of these grants are provided. Because no additional funding will be provided to the HE sector for doing work that should have been done at the secondary school level, the introduction of earmarked funds for foundation programmes, in effect, amounts to a decrease in funding for the sector.

It was indicated in par 4.2 (i) that the weights for the relative costs in the funding grid (see Table 4) were based on a study of HE institutional expenditure in 1997. The methodology used in this study identified FTE students, FTE personnel and space-use as the main drivers of the cost of all institutional activities. Since these drivers can be classified into the 22 CESM

categories (see Paragraph 3.3), it is possible to express all costs in terms of these 22 categories and to calculate average unit costs per FTE student per course level. Utilizing these unit costs, the funding groups (Table 5) and the funding grid weights are determined. In applying these weights only in the calculation of the teaching input block grant, which represents only about 65% of the total block grant, and keeping the other grants neutral as far as funding group is concerned, the NFF is clearly discriminating against HE institutions with relatively high enrolments in the “expensive” funding groups, that is, in groups 3 and 4. Since most module enrolments in programmes in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET programmes) fall into groups 3 and 4, the NFF is biased in favour of non-SET programmes. The NFF is therefore not in line with the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE, 2001) which clearly indicates the need for a shift in enrolments from humanities, business and commerce to SET.

It has already been indicated that the revised SAPSE formulae was used for 11 years as the instrument of the State to subsidize universities and technikons. Although many criticisms were raised against these formulae at the time, it was, however, possible for institutions to do medium and even long term planning in the SAPSE era. This brought about stability in HE. The suspension of the most important part of the NFF only two years after implementation will terminate most of the institutional planning already done in terms of the NFF since its implementation in 2004/05.

According to the Department of Education’s presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Education (2004), the size and the shape of the HE system cannot be left to the vagaries of the market, but should be informed by the human resource development needs of the country. It is of some concern that the HE student growth policies of the State, as outlined in the two Ministerial Statements of 2005 referred to earlier, have been determined without any coordinated attempt to determine the human resource development needs of South Africa. The most important factor taken into account in these policies is the presumed Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF, 1998) allocations to HE by Treasury for 2005/06 to 2007/08. This approach seems short sighted, especially in the light of many predictions of a large economic upswing in South Africa in the next few years.



**Table 8: Allocations<sup>1)</sup> per weighted FTE student (WFTEs) according to university and year**

University	Allocation/Indicator	1996	1997	1998	1999
Cape Town	Allocation (R)	250 645 000	277 385 000	293 190 000	305 467 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	12 326	12 879	13 188	13 360
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	20 335	21 538	22 232	22 864
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	26 171	25 519	24 647	24 093
Durban-Westville	Allocation (R)	137 410 000	142 692 000	135 656 000	146 186 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	10 390	10 114	9 438	9 405
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	13 225	14 108	14 373	15 543
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	17 021	16 716	15 935	16 379
Medunsa	Allocation (R)	108 318 000	123 972 000	110 685 000	161 857 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	2 767	2 846	2 834	2 836
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	39 146	43 560	39 056	57 072
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	50 381	51 611	43 299	60 139
KZ-Natal	Allocation (R)	248 274 000	266 552 000	293 565 000	320 183 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	13 624	14 408	15 061	15 467
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	18 223	18 500	19 492	20 701
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	23 453	21 920	21 609	21 814
North	Allocation (R)	184 134 000	207 056 000	220 861 000	186 126 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	18 980	19 420	18 058	15 269
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	9 701	10 662	12 231	12 190
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	12 486	12 633	13 559	12 845
Witwatersrand	Allocation (R)	312 603 000	296 826 000	319 417 000	332 959 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	13 876	13 884	13 720	13 726
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	22 528	21 379	23 281	24 258
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	28 994	25 331	25 811	25 561
Zululand	Allocation (R)	70 437 000	92 764 000	93 497 000	100 868 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	5 751	7 530	7 883	7 785
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	12 248	12 319	11 861	12 957
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	15 763	14 596	13 149	13 653
Transkei	Allocation (R)	-	121 304 000	120 285 000	109 543 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	-	7 816	7 420	6 562
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	-	15 520	16 211	16 694
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	-	18 389	17 972	17 591
Venda	Allocation (R)	-	77 039 000	92 507 000	98 044 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	-	8 280	7 702	7 975
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	-	9 304	12 011	12 294
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	-	11 024	13 316	12 955
Total: HAUs (Cape Town, Natal and Witwatersrand)	Allocation (R)	811 522 000	840 763 000	906 172 000	958 609 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	39 826	41 171	41 969	42 553
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	20 377	20 421	21 591	22 527
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	26 225	24 196	23 937	23 738
Total: HDUs (Durban-Westville, Medunsa, North, Zululand, Transkei and Venda)	Allocation (R)	-	764 827 000	773 491 000	802 624 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	-	56 006	53 335	49 832
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	-	13 656	14 503	16 107
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	-	16 180	16 078	16 972
Total: All institutions	Allocation (R)	-	1 605 590 000	1 679 663 000	1 761 233 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	-	97 177	95 304	92 385
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	-	16 522	17 624	19 064
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	-	19 576	19 539	20 089
CPI multiply factor		1.2870	1.1848	1.1086	1.0537

Notes: 1) For 1996-2003 the allocations include SAPSE subsidies and all *ad hoc* allocations, but exclude NSFAS allocations. For 2004 and 2005 the allocations include NFF block grants and *ad hoc* allocations, but exclude NSFAS allocations, restructuring allocations and allocations for foundation programmes. Data sources: Department of Education 2005. *Information on the State Budget for Higher Education*, Preliminary report; SAPSE and HEMIS databases; Statistics SA. 2005. Consumer Price Indices: 1996-2004 and BER. 2004: Projected CPI for 2005.

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
336 525 000	374 731 000	409 784 000	447 243 000	467 541 000	480 948 000
13 478	14 019	14 141	15 239	16 462	17 101
24 968	26 730	28 978	29 349	28 401	28 124
24 968	25 289	25 133	24 037	22 943	21 599
164 045 000	169 676 000	190 844 000	166 286 000	162 833 000	-
8 878	8 201	7 455	7 341	7 653	-
18 478	20 690	25 599	22 652	21 277	-
18 478	19 574	22 202	18 552	17 188	-
158 056 000	171 999 000	171 803 000	167 417 000	158 252 000	164 587 000
2 956	2 877	2 985	3 292	3 153	2 969
53 470	59 784	57 555	50 856	50 191	55 435
53 470	56 560	49 918	41 651	40 544	42 574
354 870 000	375 649 000	416 074 000	477 119 000	517 479 000	-
16 152	15 899	16 168	18 267	19 734	-
21 971	23 627	25 735	26 119	26 222	-
21 971	22 353	22 320	21 392	21 182	-
194 601 000	188 266 000	187 285 000	128 146 000	154 288 000	168 500 000
12 691	10 140	8 787	7 344	6 977	8 055
15 334	18 567	21 314	17 449	22 114	20 919
15 334	17 565	18 486	14 291	17 864	16 066
338 886 000	368 324 000	408 260 000	463 853 000	513 641 000	530 612 000
13 333	12 997	13 433	15 557	16 883	18 418
25 417	28 339	30 392	29 816	30 424	28 809
25 417	26 811	26 359	24 420	24 576	22 126
105 319 000	116 268 000	115 317 000	110 679 000	142 140 000	142 053 000
7 056	5 988	4 984	5 867	6 233	7 282
14 926	19 417	23 137	18 865	22 804	19 507
14 926	18 370	20 067	15 450	18 421	14 982
108 837 000	112 651 000	85 904 000	89 188 000	96 221 000	103 639 000
6 230	5 897	3 699	4 246	3 836	5 569
17 470	19 103	23 224	21 005	25 084	18 609
17 470	18 073	20 142	17 203	20 263	14 292
89 394 000	115 053 000	121 949 000	92 954 000	128 544 000	139 963 000
6 780	5 925	5 998	5 656	5 863	6 920
13 185	19 418	20 332	16 435	21 925	20 226
13 185	18 371	17 634	13 460	17 711	15 533
1 030 281 000	1 118 704 000	1 234 118 000	1 388 215 000	1 498 661 000	1 011 560 000
42 963	42 915	43 742	49 063	53 079	35 519
23 981	26 068	28 214	28 295	28 234	28 479
23 981	24 662	24 470	23 173	22 808	21 872
820 252 000	873 913 000	873 102 000	754 670 000	842 278 000	718 742 000
44 591	39 028	33 908	33 746	33 715	30 795
18 395	22 392	25 749	22 363	24 982	23 339
18 395	21 184	22 332	18 316	20 181	17 925
1 850 533 000	1 992 617 000	2 107 220 000	2 142 885 000	2 234 093 000	1 730 302 000
87 554	81 943	77 650	82 809	86 794	66 314
21 136	24 317	27 138	25 877	26 971	26 092
21 136	23 006	23 536	21 194	21 787	20 039
1.0000	0.9461	0.8673	0.8190	0.8078	0.7680

**Table 9: Allocations<sup>1)</sup> per weighted FTE student according to technikon and year**

Technikon	Allocation/Indicator	1996	1997	1998	1999
Cape	Allocation (R)	107 029 000	107 908 000	115 402 000	117 718 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	7 026	7 391	7 742	7 652
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	15 233	14 600	14 906	15 384
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	19 605	17 298	16 525	16 211
Northern Gauteng	Allocation (R)	85 334 000	93 417 000	97 860 000	95 702 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	5 238	6 119	6 946	7 220
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	16 291	15 267	14 089	13 255
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	20 967	18 089	15 619	13 967
Mangosuthu	Allocation (R)	46 988 000	70 493 000	71 037 000	75 864 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	2 991	3 595	4 367	4 564
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	15 710	19 609	16 267	16 622
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	20 219	23 233	18 034	17 516
Peninsula	Allocation (R)	87 490 000	91 719 668	110 357 000	107 743 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	5 506	6 033	6 559	6 826
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	15 890	15 203	16 825	15 784
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	20 450	18 013	18 653	16 632
Pretoria	Allocation (R)	156 886 557	176 320 202	177 016 647	223 949 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	11 092	12 910	13 250	14 799
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	14 144	13 658	13 360	15 133
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	18 203	16 182	14 811	15 946
Vaal Triangle	Allocation (R)	95 231 000	107 095 000	107 138 000	137 798 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	5 552	6 944	7 493	9 450
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	17 153	15 423	14 298	14 582
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	22 075	18 273	15 852	15 365
Border	Allocation (R)	33 103 000	39 915 000	48 981 000	61 629 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	-	1 270	1 999	2 869
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	-	31 429	24 503	21 481
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	-	37 238	27 165	22 635
North West	Allocation (R)	29 406 000	35 581 200	49 361 000	42 307 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	-	1 950	2 404	2 948
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	-	18 247	20 533	14 351
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	-	21 619	22 764	15 122
Eastern Cape	Allocation (R)	36 959 000	43 675 000	69 736 000	61 249 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	-	2 094	3 199	3 664
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	-	20 857	21 799	16 716
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	-	24 712	24 168	17 615
Total: HATs (Cape, Pretoria and Vaal Triangle)	Allocation (R)	359 146 557	391 323 202	399 556 647	479 465 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	23 670	27 245	28 485	31 901
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	15 173	14 363	14 027	15 030
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	19 528	17 018	15 551	15 838
Total: HDTs (Northern Gauteng, Peninsula, Mangosuthu, Border, North West and Eastern Cape)	Allocation (R)	-	374 800 868	447 332 000	444 494 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	-	21 061	25 474	28 091
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	-	17 796	17 560	15 823
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	-	21 085	19 468	16 674
Total: All institutions	Allocation (R)	-	766 124 070	846 888 647	923 959 000
	WFTEs(n-2)	-	48 306	53 959	59 992
	Allocation/WFTEs (R)	-	15 860	15 695	15 401
	Alloc/WFTEs (R of 2000)	-	18 791	17 400	16 229
CPI multiply factor		1.2870	1.1848	1.1086	1.0537

Notes: 1) For 1996-2003 the allocations include SAPSE subsidies and all *ad hoc* allocations, but exclude NSFAS allocations. For 2004 and 2005 the allocations include NFF block grants and *ad hoc* allocations, but exclude NSFAS allocations, restructuring allocations and allocations for foundation programmes. Data sources: Department of Education 2005. *Information on the State Budget for Higher Education*, Preliminary report; SAPSE and HEMIS data bases; Statistics SA. 2005. Consumer Price Indices: 1996-2004 and BER. 2004; Projected CPI for 2005

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
128 226 000	142 403 000	163 607 000	183 489 000	225 007 000	23 763 000
7 933	8 549	8 259	9 540	11 075	12 744
16 164	16 657	19 810	19 233	20 316	18 647
16 164	15 759	17 181	15 752	16 411	14 321
110 976 000	119 960 000	130 634 000	147 575 000	157 424 000	-
7 453	7 549	7 668	7 951	8 588	-
14 890	15 891	17 036	18 561	18 331	-
14 890	15 034	14 776	15 201	14 808	-
74 379 000	75 485 000	77 703 000	88 951 000	107 401 000	110 746 000
4 587	4 623	4 186	4 391	4 971	6 249
16 215	16 328	18 563	20 258	21 606	17 722
16 215	15 448	16 099	16 591	17 453	13 611
117 074 000	119 287 000	135 102 000	147 282 000	149 657 000	162 929 000
6 911	7 004	7 052	6 935	7 069	7 278
16 940	17 031	19 158	21 237	21 171	22 387
16 940	16 113	16 616	17 394	17 102	17 193
253 019 000	289 157 000	308 446 000	414 491 000	403 053 000	-
18 019	19 221	20 574	24 449	25 034	-
14 042	15 044	14 992	16 954	16 100	-
14 042	14 233	13 003	13 885	13 006	-
140 785 000	137 241 000	146 681 000	184 223 000	177 590 000	195 597 000
10 610	10 478	10 554	11 203	11 323	11 471
13 269	13 098	13 898	16 444	15 684	17 051
13 269	12 392	12 054	13 468	12 670	13 096
66 798 000	73 626 000	67 923 000	71 132 000	73 219 000	77 140 000
3 451	3 731	4 011	4 035	4 010	4 816
19 356	19 734	16 934	17 629	18 259	16 017
19 356	18 669	14 687	14 438	14 750	12 301
56 240 000	60 127 000	71 041 000	77 936 000	79 477 000	-
3 603	3 595	3 923	4 022	4 192	-
15 609	16 725	18 109	19 377	18 959	-
15 609	15 823	15 706	15 870	15 315	-
58 793 000	75 637 000	83 598 000	101 644 000	125 246 000	128 829 000
3 658	3 166	3 859	4 799	6 114	7 345
16 072	23 890	21 663	21 180	20 485	17 540
16 072	22 602	18 788	17 347	16 548	13 470
522 030 000	568 801 000	618 734 000	782 203 000	805 650 000	433 232 000
36 562	38 248	39 387	45 192	47 433	24 215
14 278	14 871	15 709	17 308	16 985	17 891
14 278	14 069	13 625	14 176	13 721	13 740
484 260 000	524 122 000	566 001 000	634 520 000	692 424 000	479 644 000
29 663	29 668	30 699	32 133	34 944	25 688
16 325	17 666	18 437	19 747	19 815	18 672
16 325	16 714	15 991	16 173	16 007	14 340
1 006 290 000	1 092 923 000	1 184 735 000	1 416 723 000	1 498 074 000	912 876 000
66 225	67 916	70 086	77 325	82 377	49 903
15 195	16 092	16 904	18 322	18 186	18 293
15 195	15 224	14 661	15 005	14 690	14 049
1.0000	0.9461	0.8673	0.8190	0.8078	0.7680

#### 4.4. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW FUNDING FRAMEWORK

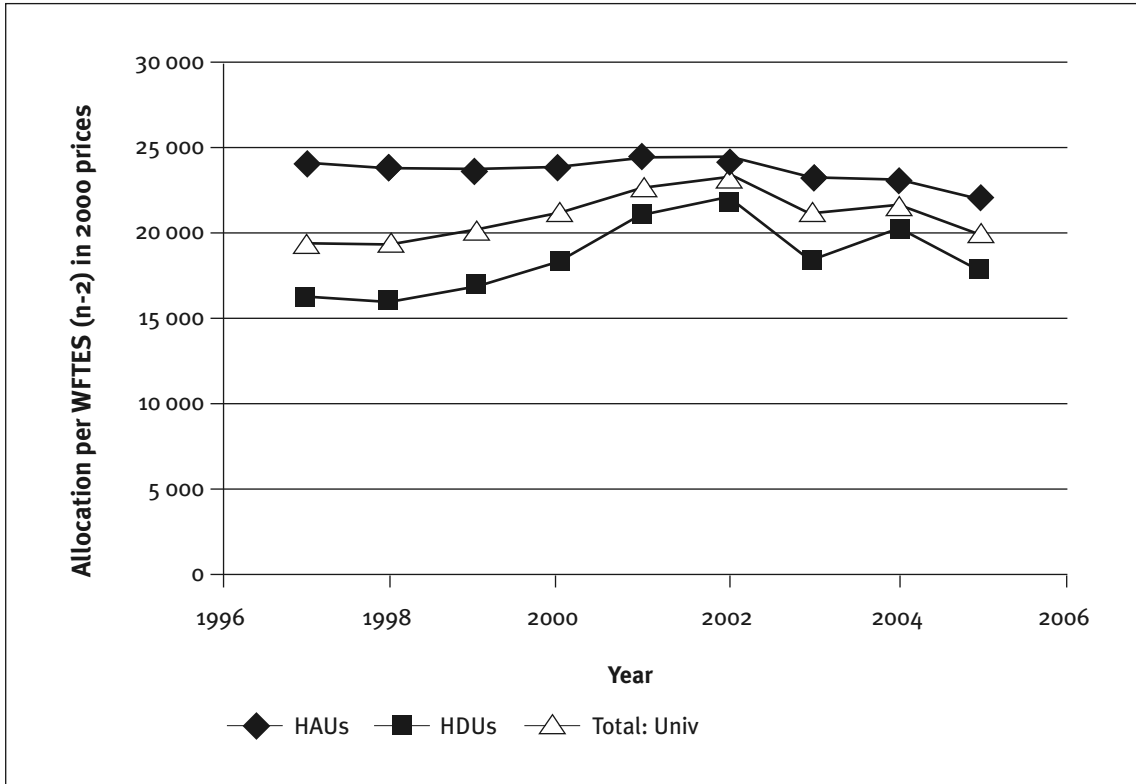
A migration strategy is used to implement the NFF block grant during the triennium 2004/05 to 2006/07. The strategy for 2004/05 amounted to the calculation of the subsidy allocations for each institution for that year according to both the SAPSE formula (base line) and the NFF (block grant). If the NFF allocation fell in the interval (SAPSE allocation minus 4.25% of the allocation, SAPSE allocation plus 4.25% of the allocation), the NFF allocation was used. In practice, the lower value of this interval was used as allocation when the NFF allocation was below that amount, while the upper value of the interval was used as allocation when the NFF allocation exceeded the upper value. The interval length of 8.5% of the SAPSE allocation was determined by the nominal percentage increase in the State block grant for 2004/05 above that of the 2003/04 grant.

An equivalent strategy was formulated for the allocations to institutions for the 2005/06 and 2006/07 financial years. The institutional baselines for the 2005/06 and 2006/07 financial years, respectively, are the final NFF block grants to these institutions for 2004/05 and 2005/06, increased respectively by 6.7% and 6.3% (according to the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework of Treasury). The respective interval lengths used in determining the final NFF allocations for the 2005/06 and 2006/07 years are therefore also 6.7% and 6.3% of the respective baseline allocations.

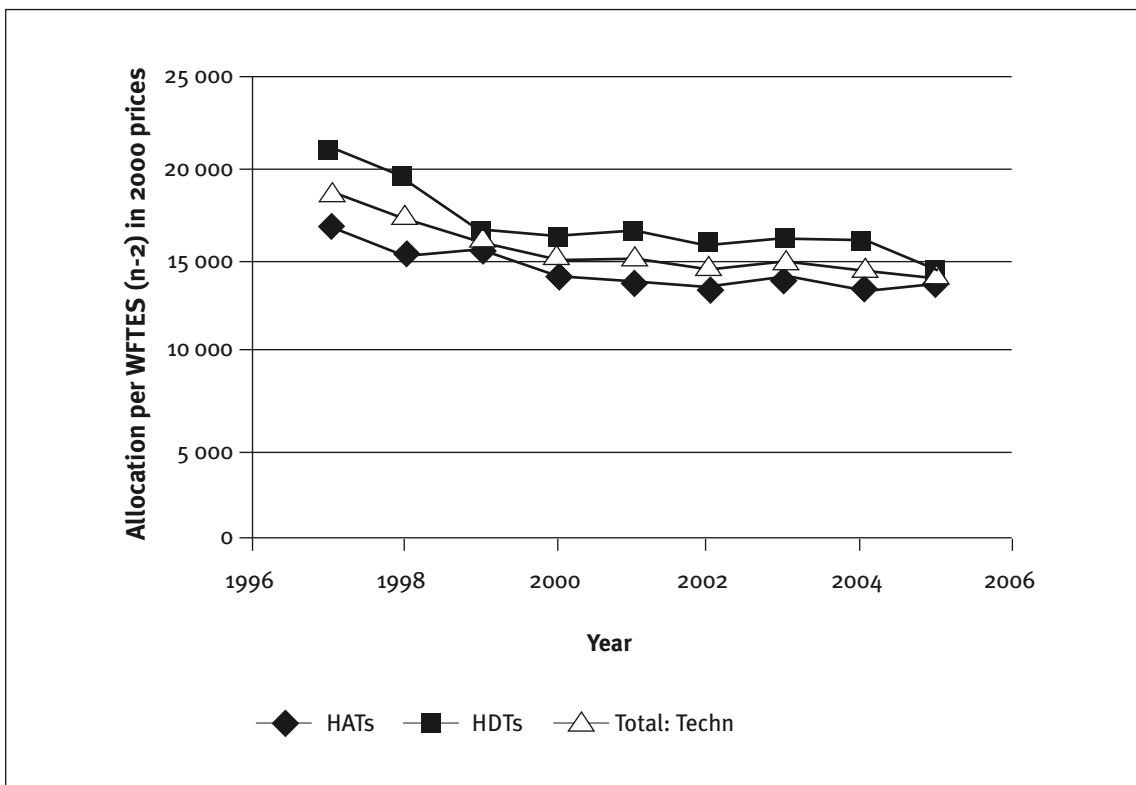
The migration strategy discussed above, the use of differential norms used for the research output of universities and technikons, and the introduction of development allocations for research and teaching were all supposed to cushion institutions from substantial negative effects in the transition from the SAPSE formulae to the NFF as State funding instruments for HE. It is, however, of some interest to determine whether any systematic differences in allocations have resulted from this transition. Table 8 compares the State allocations to nine universities according to the SAPSE formula (for 1996 to 2003) with allocations to these institutions according to the NFF (for 2004 and 2005), thus, after the migration strategy had been used for two years. Table 9 does the same comparison for nine technikons. Only institutions that have been left intact in 2004 and 2005 by the institutional merging process (or where information is available separately for the merging institutions) are included in the two tables. This was necessitated since no official FTE student numbers (needed for the comparisons in the tables) for the seven Vista campuses (incorporated into seven different institutions), the East London campus of Rhodes (incorporated into Fort Hare University) and the Dental Faculty of Stellenbosch (incorporated into the University of the Western Cape) are available. Furthermore, the Durban Institute of Technology (DIT) was only established in 2003, while Technikon Witwatersrand, Technikon South Africa and Technikon Port Elizabeth have since been merged with institutions receiving undisclosed numbers of Vista students. Although the Border Technikon and the Eastern Cape Technikon merged with the University of Transkei in 2005, budget information is available for these three institutions separately for that year (2005). The same applies to Cape Technikon and Peninsula Technikon. Separate information is also available for Technikons Pretoria, North West and Northern Gauteng for their merging year, 2004, and for the Universities of Natal and Durban-Westville for their merging year, also 2004.

In order to compare the SAPSE and NFF allocations, the amounts in year  $n$  are expressed in Tables 8 and 9 in unit values, that is, the weighted FTE student (WFTES) numbers in year  $n-2$ . This unit

**Figure 3: Real allocations per WFTEs (in constant 2000 prices) for universities according to institutional group and year.**



**Figure 4: Real allocations per WFTEs (in constant 2000 prices) for technicians according to institutional group and year.**



value has been selected, as it is the basic input variable for the NFF. Weighted student numbers are determined by using the SAPSE weighting factors of 1 for contact FTEs and 0.67 for distance FTEs. To ensure a fair comparison between the two funding systems, the allocations in Tables 8 and 9 include – for 1996 to 2003 – the SAPSE subsidy amounts, as well as all *ad hoc* allocations, but exclude the NSFAS earmarked amounts. For 2004 and 2005, the NFF block grants and ad hoc allocations are included, but allocations for NSFAS, for restructuring and for foundation programmes, are excluded.

Figures 3 and 4, respectively, summarize the most relevant information of Tables 8 and 9, in other words, the real allocations (in constant 2000 prices) per WFTEs for the two university sector groups (HAUs and HDUs) and for the two technikon-sector groups (HATs and HDTs). The respective totals for the nine universities and the nine technikons are also shown in the figures.

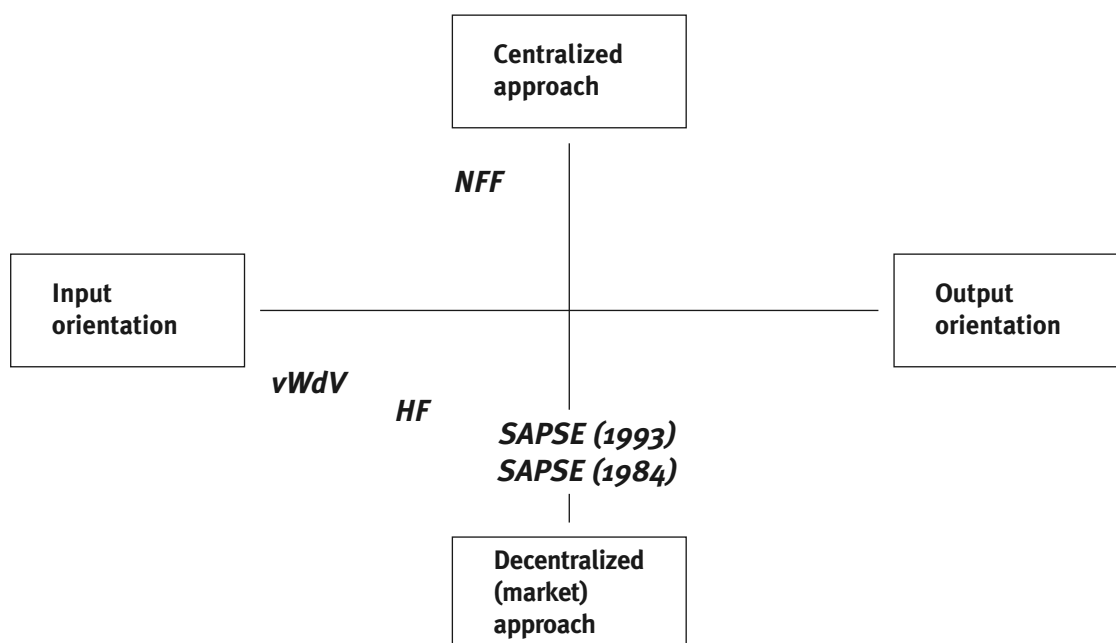
From Tables 8 and 9, as well as Figures 3 and 4, the following are evident –

- Although some fluctuating values of annual real allocations per WFTEs are seen for individual institutions for the period 1996 to 2003, the 2003 and 2004 allocations are relatively compatible. The fact that SAPSE allocations for year  $n$ , was calculated on projected ESS for year  $n$  and not on FTE students for year  $n-2$  (used in the comparisons) contributed to the earlier fluctuations.
- The HAUs experienced a mild decrease in relative allocations from 2003 to 2004, while the HDUs experienced a substantial increase in relative allocations from 2003 to 2004. This could indicate an over correction in especially introducing the research development allocations in the NFF.
- Both HATs and HDTs experienced very mild decreases in relative allocations from 2003 to 2004.
- The significant decreases in relative allocations from 2004 to 2005 for both the university and technikon groups are without doubt due to the implementation of the growth restrictions of 5% for contact and 3% for distance FTE students in 2003 in calculating the 2005/06 State allocations to institutions.

## 5. SUBSIDY FORMULAE FOR HE IN SOUTH AFRICA CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO JONGBLOED'S TWO DIMENSIONS

Returning to Jongbloed's classification in paragraph one of this document, the five subsidy formulae used since 1953 to fund HE and discussed in this paper can (very crudely) be classified according to Jongbloed's two-dimensional scheme (see Figure 1), as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Two-dimensional positioning of HE funding formulae according to Jongbloed's scheme



The reasons for the classification are:

- *Holloway (HF)*: Partly market oriented but basic teaching provision independent of market. Apart, possibly, from courses offered by institutions, no other output measures are used.
- *Van Wyk de Vries (vWdV)*: Some State involvement, for example, centrally determined personnel remuneration. No output measures used in funding.
- *SAPSE (1984)*: Completely market oriented and almost fifty per cent based on output measures;
- *SAPSE (1993)*: Growth restrictions on student growth and almost fifty per cent based on output measures; and
- *NFF*: Government determines the size and shape of HE from year to year. This is done *inter alia* by means of the approval of institutional Programme/Qualification Mixes (PQM), the annual determination of the relative block allocations and earmarked allocations for the HE system, as well as growth restrictions on subsidizable FTE students or teaching input units. About thirty per cent of funding is determined by means of output measures.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The funding of higher education by means of some kind of formula has been in practice in South Africa for more than 50 years. This has helped institutions to plan ahead. There is a chronology in the five formulae used during these years. By way of evolution, the best characteristics of the older formulae were mostly retained in developing the new ones. The latest formula, the NFF, has been in operation for two years. The most important differences between



the NFF and its two SAPSE forerunners are firstly, the fact that the NFF is much more State centred than the SAPSE formulae (see Figure 5) and secondly, that the NFF is only a mechanism dividing a given amount and not (like SAPSE) a formula that determines the funding need for higher education. A consequence of this last important difference between the SAPSE formulae and the NFF is that a built-in cost inflator is not deemed to be a necessary part of the NFF.

Judging from the rather limited study in Paragraph 4.4, the transition from the SAPSE funding system to the NFF seems to have been relatively smooth. As can be expected, the capping of the subsidised FTE students in 2003 in the calculation of the 2005/06 HE institutional allocations has decreased the unit allocations.

The suspension of the teaching input block grant of the NFF for the 2006/07 financial year (and the proposed continuation of this strategy to the 2007/08 and 2008/09 financial years) by the Minister of Education, shall definitely erode the viability of the NFF (as described in Paragraph 4.2) as a future mechanism, suitable for State funding of HE. This suspension is also a setback for institutional planning processes, which had already been developed according to the parameters defined in the NFF.

New policy or the confirmation of the existing policy on space and cost norms for the erection of new buildings and land improvements other than buildings at HE is needed urgently. In addition, the fact that the NFF lacks a component for the subsidization of capital expenditure at HE institutions, is an oversight and should be rectified as soon as possible.

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Venter R.H. 1985. *An investigation of Government Financing of Universities*. SAPSE-110 *Comparing Education statistics across the World*, Table 13.

# INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICTS) AND SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING/S (OF) THE LANDSCAPE

Laura Czerniewicz, Neetha Ravjee, Nhlanhla Mlitwa

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides some insight into the ways in which Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are understood by practitioners and researchers working in higher education institutions in South Africa, in general, and how ICTs are understood in relation to change, in particular. These interpretations are located within policies, practices and structures that nationally and institutionally frame the work, both explicitly and implicitly. The chapter also briefly highlights some key issues that are at present dominant in the field.<sup>1</sup> Running through the chapter are observations of unevenness, emergence and growth.

### 1.1. FRAMING AND METHODOLOGY

This study draws from the literature on higher education, and the sociology and philosophy of science. Interview transcripts, national and institutional policies and regulations, as well as published journal articles by South African researchers, and to some extent, Master's dissertations and doctoral theses are drawn upon extensively. Methodologically, an iterative approach is used, working firstly, up from the data and secondly, down from the theory to locate the data in the larger theoretical frame.

The main sources of direct data for the report are institutional policies, structures, new teaching practices and interviews with 16 people, generally holding middle management positions, at the intersection of the technological and the educational, within university structures in South Africa. The interviewees are interpreters at the interface between policy makers, on the one hand, and academics and students, on the other. A different picture would have emerged had the respondents been senior level decision-makers or discipline-based academics or students. The respondents were keen not to be personally identified, given that they often raised institutionally based problems.

The respondents by no means comprise a comprehensive list of everyone working in the field. They do, however, provide a sample of a range of employees at South African institutions (as they existed in 2004), including historically advantaged and disadvantaged; primarily English speaking or primarily Afrikaans speaking; technikon and university. No one from the dedicated distance education providers was interviewed, as the focus was on ICTs in the institutions that are chiefly regarded as contact institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is drawn from a lengthy research report, which maps ICTs in higher education in South Africa. The report provides details from primary sources, fleshes out theoretical perspectives and provides additional sections. The report is available from the Council on Higher Education (2005).

Recent work in technology studies, particularly those of Feenberg (1999) and Brey (2004), are drawn on in order to provide starting points to understand the relationship between ICTs, social context (educational context) and change. Feenberg's four approaches to the relation between technology and society – determinist, instrumental, substantive and critical – proved useful. Brey's (2003:50-54) work helps to explain the ways in which technology and society are co-constructed, or "deeply interwoven". Brey argues that technology is socially shaped and that society is simultaneously shaped by technology. Social-shaping approaches assert that social factors and social processes shape technology, and oppose determinist claims of technological change as a linear process resulting from an internal technological logic. Strong versions of this approach would include social constructivist approaches. Technological-shaping approaches, in contrast, claim that technologies shape their social contexts in various ways – by opening novel possibilities for change, and in their side effects and multiple uses.

Finally, it was deemed necessary to problematize technology – its language, assumptions, strategies, practices and effects – in its different contexts, as a way of exploring both explicit and implicit power relations. This means accepting that technology can at times function to enhance teaching and learning, but it can also disadvantage, stigmatize and exclude people in various ways (Ravjee, 2004a:3-4).

### **1.2. GROWTH OF ICTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

A review of the landscape reveals that there has been an increase in interest in technology in many higher education institutions in South Africa since 2000. While in other countries the interest in technology is related to national policy frameworks and impetus provided by funding bodies, this is not the case in South Africa, where there are as yet no specified policies for technology in higher education. Despite this, higher education institutions are spending more of their budgets on ICT infrastructure than in previous years in the face of a poor ICT infrastructure, nationally and in higher education.

The increased interest appears to have occurred for several reasons, the most prevalent being a dominant view, an agreed kind of "common sense", that people are moving towards a new kind of society for which ICTs are considered a basic requirement. Such a society requires a support infrastructure in the form of people with knowledge, skills, and the ability to deliver ICT services. It also involves a reformulation of the nature of learning and the requirements of a graduate. For some, technology is a fact of life and has to be engaged with as a competitive necessity or as a result of current circumstances. Two other common views are, first, that ICTs can play the role of on educational change agency and, second, that technological innovation and educational innovation are intertwined.

Although a few universities had put ICT strategies in place as long ago as the late 1990s, in most cases, this has happened much more recently and, in a few, it has been impossible to find any evidence of action in this arena at all.

With regard to where the interest is coming from, the prime movers are individual academic staff (in the form of champions), senior leadership (either informally or formally) and the students themselves.

In all institutional contexts, individual champions are cited as drivers: staff (academic and non-academic) already using computers, located either in pockets of group activity or largely isolated. These individuals are found in different places in the structures and hierarchies, and come from a variety of disciplines. These individuals became involved, because they had experienced technology on an individual course, or because they were “playing with technology”. Many began as educators using technology for administrative support, and then moved on to experimenting with teaching and learning possibilities from there.

Sometimes, the drivers are individuals at a senior level who recognize and support activity on the ground; and, in this way, succeed in “getting e-learning started on campus”. In at least eight institutional cases, senior level strategic decisions have been taken to support the adoption of ICTs in higher education, with the concomitant significant resources being systemically provided. In some of these cases, particularly historically black institutions, senior level administrators have supported ICT uptake without the institutional resources to partner this commitment, with “money, money, money” being cited as the major constraint, and donors being drawn on for some support. It was observed in one case that larger forces might be needed to drive internal processes, as “we need to be pushed from the outside,” as one respondent confessed.

The third significant group driving the increased use of ICTs is students. They already use computers more than academics do,<sup>2</sup> and arrive with expectations that ICTs will form part of their higher education experience. They are thus key drivers for change.

## 2. POLICIES AND STRUCTURES

While ICTs for education at schools and in institutions of further education and training (FET) are prioritized at national policy level in South Africa (Department of Education, 2003), there is a lack of a coherent national policy framework on ICTs in relation to higher education in South Africa. References to educational ICTs in a number of related policies do, however, exist in *ad hoc*, limited and indirect ways.

The importance of ICTs for education, specifically for teaching and learning, is noted in the Higher Education White Paper 3 (1997), the National Plan, the National Research and Development Strategy (2002) and the Foresight ICT report (1999), all of which pair economic change in an information economy with educational change, and relate this to the need for ICT-related graduate competencies.

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<sup>2</sup> See Czerniewicz and Brown’s paper on use of ICTs, 2005, for details.

However, there is no coordination regarding ICTs in higher education across pertinent policy documents and this opens up the possibility of key issues being overlooked while other relevant matters are foregrounded in those documents. The need for a single critical eye on these issues is a matter to be noted and addressed at a national supervisory level or, as the Americans say, at “oversight” level.

At the institutional level, there is a continuum of policy examples of ICTs in higher education. On the one hand, there are formal policies complete with strategic plans and regulatory procedures, as well as statements of policy principles. There are a number of cases of draft policies or of individuals currently engaged in producing them. On the other hand, there is a significant group of institutions where there is no evidence of such policies at all.

A handful of institutions have detailed and comprehensive policies and associated documents in place. Stellenbosch University, for example, has an E-Campus Strategy, an e-learning policy, and a general Information Technology (IT) policy and requires a “minimum electronic presence” (Van der Merwe & Pool, 2002). The University of Pretoria provides another case of a detailed institutional policy framework, with its Telematic Learning and Education Innovation Strategic Plan 2002-2005 (September, 2002). Other institutions, including University of Cape Town (UCT), Tshwane University of Technology and the University of the Western Cape, have formal policy or strategic documents that make their key principles and intentions clear, although there do not appear, as yet, to be accompanying operational or implementation documents.

In other cases, such as University of Fort Hare and the University of Free State (UFS), draft policies exist, and in several cases, policies are being written from the ground up with newly appointed individuals being required as their first task to produce “some sort of policy document” to frame their work.

In some instances, ICTs and teaching and learning are incorporated into related policy documents, such as the Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Strategy at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). However, there do not seem to be any frameworks at all regarding the use of ICTs in higher education in a significant number of institutions.

Policy intentions are first being formally marked and are only articulated later in many institutions. Even without formal policies or regulations in place, there are relevant structures in existence at most institutions, located in several settings, including teaching and learning structures, higher educational development structures, IT structures and faculty departments.

The largest concentration of expertise is located in teaching and learning structures with the more recent trend being to locate online learning in newly created structures, specifically

framed to support higher education development, as at the University of Cape Town, the Durban University of Technology and the University of the Free State.

The location of such centres in learning and teaching structures represents a significant shift from the past, and signals an emphasis on the educational aspect of educational technology. However, despite this, a supportive champion is an important element in the power play of interests, legitimacy and growth. Hence, one e-learning coordinator noted that their director (of a teaching and learning structure) had no interest in e-learning as a tool and had not included that element in the current strategic plan. In another case, the head of the teaching and learning structure indicated that the e-learning structures focused on the “e” part while ignoring the “learning” dimensions. In cases where structures continue to be located in the ICTs services, it was because of a champion supporting the work located there.

Many institutions have two structures, which divide the roles of support, development, research and teaching along traditional academic/non-academic lines. Thus, teaching and researching ICTs is likely to be located in academic departments, such as education or information systems, while non-academic structures play support, service and/or development roles. This division of labour differs from institution to institution, as does the extent of collaboration as well as associated tensions. These structural divides are significant and may be due to a lack of senior level monitoring of the kind of integrated work required of ICTs in higher education, itself a new area spanning several disciplinary domains. They may also reflect long-standing tensions within universities between the craft knowledge of practitioners in what are generally regarded as support posts, and the specifically discipline-based knowledge of traditional researchers.

The fragmentation and dispersed location suggest how important individual champions remain at this early stage, especially given the absence of dedicated, coherent policy frameworks. The relationships, at institutional level, between individuals, emerging organizational forms, roles and practices and current uncoordinated policy frameworks need to be explored more fully given the crucial role being played by educational technologists – implicitly and explicitly – as agents of change. Through decisions and choices on the ground, important decisions are being made framing an emerging policy framework, which makes explicit the subconscious allocation of values. While this daily work is exciting and often innovative, it would benefit from conscious policy principles that exemplify the clear objectives of South African higher education.

Attention clearly needs to be paid to the issue of a potential single national policy. There are arguments both for and against an overarching policy, especially in the light of the currently policy intense, higher education environment. A national policy would provide a clear statement of principles, and express values in relation to overall intentions and goals. Such a policy could play a role in ensuring that the required human resource development could take place in a coordinated fashion in a manner that is appropriate and responsive to local conditions. It could also play a role in an accreditation system for the emerging career paths of people working in

his field. However, a new policy would require additional resources in a national department that is already financially stretched. It might also spawn additional regulations which change-weary academics and managers could be resistant to even if the intentions were sound.

### **3. PRACTITIONER-BASED NOTIONS OF ICTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The terminology of ICTs in education varies a great deal, although the most commonly used terms are e-learning and online learning. Given the emphasis on the social aspects that were observed throughout this study, it is not surprising that for many it is the “learning” part of the word that is important. E-learning may be associated with a specific pedagogical approach – for example, either instructivism or constructivism – an indication of how diverse the connotations of the concept can be.

There is also lack of consensus about the extent to which e-learning is associated with distance learning, with polarized positions being represented (both that it is associated and that it isn't!) as well as arguments for other terms, including “blended learning” and “open learning”, regardless of the platform on which it occurs. There is occasional use of terms, such as “distributed learning” and “multimodal learning”, but the terms “virtual learning” and “networked learning”, both used regularly beyond South Africa, are not evident in the data collected for this survey.

There is agreement that technology in higher education refers to information and communication technologies, that is, the amalgam of computing and telecommunications technologies, including computers, the Internet, CD-ROMS, software and digitalware. Generally, ICTs refer to networked computers.

For many people in higher education, using ICTs means the web. Thus, the term “web-based” is used as an equivalent to ICTs even when, technically speaking, the two terms are not interchangeable. The shift from stand-alone multimedia machines to inter-connected web-based technologies is noted, with many observing that it is only since the advent of the web that ICTs have been mainstreamed into education.

While there is some consensus about what ICTs are, there is less about what they mean. Such meanings can be evoked by the metaphors used to describe them, as they all reflect serious thought into these issues and clearly place competing ideas about teaching and learning at the centre of the e-learning debate. In addition, while these metaphors refer to ICTs in higher education, they can be seen to reflect larger discourses on the relationship between technology and change, and its role or function in higher education. They can therefore be usefully interpreted through the technological shaping of society and the social shaping of technology, or the co-construction approach that combines elements of both, as described earlier.



The dominant conception of ICTs in education is that of the tool, the nature of which varies. This exemplifies a social shaping perspective, with ICTs generally perceived as neutral. Thus, the comment that “ICT is just a tool, some people see technology as being able to teach people and I don’t believe it can” (I.K.) is typical. This point may extend to the related vehicle metaphor, which leads to a discussion of issues of appropriateness, and the fitness of ICTs for purpose and use, with questions being asked as to what kind of vehicle or tool is needed for specific kinds of tasks.

We have found it necessary to problematize technology further and we argue that it can, under certain conditions, be beneficial or not under other conditions, and is highly dependent on other things such as specific context or the history of the institution. A less commonly articulated approach specifically imbues tools with human values, indeed ‘tools have politics.’ (I.M.)

There is also some indication of approaches whereby ICTs and education are co-constructed. These tended to be expressed in two other metaphors, which are less dependent on images and suggest stand-alone or linear components. These metaphors suggest more systemic approaches: the ecology metaphor and the bloodstream metaphor. Both begin by explaining or defining ICTs in higher education as some kind of network. Interestingly enough, they both move towards describing ICTs in relation to change processes. The bloodstream metaphor is used to indicate networks, but also to suggest a diffusion mechanism by which ICTs are appropriately and selectively utilized, and are mainstreamed into the core business of the university.

The diffusion metaphor is indicative of a theme not covered in this project, that of the processes and mechanisms of organizational change, especially in relation to ICTs. The “how” of such unfolding and elaborate change in institutions is the subject of much international literature and is certainly an area of investigation that would be valuable locally.

#### **4. INTERPRETATIONS OF ICT AND HIGHER EDUCATION CHANGE**

Given that ICTs are being taken up in a higher education context characterized by the changes with which ICTs are almost inevitably associated, it is necessary to explore the ways that the intersections of ICTs and higher education change are understood and constructed.

These notions of change are perceived of as “clusters of meaning” which are represented in formal texts, reported practices and meanings in practice. In attempting to understand how meanings emerge, and how meanings are learned, it is important to examine dominant meanings in specific local contexts, in networks of institutional actors. The ways in which contested meanings of ICT within and among groups both shape how institutions use (or do not use) particular ICTs, and give rise to new practices and issues (e.g. prioritization of institutional funds; choice of software) are also considered.

Three clusters of meanings of the relation of technology to higher education change emerge in this empirical research: first, ICT and higher education change as improvement, second, ICT and higher

education change as innovation, while the third locates ICT change in, and as, transformation (in different ways). The first two meanings seem to be located firmly in the overarching globalization discourse on higher education change – evident in the language of improvement and innovation in associated policies, structures and practices – and generally tend to present an unproblematic view of the relationship between ICTs and higher education change. The third meaning seems to oscillate between an optimistic view of technology in transforming higher education, and a critical perspective that problematizes certain aspects of the higher education space.

These three meanings coexist and overlap, contradict and compete, at different times. They jostle with one another and are foregrounded at different times, at different levels within institutions and at meso-levels and at macro-levels, often operating within the dominant meanings of the globalization discourse, but also intersecting with other subaltern discourses to form various clusters of associated meaning and practices.

#### **4.1. CHANGE AS IMPROVEMENT**

The idea that the recent ICT inspired changes lead to various kinds of improvements in higher education – from increasing access to higher education, reconfiguring libraries and institutional management and administration, to improving the quality of teaching and learning – is evident in all data forms informing this study. Key terms in this discourse include “enhance”, “improve” and “added-value”. This perspective is expressed in the progress-linked metaphors used to describe e-learning – door, horizons, staircase – which suggest an improvement in the form of a movement to a better place. Thus, one respondent surmised that “... if anything it [e-learning] is a staircase I suppose, because it is a difficult uphill struggle but you get there in the end. Hard work but rewarding, a staircase with a great shining light at the end.” (I.B.)

In this meaning of change, existing relationships, activities and pedagogical practices within the institution remain fundamentally the same. There is neither a threat, nor a fundamental challenge to a sense of identity or an existing notion of what higher education or pedagogy comprises. However, prevalent institutional and pedagogical activities can be accomplished more speedily, or more efficiently, or to a greater extent, thanks to technology. Rather than a fundamental shift in pedagogy or in the higher education space itself, there is rather some kind of added value. The meaning of “change as improvement” is evident in ways that include increased access to content and better communication, and forms part of an efficiency paradigm.

Networked computers are often promoted, because they increase access to content, especially for those in disadvantaged circumstances, and the point is often extended to emphasize how increased access is provided to a larger system, an endless library for all. The quantity of information is stressed, as are the value of immediacy, the ease of updating material, and the speed of research. On the other hand, a repeated criticism of online learning is that it is used too often to “dump” content, and that the real opportunities lie in the communication possibilities of the technologies.

Hence the remark that “a computer is a machine, it has no life to it, it has no personality to it, it’s a creation of man, ok. All that a computer has done, it has made communication a lot more effective”.

The possibilities of extended communication are described in two ways: by collapsing distance and by compressing time. Not only do ICTs offer a larger classroom, but they can also take students beyond the classroom. This leads to an “anywhere anytime” hype, which may mask other factors that determine whether there is a real shift in practice. Therefore, the opening up of distance is described as being experienced in both a positive and a negative light, with explicit links being made to costs and pedagogical approaches. It is observed that extended delivery across distance may be meaningless in isolation, but at the same time, there is a sense that opening up relationships across distance provides opportunities for new models that provide increased control and power.

The questions arise as to the conditions under which these extended possibilities can enhance pedagogical communication and how online communication is being used. These are the subjects of a growing research area, given that the advantages of the medium do not automatically lead to optimum educational use.

Improvement approaches are often associated with an efficiency paradigm where the fundamental nature of the system is not seen as problematic, but rather that the system is not working as well as it should. This paradigm does not seek to transform existing practices, but to make them more efficient. The efficiency paradigm is also viewed in both a positive and a negative light. For some, efficiency means lightening teaching and administrative burdens by automating repetitive tasks, so that the real pedagogical issues can receive attention. However, some argue that common practices are simply add-on approaches, which include using technology for the delivery of course content without adding value in the form of follow-up interactive learning activities, or without addressing issues of curriculum transformation. This is in line with comments from elsewhere that e-learning is currently ‘merely an enhancement of existing practices’ (Garrison & Anderson, 2004).

This perspective is not dominant in the interview data, and indeed references to this approach usually appear in the form of a critique of constant improvement that does not necessarily question the nature of that change.

There is an increasingly common acknowledgement that ICTs, or any other technology, cannot improve teaching and learning or effect change independently of the context of its application. Thus, the degree to which web-based teaching enhances learning depends on the context, and the argument is also made that the context rather than the medium determines the effectiveness and the extent of added value.

In summary, on the positive side, ICTs are seen as providing the tools to make higher education more efficient in various ways – by reducing administrative work and assisting with monotonous teaching activities. On the negative side, efficiency can become a good in itself at the expense of other educational values.

#### 4.2 CHANGE AS INNOVATION

In contrast to the “improvement” paradigm’s focus on adding-on new elements to make the existing system more efficient, innovation approaches emphasize “doing things differently” and are more likely to pay attention to the teaching and learning contexts of technology. The various examples discussed below suggest the meanings attached to “something new.” The associated meanings of ICT-enhanced change as innovation stress the original, the unique, and that which was not previously possible.

The first set of examples focuses on the advantages of the new media forms arising from and part of ICTs. These examples also refer to the use of artefacts for purposes for which they were not originally designed. As more than one respondent suggested, change is about innovation. It is not more of the same thing in a different way “like putting existing stuff behind glass” (I.O.), but it is about doing something new.

Another view emphasizes the role of technology as “forcing” a kind of reflective practice, leading to positive educational outcomes. For example, the requirement in some institutions (locally and elsewhere) for a significant percentage of courses to have an “online presence”, means that all course outlines are now open to public (including other lecturers and students’) scrutiny. It has also led to changes in practice, as one respondent observed. However, it can also be experienced negatively as an imposition with “online presence” requirements at some higher education institutions being met by strong faculty resistance to this kind of mandatory use of ICTs, viewed as diminishing faculty autonomy and independence.<sup>3</sup>

Another set of examples focuses on the ways that ICTs are understood to offer something new pedagogically, with pedagogical practices comprising relationships between key agents (teacher, student and content) and consisting of a repertoire of teaching and learning activities. Many reported practices (from both respondents and the literature) focus on these new activities and new relationships.

The kinds of examples found locally feed into the large, growing international literature, which demonstrates the myriad possibilities and experiences of new teaching and learning activities now occurring owing to ICTs. References were made to activities to do with content presentation (such as online animations), practical activities, simulations and real life activities, as well as activities that benefited from anonymous learning environments. It was observed that technology provides practical activities with opportunities for safe, self-paced and varied activities not possible in a non-digital context. Ironically, in a medium criticized for policing (Noble, 2002), the opportunity for anonymity as a safe learning experience was noted. The opportunity provided by networked computers for students to create authentic productive activities was also noted.

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3 For example, the recent two-month long faculty strike at the University of York in Canada and the similar faculty and student resistance at UCLA provide two comparative cases of resistance to requirements imposed by university administrators to put aspects of courses online. For a further discussion of this see Noble (2002).

Interactivity is believed by many to lie at the heart of the educational experience. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that several respondents and case studies mention the possibilities of ICT-enabled interactivity forming a part of a whole range of different activities online. Indeed, it is even argued that ICTs make it possible for universities to get back to the interactivity that should be central to their work. ICTs are seen to offer tremendous possibilities in improving communication and a sense of presence in large undergraduate classes. Not only does the technology enable lecturer-student communication, but it also specifically highlights the way that it enables peer communication in large classes. It has been argued that technology makes it possible for different interest groups to communicate.

Clearly, online communication and collaboration is an important new practice, one acknowledged at the South African policy level.

ICT has created one specific new form of contact... Online communication allows learners and educators to remain separated by time and space (although some forms of communication assume people congregating at a common time) but to sustain an ongoing dialogue. In online discussion forums for example, spatial separation between educator and learner is removed by the 'virtual' space of the Internet but temporal separation remains... This suggests that there may be cause to suggest a new descriptor of educational methods of educator-learner contact that are not face- to-face but are mediated through new communication technologies. (CHE, 2004: 76)

In addition, new staff and students roles may arise from ICTs. Staff, such as tutors, can play a supportive, monitoring role. At the same time, it is emphasized that ICTs do not mean that there is no longer a role for staff. Student roles are changing, as "this [e-learning strategy] puts much more learning in the hands of the student." (I.D.)

While the examples observed provide a glimpse of emergent innovation in South Africa, there is a need for detailed investigations of these kinds of ICT-enabled activities in South African education with regard to their extent, nature, quality and effectiveness. It was noted too that the meaning of technology-enhanced changes as "innovation" in higher education change tends to focus optimistically on exciting possibilities, but it can be critiqued for undermining existing power relations. This lack of attention to issues of power, knowledge, institutional cultures, and the dynamics of historical redress is also part of a general critique of the information society argument, which generally frames this approach to ICTs (See Ravjee, 2002 and 2004b). Thus, ICTs and innovation are often spoken of in one breath as twinned concepts inextricably linked to the idea of a knowledge society, as can be seen in South African policies at the national and institutional levels.

### **4.3. ICT-ENHANCED CHANGE AS TRANSFORMATION**

In the South African landscape, "clusters of meanings" of change are observed as transformation occurring in two dimensions. The first emphasizes ICT in relation to institutional transformation, while the second is about the relation of ICTs to the transformation of pedagogies.

The cluster of meanings associated with ICT-enhanced institutional transformation emphasizes the power dynamics of integrating ICTs into the very fabric of the institution. Thus, as ICT-related learning structures continue to expand – with differential levels of funding across and within different institutions – they raise new issues that intersect with existing issues facing higher education institutions. ICTs are therefore more likely to form one thread in a complex net of transformation, including historical redress, curriculum transformation, diversity and equity.

Terms, such as “pervasive” and “total”, are observed, forming part of the argument that the introduction of ICTs is extensive and systemic. This understanding is alluded to in a comment on the inter-connectedness of the various elements of the work of the university, how changes in one element inevitably cause changes elsewhere; “all of these old elements [are] like a spider’s web; you pull on one little aspect and all the others start moving, so there was no way we could have done just e-learning ... that is what we found. It was just amazing what jumped out of the cupboard when you start moving the one little piece and still does and it is just amazing... So teaching and learning impacts on research, impacts on admin., impacts on... Incredible.” (I.H.)

This view is also evident in some policies and structures including the National Plan, the Presidential International Task Force on Information Society and Development and the Foresight Report which explicitly associate technology with transformation. This understanding of ICT-led transformation can also be associated with a developmental approach, evident in the strategic location of learning in educational development structures in some institutions. The choice of structures – for example, the location of e-learning structures within a Centre for Higher Education Development as in the DUT, UFS and UCT – itself suggests an integrative approach to institutional transformation. Further empirical studies into the history of these new structures and their emergence out of (or not) existing IT or teaching and learning structures would clarify the understanding of these changes.

Research and reflections published by South African academics consider the tensions implicit within such transformation. For example, one study critically investigates the implementation of online learning technologies at higher education institutions, with the accent on the needs of society and the role of business. The conclusion is that the process may be directed towards the needs of business, while the overarching needs of society are neglected (Heydenrych, 2000a). Another study explores the dilemmas of distributive justice with regard to whether South African universities should introduce or develop online learning for flexible mode delivery under circumstances in which some students do not have access to Information Communication Technologies (Broekman *et al.*, 2002). And yet another study provides some sober reminders of the difficulties dictated by the context, in the form of enabling or constraining conditions. This stance is useful in understanding both how contested meanings of ICT actually shape everyday, normal practices – for example, the choice of what type of technology to use, and what kind of practices emerge to support that choice – and also what power relations are in place to either support or challenge these choices and related practices.

For some, ICT-lead transformation is useful “at the level of techniques” but is unable, if isolated from other transformation initiatives, to speak to the “essence of transformation”. And for others, there is simply no choice. The generally accepted view of technology is the idea that ICTs are necessary if institutions are to survive. One interviewee asserted: “quite frankly, I don’t think if this place has to say we will no longer use ICT technology, so then this place might as well shut down.” (I.P.) While this “do or die” view is widely shared, its dangers are noted in a more critical perspective that suggests that hidden behind the assumptions of the general value of technological innovations are protectionist mechanisms supported by legislation and specific practices, which ironically turn out to be obstacles to innovation.

Because what people usually mean when they talk about knowledge economy is hiding knowledge and protecting it through legislation and keeping it from people and dishing it out to people in bite size chunks that one pays for, and human society has developed over the years largely because knowledge is available and freely shared. ...copyright, patenting everything under the sun ... [these practices are] not protecting innovation, they are killing it. ... So yes, the knowledge economy, yes you can make money out of knowledge but you don't have to do it by protecting and hiding it. (I.H.)

The question is therefore about innovation, but “towards what end?” Is it towards “more of the same” but more efficiently; or is it about “doing things differently” in ways that can fundamentally transform the political economy of neo-colonial higher education practices? There is a strong view in the findings of this research project that these shifts towards supporting teaching and learning require a change in focus, and a change in “mindset” regarding the new functions of ICTs. Thus, the second cluster of meanings relates ICTs to the transformation of pedagogies, where in contrast to much of the international literature, a strongly determinist view was not found in the data collected. The respondents perceived ICTs not as the inevitable cause of change, but rather as an opportunity for rethinking practice. The argument is that it is not technology *per se* that causes change in pedagogical practice. Rather, it is the act of using a new kind technology (usually networked computers), which provides an opportunity for academics to reflect on their practice. Thus, for a sizable group, ICTs play the role of a catalyst for pedagogical transformation. This group of changing practices views technology as neutral, with change occurring in the pedagogy, because of a disruption rather than because of the nature of the technology itself. This view is strongly located in the social shaping approach, one that locates all impetus for change in the social dimension rather than the ascribing any causative effects to technology itself. Using the same pedagogical practices in a different medium can show those practices up in a new light, or it may be the examination of and focus on the new medium, which provokes the attention to existing practices. So,

I see it as an opportunity to go back to the people and say, ‘Listen, let’s just rethink this whole thing, there is a medium that we can use that can open up a whole different approach ... so you can get away from this chalk and talk, which nine times out ten is totally mindless and let’s try and see if we can use it in another way and see what happens’, and the interesting thing about it is that those who have done it, their experiences has been so positive and they have become so excited by it that it just keeps driving them on and on to change more and more and to keep rethinking the whole thing, that has been the interesting part. (I. M.)

There is also evidence of a view that the use of ICTs changes the way not only activities happen, but indeed also the way that thinking itself happens. This perspective accords with learning theories, which argue that activity and cognition are interrelated, with ICTs forming an inextricable mediational link between social and mental cognition. The growth of such theories is important and is being explored by local researchers (such as Frith *et al.*, 2004, Hardman, 2004) following activity theorists (such as Wertsch and Engestrom) to understand cognition, tools and context.

This attention to pedagogical change in context can be observed in many local and international studies, which support the idea that ICTs will enhance teaching and learning if certain other things are in place, particularly if there is a paradigm change (King, 1993; Rogers, 2000) from traditional ways of teaching, and if they are linked to the overall instructional design (Cronje, 1997; Baldwin, 1998; Czerniewicz, 2001) as a central part of the course, not an “add-on” (Green & Gilbert, 1995; Coetzee & du Bruyn, 2003). These explore how ‘modern offerings of programs [sic] can be enhanced considerably [by technology] if planned and implemented properly as long as critical conditions to integrate technologies into teaching and learning are adhered to to ensure optimal application in HE’ (Broere, *et al.*, 2002).

It is illuminating to review the statements in the National Plan:

Some institutions see information technology-related approaches as the central solution to the problems experienced by disadvantaged students. While the innovative use of technology is to be welcomed, there is a strong risk that approaches which focus only on improving delivery through information and communication technology, and which leave traditional curricular structures unchanged, will not provide a comprehensive solution. (National Plan, 2001: 2.3.2)

The understanding of pedagogically led, ICT transformation described in this section indicates that the plea made in the National Plan in 2001 for ICT innovation to be closely aligned with curriculum transformation has been heard, and owned, at least by some.

Overall, the observation was that the first cluster of meanings – of ICTs as improvement – was the least common in the findings. The second two sets of meanings of change – as innovation and as transformation – were more dominant, with both emphasizing local contexts as determining the extent to which ICTs will enhance the quality of the educational experience. Of the various approaches identified in the introduction of this paper, these views coincide most strongly with the social shaping approach to the relation between technology and social context. The third meaning evident in the data corresponds in addition, although in a weak sense, with aspects of critical theories of technology which problematize technology in its different contexts.

## 5. KEY ISSUES

It became evident during the course of this study that how ICTs are understood and taken up (or not) is context-specific. Thus “context” is a significant theme, because the potential for technology



to enhance teaching and learning happens at certain times and under certain conditions, which are institution specific. This means that technology-led changes need not necessarily lead to improving or changing teaching and learning paradigms in any substantive way, and that ICT-enhanced learning may be contradictorily superficial or deep. These observations about context are linked to four issues, which emerged as significant in this study, each of which is discussed briefly below.

### **5.1. NEW COSTS, UNEQUAL RESOURCES AND COMPETING PRIORITIES**

The growth of ICTs in higher education requires the consideration of new costs in the context of unequal resources and competing institutional priorities. While it was impossible to determine the actual institutional budgets for IT, in general, and for e-learning, in particular, it is clear that ICT related expenditure is a new and rapidly increasing cost item for institutions.

The new cost areas include new infrastructure (networked computers, Internet access, computer laboratories), maintenance and upgrading of existing infrastructure, software staff capacity, training, and other general administrative costs. Several areas, in particular, demand annually escalating costs and involve huge budgets: bandwidth, computer security and new software and information systems (Greaves, 2005).

Overall, the fact that South African institutions are spending more on ICTs as a percentage of their total expenditure than they did five years ago (Greaves, 2005), raises important issues for the higher education sector. The amount that institutions devote to ICT-related expenditure differs by institution and clearly leads to unequal student access to ICT resources, both across institutions (nationally, regionally, and by historical privilege) and within institutions (by faculty, department, student residences, and the status of students by class, level of study, and so on). The possibility of further institutional collaboration, beyond a legal arrangement through the Tertiary Education Network of South Africa (TENET) and via a sharing of ICT resources, deserves further study.

### **5.2. INSTITUTIONAL MERGERS**

The institutional mergers have a number of implications at the infrastructure level, including the integration of operating systems and additional operational costs (see Paterson 2004, for details). Mergers may in themselves be leading to the use of ICTs, particularly in the cases where there are already, or are going to be, multiple campuses.

The merger may itself be seen as the priority, with other matters, such as ICTs, simply having to take a back seat. In contrast to the view that nothing will happen until the newly created institution develops a joint strategy, there is a more common view that the “stronger” partner, the one already using ICTs, is likely to be the dominant one in this domain.

This strategy might be viewed positively with regard to ICTs, as in the comment that, “I’d rather be honest about it and say we’ve been taken over and hence all their policies and procedures and that kind of thing have [been, or] will be transferred here at some stage, ok. But I don’t have a problem

with the ICT, because they really were progressive in relation to what we've done here." (I.D.) Perceptions of being either ICT haves or ICT have-nots are evident from both sides. One respondent observed that his institution was the dominant partner, because the institution it was going to be merging with had shown no interest to date, but that they would have to show an interest once the merger had taken place. In another case, the institution that had already been working with ICTs had assumed responsibility for the institutions that would be joining them and had prepared detailed plans. These kinds of identities can be seen as problematic and can lead to situations of "othering" when potential partners in an institutional merger do not meet as equals. (Such cases are referred to as incorporations.) An unequal partnership is exemplified by a case where students were somehow seen to be at fault for their perceived weaker computer skills, and stigmatised; "The fact that these students who really do not deserve to have an XX University badge on their degree certificate are going to get that, has to do with the merger." (I.J.)

There is a danger that the othering of the partner perceived to be weaker may set up an "us-they" antagonism, where "we" are those who know, and "they" are those who need to be taught. Many of the issues arising from institutional mergers illustrate the fact that the contextualization of change is clearly crucial to exploring the power dynamics of ICT-related change in higher education; particular historical and national contexts present institutions with unique challenges. It is possible to argue that changes arising from the innovative use of ICTs are dependent both on the broader socio-economic and political contexts, and on the local institutional struggles and strategies around the distribution of resources as well as the relational aspects of redressing historical inequities in educational institutions.

### **5.3. INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION: ICTS AND ACCESS**

The strong view found in broad literature until recently that ICTs are great equalizers (see Coombs, 2000, for example) has receded, as the local realities and complexities of implementing ICTs in education in a diverse and divided terrain have become more evident. Increasingly, there is an acknowledgement of new digital divides, emerging out of existing social divides around class, 'race', gender, nationality and disability as impediments to that potential role. These divides restrict higher education access and participation and therefore lead to the continued exclusion and under-representation of historically excluded groups in ICT fields. This makes access to ICTs a redress issue (Ravjee, 2004b).

There is surprisingly little local research into the redress, access and use of ICTs in higher education in South Africa (Van der Westhuizen, 2004). However, a regional study in the Western Cape describes the resources people use, need and draw on in order to gain or acquire access to specific ICT uses and practices; and this study argues that the very resources that people need access to are the same resources to which they will be able to contribute (Warschauer, 2003). Thus, access and use are closely interrelated: access to resources and the creation of resources are interdependent. These resource groupings (see Czerniewicz & Brown, 2004, for details) are a useful way of commenting on the data texts of this present study.

Lack of physical access remains at the forefront of all accounts of access in the literature. As one respondent put it bluntly, “the issue is access – physical access”. This includes the tangible resources of computers and associated telecommunication infrastructure, including appropriate location, availability and adequacy. Estimated personal computer density in South Africa is low at 7.2 in 100 people. There were 3 523 000 South African Internet users in 2004, 7.4% of the population (according to Internet World Statistics). Higher education statistics are hard to find, but it appears that one-sixth of South African users are in the academic sector (Czerniewicz, 2004).

Access to computers is limited, often has a limited starting point, and is very uneven across the sector. One institution reports that less than ten years ago it had 20 computers on campus for students. Another institution reported that the current ratio is still 1:100. The problem is exacerbated by slow telephonic connections, network connections to residences, and lack of broadband access. These problems occur elsewhere in the world.

What is considered adequate access, varies too. In one case, 1:20 is considered a major improvement, but in general this is considered too low. Existing laboratories are full to capacity. At one institution, laboratories are open 18 hours a day, everyday of the week. At another, they are open until midnight, and are reported to be always full. Most institutions have general all-purpose laboratories open to all students, as well as faculty or department-based laboratories in certain disciplines. While these may be discipline appropriate in terms of ICT (for example, it would be difficult to teach Information Science [IS] without computers), there are nevertheless inequalities of resource allocations across faculties.

Access to computers is stressed as an issue throughout the sector, with both previously advantaged and historically disadvantaged institutions complaining of inadequate access to computers. Even those historically advantaged institutions that have prioritized ICTs in both policy and resources are struggling with access, especially as computer-curriculum integration increases, and as varying student needs have to be met.

It is also noted that there is a growing interest in the possibilities of wireless technologies across higher education institutions as the cellular telephone phenomenon, which burst upon South Africa less than a decade ago, offers an opportunity for innovation in a country where 5 million landlines exist in locations which have electricity, yet 18.7 million mobile telephone users are spread across the population at large. This is a particularly promising opportunity to bridge the digital divide as, unlike other kinds of access, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are just as likely to have cellular telephones as their more privileged counterparts (see Barnes, 2004, for details).

In order for individual students or academics to use ICT’s meaningfully for teaching and learning, they need access to personal, collective and contextual resources. Respondents for this project empathized with the relevance of attitudes. However, an interesting difference emerged between students and staff: “I think the students are more ready for it than staff are. And I think

it's due to the fact that it's something new for staff members" (I.O.). This introduces an additional complicating divide, based on age and expectations, and emerging from the cultural context in which the different generations grew up.

#### **5.4. SOFTWARE ISSUES**

There is, at present, an increase in South African higher education institutions in the use of online learning environment (OLE) software with the choices essentially being between proprietary software or free and open source software (FOSS). The debates raging over these OLE choices in higher education are not entirely technical. Entangled in them are political, pedagogical and resource issues, many of which relate to broader debates in society about the choices, priorities and decisions for higher education institutional transformation as a whole.

Institutions, which have developed home-grown solutions, are generally realizing that this is a relatively expensive option, and are either looking at alternatives, or positioning their products as open source projects, which can gain wider use and attract external resources, thereby reducing overall development costs for the institution.

At first glance, the choice between proprietary and open source solutions appears to be about cost with proprietary software (such as WebCT) requiring a licence denominated in foreign currency, whereas open source software requires no licence costs. However, in educational and pedagogical terms, the issue is more usefully located within the debate about standardization and flexibility (see Agre, 2000, for elaboration) with a key premise being that ICTs increase incentives to standardize considerably. The key tension lies in separating those elements that need to be standard from those that need to be particular. A university is a particularly diverse environment, a "diverse assemblage" of social and situated practices. These institutions need to have space to be diverse and locally located (in disciplines, levels of study, educational objectives and so on), but they also need to be interconnected, to be able talk to one another, and their hardware needs to be reusable. Standardization can either be a force for uniformity or for diversity depending on how it is designed. The ongoing issue is the extent to which it is able to serve flexibility and diversity and the extent to which its design encourages and supports specific pedagogical practices (while potentially discouraging or constraining others). Complex decisions have to be made regarding competing requirements, balancing affordability, features, flexibility and risk.

A common response to these concerns in open source projects is for institutions to join open source consortia. It is for this reason that institutions, such as UCT and NWU, have joined initiatives like the Sakai Project, which is designed to build a standardized framework within which local solutions can be created. Moodle is another open source solution being adopted by local institutions, including Rhodes University; and the University of the Western Cape is developing a consortium (AVOIR) around its own Knowledge Environment for Web-based Learning (KEWL) product.

Software choice is a hotly contested issue and as Agre (2000) notes, the future is not yet foretold. As he says, “the forces that encourage higher education to standardise its technologies interact with other forces that may push in other directions. Information technology is uniquely malleable and is easily shaped by the ideas and interest of whatever coalition has the wherewithal to guide the development and implementation of new systems”.

It is impossible to do justice to the complexity of these issues here. However, the importance of this debate has been highlighted and the fact that decisions have ramifications beyond the practical question of a software choice has been stressed.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the current state of play with regard to the conceptualization and utilization of ICTs in South African higher education. It has been noted that, in all senses, this is a new and developing field. There is, as yet, no unanimity in the conceptualization, visualization or utilization of ICTs at institutional level. There has been a great deal of growth in the taking up of ICTs – but it has been uneven growth, largely dependent on individual energy, expertise and on conflicting visions. This diversity was illustrated by the metaphors used by ICT practitioners who were interviewed for this project. These practitioners have a variety of titles, work in a variety of organizational structures and forms, report through a variety of institutional channels, and use a set of metaphors to describe ICTs that are, to some extent mutually exclusive. ICTs – are they neutral, or value-laden tools? Are they stand-alone implements, or parts of larger, complex systems? There is currently no consensus on these fundamental issues in South African higher education.

This lack of consensus could be seen as an opportunity or as a threat. An optimistic view might be that the use of ICT is growing organically, where and as required. And in a field where, internationally, the hardware and software are literally changing on an hourly basis, it would be dangerous to try to impose frameworks and understandings on those individuals who have been with this field at the different institutions, since its inception. From this point of view, the lack of a well-defined national policy – or indeed, of any substantive national policy at all – could be seen as enabling.

On the other hand, the lack of consensus among practitioners could lead to situations where national resources are being lost in institutionally-based enterprises that duplicate one another, or that find scarce funding to go off on the intellectual equivalents of wild goose chases. It also leaves the institutions carrying greater burdens and falling farther and farther behind in a race, which is, by definition, dependent on resource allocation.

With regard to the relationship of ICTs to higher education change, three different notions of change have been observed – as improvement, as innovation and as transformation, with the overarching globalization discourse cutting across these meanings. This discourse forms part of

one playing out in different forms internationally. Also, a strong view of ICTs across these three meanings is in terms of their function or role in higher education.

It is possible to identify other discourses on higher education change, which ask different kinds of questions, and which do not examine ICTs in terms of their function to some end. The decolonization and democratization projects in higher education may be seen as examples of alternative discourses on change that are being submerged or displaced by the hegemonic globalization discourse (Ravjee, 2004b). These debates did not appear in the current data. Given that there is also little consensus in the literature about the relation between ICTs and higher education transformation, it is hardly surprising that the intersection of these debates is fraught with contradictions, ambiguities, and contentious issues.

At the same time it is also possible to identify various intersections and overlaps in meanings as discourses interact and coexist in contradictory practices claiming to support efficiency and improvement on the one hand, and equity and redress on the other. These tensions are most clearly evident in the policy tensions on higher education change in South Africa. For example, recent work in alternative pedagogies draws from both critiques of the commercialization of higher education literature, and the debates around power and knowledge and the recognition of difference in decolonization discourses.

It is therefore emphasized that it is important to problematize technology, which should not be viewed as an automatic good that will automatically enhance teaching and learning in higher education, or straightforwardly change historical patterns of access to higher education. Contextual factors play a crucial role in determining the democratic potential of ICTs in contributing to higher education transformation. South Africa is finding its way to understanding how best this can be done. It can only be said with any certainty that the intersection of ICTs and teaching and learning in South African higher education has put down roots – some shallow, and some deep.

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# SYSTEMIC GOVERNANCE, PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY

Felicity Coughlan, Joseph Divala, Penny Enslin, Mike Kissack and Thokozani Mathebula

## 1. INTRODUCTION

University autonomy remains as controversial an issue in South African higher education as it was during the apartheid era. Before 1994, liberal universities<sup>1</sup> in South Africa declared support for the principles of academic freedom and university autonomy, in opposing State education policies and State interference, in particular. Their stance was captured in T.B. Davie's well-known definition of academic freedom as 'our freedom from external interference in who shall teach, what we teach, how we teach and whom we teach' (quoted in Jansen, 2005a:297).

In examining the relationship between the State and the higher education sector in South African since 1994, the chosen starting point is a tension reflected in the Higher Education Act (Republic of South Africa 1997:2): 'it is desirable for higher education institutions to enjoy freedom and autonomy in their relationships with the State within the context of accountability and the national need for advanced skills and scientific knowledge'. The tension at stake may be captured in the question of whether the interpretation of accountability and the measures taken to meet the need for skills and knowledge threaten to undermine academic freedom and university autonomy.

A provocative response to this question has been posed by Jonathan Jansen (2004b), who has argued that both academic freedom – and university autonomy, especially – face an uncertain future in South Africa 'both as concept and practice'. Not mincing his words, Jansen contends that changes in the higher education sector constitute a 'gradual but systematic erosion of historical standards of autonomy that were ingrained within the institutional fabric of universities' (2004b:5), thus redefining conceptions of institutional autonomy as the State systematically acquires new forms of power over the universities through a series of incursions. In a definition that shares Davie's emphasis on autonomy as the absence of external interference, Jansen stipulates: 'I will take *institutional autonomy* to mean the right of institutions to decide for themselves on core academic concerns; and *academic freedom* to mean the absence of external interference in pursuing these concerns' (2004b:4).

In higher education policy since 1994, the relationship between the State and the universities has been defined in terms of 'cooperative governance' and 'conditional autonomy'. Emerging from the apartheid era, notorious for its State interventions in universities, there was a general hope that with the new democratic system that assumed power in 1994 higher education would enjoy a more harmonious relationship with government, as partners rather than antagonists. This would create the ideal space for the development – among other things – of institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

<sup>1</sup> The analysis focuses on universities. This is appropriate given the restructuring of the higher education sector. The presence of private providers and other role players within higher education is acknowledged. Private providers face similar challenges to those of the public institutions, although they are more vulnerable to the pressures of corporate demands.

The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996) spelt out the new relationship and it was restated in the 1997 White Paper (3.7) with the following description of cooperative governance, '[which] assumes a proactive, guiding and constructive role for government. It also assumes a cooperative relationship between the State and higher education institutions'. One implication of this is, for example, that institutional autonomy is to be exercised in tandem with public accountability. Another is that the Ministry's role as overseer does not involve responsibility for the micromanagement of institutions. A third implication is that the Ministry will undertake its role in a transparent manner.

Thus, in line with the Green Paper (1996:175) the role of the State is in 'supervising the higher education system to ensure academic quality and maintain a certain level of accountability'. This approach was initially formalized in the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997).

The aim in original policy papers and legislation was clearly to limit the interference of the Ministry of Education.

It is the responsibility of higher education institutions to manage their own affairs. The Ministry has no responsibility or wish to micro-manage institutions. Nor is it desirable for the Ministry to be too prescriptive in the regulatory frameworks it establishes. Diversity and flexibility are important aspects of institutional responses to varying needs and circumstances. It is only in extreme circumstances that the Minister of Education, as the responsible representative of the elected government of the country, would consider intervening in order to assist to restore good order and legitimate governance and management in an institution. (Department of Education, 1997, Section 3.33)

Institutional autonomy in this regard refers to the 'degree of self-regulation and administrative independence that an institution enjoys in making decisions on its goals, programmes and priorities and on the means and procedures by which these will be pursued' (Department of Education, 1996, Chapter 4, Section 4.2). This includes independence in methods of teaching and assessment, research, establishment of academic regulations and the internal management of resources generated from private and public sources. However, such autonomy is 'limited by the demands of accountability: by the requirement to demonstrate responsible actions to one or more constituencies and in particular to account for how funds have been spent' (Department of Education, 1997, Section 1.24).

Commentators, including the Council on Higher Education (CHE), have paid close attention to this new construal of institutional autonomy. In their report to the CHE, *Governance in South African Higher Education* (2002, Chapter 5), Martin Hall, Ashley Symes and Thierry Luescher rehearse the argument for conditional autonomy. They note how the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) distinguished three categories of relationships between State and higher education institutions: State steering of institutions that are largely autonomous, 'direct State control in the public interest', and 'State interference', supposedly as under apartheid.

The authors of the CHE Report prefer to see the apartheid era as ‘a combination of direct State control and pronounced institutional autonomy’ (Hall *et al*, 2002: 87). The Report claims that

the evolution of South African higher education policy [from 1997 to 2001] marks a path from a comparatively loose system of State steering, with guarantees of autonomy, block grant funding and the expectation of self-regulation by individual institutions, to a system of conditional autonomy in which substantive autonomy (academic freedom) continues to be guaranteed while the State exercises increasing control over procedures of funding and academic accreditation. (Hall *et al*, 2002: 92-93)

The Report continues:

If, however, conditional autonomy is to prove an effective balance between, on the one hand, the needs of the State to direct higher education in the interests of development and, on the other hand, the needs of institutions to preserve and defend an environment in which teaching and research can prosper without outside interference, then the rights and responsibilities of the academic sector must be guaranteed and asserted. (Hall *et al*, 2002: 93)

Nico Cloete (in Cloete *et al*, 2002: 91) comments on the NCHE’s argument for the State to adopt a relationship of cooperative governance with civil society in which the State would take the leadership role:

Cooperative governance has implications for relations between the State and higher education institutions. It seeks to mediate the apparent opposition between State intervention and institutional autonomy. The directive role of the State is reconceived as a steering and co-ordinating role. Institutional autonomy is to be exercised within the limits of accountability. A cooperative relationship between the State and higher education institutions should reconcile the self-regulation of institutions with the decision-making of central authorities. The viability of such reconciliation depends to a significant degree upon the success of a proposed intermediary body with delegated powers, and of proposed structures for consultation and negotiation. The State uses financial incentives and other steering mechanisms as opposed to commandist measures of control and top-down prescription (after Kraak, 2001).

Such readings of notions of cooperative governance and of conditional autonomy, of State steering reconciled with significant self-regulation, could be justified by the requirement to transform the sector in pursuit of a broader goal of social justice in a new democracy. But given Jansen’s declared stance that the pursuit of these new principles has eroded institutional autonomy, the question is posed: Does conditional autonomy as expressed in South African higher education policy and its implementation to date constitute both a significant reduction in university autonomy and hence in academic freedom?

The assumption is that there is an inextricable relationship between the State and the university, and that each has a set of commitments or obligations to honour. Generally, the State seeks to implement a programme of social justice and redress, which includes ensuring that more people have access to tertiary education, and recommending that the universities contribute to the country’s social development (this has implications for what is taught and how it is taught, and

so there are implications for curriculum and pedagogy). The university, in its turn, privileges the notion of academic freedom, because this is a prerequisite for the integrity of teaching and research. Will the State's attempts to discharge its obligations compromise the universities' attempts to discharge theirs? There does seem to be a potential problem of compatibility here and it appears that the notions of 'cooperative governance' and 'conditional autonomy' are attempts to manage (if not resolve) this key tension in the relationship between the State and the university.

How can these shared goals be established and these discrete interests defined? The principles of *deliberative democracy*, which are outlined in Section 2, have critical implications for the notion of university autonomy; these are applied in an analysis of the notions of conditional autonomy and accountability. The implications of deliberative principles for universities and their relationship with the State are outlined in Section 3 of this chapter. Accepting the symbiotic relationship between 'the university' and 'the State', the argument is that the establishment and maintenance of a system of *deliberative democracy* are indispensable if the relative autonomy of the tertiary sector is to be sustained under these conditions of interdependence. The structures and practices of deliberative democracy, regulating the relationship between 'the State' and 'the university', may ensure that the definition of university autonomy is continually negotiated, and that the extent of State and university prerogatives is continually reassessed.

In addition to commending a deliberatively democratic relationship between the State and the university, this chapter also claims that the internal dynamics of today's university, which encompass the dual emphasis on teaching and research, are best promoted by fostering a climate of deliberation. This is an implicit acknowledgement that university autonomy cannot simply be equated with academic freedom, for an autonomous institution is quite capable of imposing its own forms of restrictive orthodoxy upon its members, thereby precluding particular kinds of debates and extensions of understanding. The customary construal of the relationship between university autonomy and academic freedom assumes that academic freedom is vulnerable only when university autonomy is threatened from the outside. This assumption is interrogated, along with the assumption that if university autonomy is conditional, so must academic freedom also be conditional.

In Section 4 of this chapter, the ways in which policy measures since 1997 provide for cooperative governance and conditional autonomy are explored, considering the extent to which these measures offer conditions in which principles of deliberative democracy can be met. This leads into a concluding discussion of the central claim that, if the State and the universities adhere to deliberative principles and procedures, then neither cooperative governance nor conditional autonomy is *prima facie* a threat to academic freedom.

The chosen methodology can be described as falling within a framework of normative political theory. This is, thus, an argument in applied political philosophy. It reflects on selected policy

developments in higher education since 1994, with reference to issues like ministerial powers, university governance, funding, quality assurance, reporting and the regulation of curricula – as well as other pressures on universities internationally. This is done in order to assess how these developments reflect key normative concepts in higher education policy, especially that of the conditionality of university autonomy. The assumption is that policy development at its best is a deliberative process, in which early articulations are significant, sometimes as much so as are the final formulations. And the chapter reflects iteratively on the notions of university autonomy and academic freedom as the discussion proceeds.

## 2. DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

An exploration of the interpretation of conditional autonomy that has been reflected in key aspects of higher education policy and its implementation draws on theories of deliberative democracy as the most significant trend in normative democratic theory since the 1980s. However, it should be borne in mind that the avowed intention in policy since 1994 has been to transform the higher education system ‘in the spirit of an open and democratic society’. One of the fundamental principles guiding this process is democratization, which ‘requires that governance of the system of higher education and of individual institutions should be democratic...’ (Department of Education, 1997: 11-12).

A starting point for the recent focus on deliberation in theories of democracy is the rejection of what deliberative theorists call the aggregative model of democracy,<sup>2</sup> dominant since the mid-twentieth century, which interprets democracy as essentially an electoral device in which the often selfish preferences of individuals are aggregated in favour of parties and policies chosen, because they are seen as most likely to advance the perceived interests of the majority. Aggregative democracy can take various forms, ranging from stark winner-takes-all “majoritarianism”, at one end of a continuum, to forms of aggregation that are mediated by proportional representation, at the other.

Emphasizing the principle of deliberative *publicity*, Seyla Benhabib writes that: ‘Democracy, in my view, is best understood as a model for organizing the collective and public exercise of power in the major institutions of a society on the basis of the principle that decisions affecting the well-being of a collectivity [sic] can be viewed as the outcome of a procedure of free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as moral and political equals’ (Benhabib, 1996: 68). Benhabib adds that behind this model of discourse lies the idea that norms are only valid if agreed to by those likely to be affected by them. In arriving at a set of agreed norms, all participants must have the same right to participate, to initiate debate, to ask questions and interrogate, to question the issues selected for discussion, and to question the rules of discursive procedure and how they are applied (Benhabib, 1996: 70). For most deliberative theorists, deliberation is required not only to arrive at agreed norms, but also to make decisions. For James Bohman (1996: 27), public deliberation is ‘a dialogical process of exchanging reasons for the

<sup>2</sup> Iris Marion Young (2000: 18), for example, distinguishes between deliberative and aggregative democracy as the two central models of democracy in contemporary political theory, emphasizing that they are ideal types.

purpose of resolving problematic situations that cannot be settled without interpersonal coordination and cooperation'. Gutmann and Thompson emphasize the principle of *reciprocity*, which 'holds that citizens owe one another justification for the mutually binding laws and public policies they collectively enact' (2004: 98).

For some of its proponents, deliberative democracy has primarily been developed as a justificatory theory, offering principles of democratic deliberation, but others 'have become increasingly interested in the problems of institutionalisation' (Bohman, 1998: 401). For Benhabib (1996: 87), deliberative democracy 'has inspired a number of social and political theorists to envisage new institutional designs'. The interest in deliberative theory takes up both its justificatory and its institutional dimensions. It is noted too that while some deliberative theorists emphasize the fact that deliberation is procedural, others (for example, Gutmann & Thompson [2003: 30]) insist that 'any adequate theory must include substantive as well as procedural principles'.

Where should deliberation take place? Deliberative theory focuses mainly on the relationships between citizens and government. Its proponents' opinions vary on the range of issues and forums that should conduct themselves according to deliberative norms. While some (for example, Rawls, 1993) prefer to restrict the ambit of deliberation to constitutional essentials, others include laws, policies, administrative decisions and moral principles within its scope, proposing deliberative democracy as a model not only for government but also for a wide variety of organizations and relationships. Benhabib (1996: 74) sees deliberation as taking place in

*a plurality of modes of association in which all affected can have the right to articulate their point of view. These can range from political parties, to citizens' initiatives, to social movements, to voluntary associations, to consciousness-raising groups, and the like. It is through the interlocking net of these multiple forms of associations, networks, and organizations that an anonymous "public conversation" results. It is central to the model of deliberative democracy that it privileges such a public sphere of mutually interlocking networks and associations of deliberation, contestation, and argumentation.*  
(emphasis in original)

In their comment on where deliberation takes place, Bohman and Rehg observe that theorists pursuing a participatory approach to democratic politics by developing a deliberative theory 'took their cue from a variety of deliberative contexts and motifs: direct democracy, townhall meetings and small organizations, workplace democracy, mediated forms of public reason among citizens with diverse moral doctrines, voluntary associations, and deliberative constitutional and judicial practices regulating society as a whole...' (1997: xiii). Even more emphatically, Gutmann and Thompson (1996) argue that deliberation should take place in any setting where citizens regularly attempt to make decisions collectively about issues of public interest. Such multiple forums 'include not only legislative sessions, court proceedings, and administrative hearings at all levels of government but also meetings of grass roots associations, professional associations, shareholders meetings, and citizens' committees in hospitals and other similar



institutions' (1996: 12-13). In 'middle democracy', they locate much of democracy's moral life; here, decisions are made not only by legislators, bureaucrats, ministers and judges, but also by civic associations and interest groups. In a later work (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004: 61), they expand their account of deliberative contexts and institutions to include 'the whole range of intermediary institutions – those that act on citizens (such as the media, health-care organizations, professional sports), those in which citizens act (interest groups, private clubs, trade unions, professional associations), as well as those in which they work (corporations, small businesses, government agencies, military service)'.

The commonly held view of deliberative theorists that deliberation should be extended across civil society as a public good is reflected in South African public philosophy. The anti-apartheid struggle tradition developed models of consultation in which leaders of trade unions and civic organizations sought mandates, consulted and reported back to constituencies. This tradition is evident in the 1996 Constitution's provision for public consultation by the provincial and national legislatures, and was enacted in the process of public consultation about the Constitution itself. Another significant feature of the Constitution, for the purposes of this discussion, is that it is not thoroughly "majoritarian", for example, in its provision for proportional representation and for judicial review.

Significantly for the present purposes, Gutmann and Thompson locate universities in the terrain of middle democracy, stating recently that '[i]n many voluntary associations, including churches and synagogues, colleges and universities, deliberation still may be desirable even if it should not be externally mandated' (2004: 35). The claim here is that, in this land of middle democracy, universities of all places should be deliberative in their own governance and in their relationships with other organizations, including the State.

To this expansive, deliberative interpretation of democracy it might be objected: a cabinet minister, controlling a government department and its bureaucracy, is the legitimate authority, elected by the majority. Such a position appeals, with some justification, to an aggregative model of democracy, at least at a formal level. Clearly, especially in the South African context and given a history of "illegitimate" minority government, the major source of legitimacy is majority rule through the electoral process, qualified though this is. But for deliberative theorists, "majoritarianism" has its limitations and, especially when considered substantively, legitimacy also resides in ongoing processes of rational deliberation among citizens.

In her examination of the philosophical underpinnings of democratic legitimacy, Benhabib argues that in complex modern democracies legitimacy derives in the first instance 'from the free and unconstrained public deliberation of all about matters of common concern' (1996: 69). Legitimacy in decision-making derives from free and equal participation by citizens in the process of deliberation. Benhabib reverses a common assumption about majority rule:

in many instances the majority rule is a fair and rational decision procedure, not because legitimacy resides in numbers but because if a majority of people are convinced at one point on the basis of reasons formulated as closely as possible as a result of a process of discursive deliberation that conclusion A is the right thing to do, then this conclusion can remain valid until challenged by good reasons from some other group. It is not the sheer numbers that support the rationality of the conclusion, but the presumption that if a large number of people see matters a certain way as a result of following certain kinds of rational procedures of deliberation and decision-making, then such a conclusion can be shown to be rational until shown to be otherwise. (1996: 72)

Gutmann and Thompson make ongoing deliberation a further condition for legitimacy:

If representatives refuse to subject their decisions to public deliberation (either prospectively or retrospectively), then they have no legitimate basis for claiming to the citizens on whose behalf they are acting that their decisions are right. (2004: 45)

Deliberation not only lends legitimacy to decisions about matters of public interest. It also brings crucial epistemic advantages to democratic processes. By ensuring that decisions are collectively made, it provides relevant *information* from more than one perspective. Still addressing the epistemic, Benhabib's account of the relationship between reason and preferences in public deliberation points towards a deliberative interpretation of *accountability*. For Benhabib, the formation of coherent preferences can only follow from a process of deliberation:

When presenting their point of view and position to others, individuals must support them by articulating good reasons in a public context to their co-deliberators. This process of *articulating good reasons in public* forces the individual to think of what would count as a good reason for all [the] others involved. ...Nobody can convince others in public of her [sic] point of view without being able to state why what appears good, plausible, just, and expedient to her can also be considered so from the standpoint of all involved. (1996: 72)

This need for ongoing reiteration of reasons among all affected is at least partly a result of the incomplete understanding that bedevils all attempts to address both problems and scarce resources through deliberation. No one participant or group of participants, including ministries and bureaucracies, can have full and privileged access to the range of information and perspectives required for rational decision-making. Even far reaching reporting requirements may provide data that is of limited value without inclusive participation in interpreting it.

Other potential objections to a call for a deliberative relationship between citizens and government officials could be that it denies the right and necessity for the State to make decisions, and that government could be paralysed by having to engage in endless deliberation, unable to implement policies. There is no denying that government has to act, sometimes in response to crises that require prompt and urgent action. As a number of deliberative theorists accept, 'deliberation is no substitute for action.... [D]eliberating before deciding is no guarantee that the action taken will be the right one. But deliberation does encourage attention to relevant values, and to this extent it increases both the legitimacy of democratic decision-making and the likelihood that the decision will be a morally reasonable one' (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004: 179).

What characterizes deliberative decision-making, is that reasons are given, at some point, to justify the decision, whether before action is taken or subsequently. While secrecy or confidentiality are sometimes required and can, under some circumstances, improve the quality of deliberation (Chambers, 2004), the assumption is that wherever possible reasons will be given. Where there is no justification for secrecy, the presentation of reasons for decisions should indicate why opposing opinions were rejected, and the explanation should be relevant and cogent. A deliberative approach to public reason would include debate about the circumstances under which information would not be made public. Deliberative principles also require that the reasons given be accessible and understandable to the public. Yet, while conceding the right of officials to make decisions, deliberative theorists emphasize the demands that a deliberative process makes: for officials to commit to an ongoing and dynamic process of public justification over time. This is likely to begin with an initial reiterative process of policy development, in which proposals are made and are responded to, information is collected and evaluated, often through more than one round of deliberative exchange. Policies, decisions and demands made by different ministries and other bodies ought to cohere and not to place conflicting demands on the institutions they regulate and influence. Deliberation should result in decisions that are binding for some time, but it should allow for issues to be reopened after a reasonable interval for further deliberation. As mistakes are corrected, retrospective deliberation can legitimately call officials to account once implementation has been monitored. Acknowledgement of the possibility that rejected opinions may turn out to have been right requires that decision-makers test their own views in due course, acknowledging the possibility that they may need to revise decisions later (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004: 58). As circumstances change, new information may prompt changes in policy or shifts in its application.

Bohman and Rehg note of Habermas's contribution to the development of deliberative theories of democracy: 'in constitutional regimes, government officials are at least constrained by the arguments and reasons that have held up in the public sphere. Insofar as a broadly dispersed, "subjectless communication" among citizens is allowed to develop in autonomous public spheres and enter into receptive representative bodies with formal decision-making power, the notion of popular sovereignty – a democratically self-organizing society – is not beyond the pale of feasibility' (1997: xv). In his article in their collection, Habermas (1997) distinguishes between communicatively generated power and administratively employed power. This distinction is pertinent to an analysis of how conditional autonomy of universities should be deliberatively interpreted.

### **3. DELIBERATION AND THE UNIVERSITY**

So far, the discussion of deliberation has focused broadly on where it should take place, how it should be done, and about what sorts of matters (in the view of this paper: in most institutions, following principles of publicity, reciprocity, reason-giving and reiteration – and about all issues affecting the public interest). So far, the argument has been that much of the obligation to deliberate must be attributed to the relationship between universities and government and its officials in the bureaucracy. But the intention is not to suggest that deliberative obligations lie only, in the case of education, with the ministry and its bureaucracy. The discussion now turns

to South African universities as deliberative organizations, beginning with their educational role in a democracy.

As deliberative theorists have long recognized, democracy cannot thrive without a well-educated citizenry. An important part of democratic education is learning how to deliberate well enough to be able to hold representatives accountable. Without a civil society that provides rehearsal space for political deliberation, citizens are less likely to be politically effective (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004: 35).

Deliberative theorists look to the schooling system to equip future citizens with the skills and knowledge they need for deliberation: ‘...schools should aim to develop the capacities of students to understand different perspectives, communicate their understandings to other people, and engage in the give-and-take of moral argument with a view toward making mutually justifiable decisions’ (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004: 61). Universities clearly have a role to play in developing these capacities too, but the argument here is that their role needs to be understood more extensively than this; and it is noted that universities have the potential to be deliberative institutions in all three of Gutmann and Thompson’s senses: as contexts that act on citizens, in which they also act, and in which they work.

Firstly, of all institutions, universities should be expected to *be* deliberative institutions; deliberation *per se* characterizes both the educative university classroom and research as a process in which justification through reason, the presentation of evidence and public debate are necessary conditions. As students are inducted into a deliberative environment, they acquire the skills needed to weigh evidence, follow the traditions of reason and justification that characterize their discipline, and to become equals in deliberation with their peers and teachers in a free exchange of ideas. Thus, there are close similarities between the characteristics of deliberation between citizens and their political representatives and deliberation in universities, where it ought to be recognized as a pedagogical approach, which constitutes citizens. Given South Africa’s history, its universities more so than those elsewhere cannot assume that their students arrive to study as autonomous, free citizens. Instead, universities need to pay attention to their potential to model and teach deliberative practices. One way of characterizing academic freedom, sometimes described in current South African educational discourse in terms of substantive autonomy, is in deliberative terms: academic freedom prevails when deliberative conditions are met.

Secondly, the demands of deliberation require that university governance should follow deliberative criteria and processes. Indeed, the tenor of the governance requirements in recent legislation is to promote public deliberation in universities as a feature of open and democratic governance, in which students and stakeholders within and outside the university are to have substantial participation. However, just as the claim that teaching should be deliberative does not require the removal of any distinction between the role and standing of students and their teachers, deliberation in university governance does not necessarily imply a populist interpretation of deliberative

democracy, in which all decisions would have to be publicly debated by all members of a university community, including its students and all its workers. The expectation, rather, is that deliberation takes place within particular publics that are, broadly, accountable to others. In universities as in government, it should be possible to rely much of the time on experts or those delegated to do so to make responsible decisions, provided their claims can be scrutinized, and contested when there may be grounds to question them (see Enslin, Pendlebury & Tjiattas, 2003).

Turning, then, from deliberation as essential to teaching, research and university governance, it must be argued that universities are also institutions that house much of a society's deliberative resources. The expertise and critical role of intellectuals in providing information and fostering and modelling deliberation is indispensable to successful deliberation in the societies they serve. In these respects, they are particularly well equipped to contribute to democracy and social justice. At the same time, it is observed that the reciprocal relationship between deliberative conditions as necessary for academic freedom and also for the university to play its role in exercising and fostering deliberation. It is reasonable both to assert the university's expertise and obligation in providing research and teaching, and to demand that it play its part in exemplifying deliberation to the general public. It is best equipped to critically debate the very nature of the university and the internal goods that define it and should do so publicly and honestly.

These interrelationships lead to a crucial fourth issue. If, as is claimed, deliberation characterizes the work of the university, how ought universities to be regulated? On this issue, it should be noted that the danger (see Enslin, Pendlebury & Tjiattas, 2003) that regulation and accountability systems that are intrusive and demanding can undermine the very deliberative conditions that make universities what they are. These dangers are present from without the university, in the form of an expanding range of bodies demanding accountability. Apart from accountability systems, regulation of universities, through such instruments as funding formulae designed to influence student success, choice of programmes (more Science and Technology and less of the Humanities), and direct intervention in what programmes will be funded for how many students at which institutions, does potentially represent – through its cumulative impact – a degree of conditionality of university autonomy that could threaten academic freedom. In South Africa's case, it is too early to reach hasty conclusions on this score. But it is reasonable to expect a commitment to a deliberative interpretation of conditional autonomy in which the terms of conditionality are debated openly within universities and between them and the State. If this does not take place, and if relationships between State and universities suffer from a deliberative deficit, the trust required between the parties will decline and it is likely that the State will resort increasingly to Habermas's administratively employed power rather than to communicatively generated power.

For universities to act accountably – a key feature of their current conditional autonomy – they ought to meet not only the requirements of reporting and quality assurance, to which the discussion returns later. They ought also to demonstrate a capacity for deliberative reflection about their purposes. To what extent do they see their mission as one of developing critical individualism, in

the face of pressures to produce manpower geared to the supposed development needs of the country, which are largely interpreted in terms of producing graduates with skills defined in relation to the sciences? Are they sufficiently reflective about the pressures of managerialism and corporate models of institutional purpose and governance? This deliberative requirement relates to a consideration of controversies about the status of knowledge itself at many of today's tertiary institutions, powerfully depicted in Bill Readings's (1996) notion of the 'university of dissensus'. The passionate and inconclusive nature of this controversy can only be directed and accommodated through the interminable processes of democratic deliberation about the values and purposes of the university sector itself.

Threats to university autonomy are also present from within, in the form of the international vogue for performativity and managerialism that is pursued within universities, which generally have not waited to be prodded in this direction by the State. While such regimes are favoured by State policies internationally, in pursuit of making institutions account for their expenditure of State subsidies and in requiring universities to meet manpower needs, they can discourage academic freedom by the sheer weight of meeting demands for endless accounting for academics' time, and by stifling innovation and imaginative teaching through specification of standardized outcomes for programmes and qualifications (see, for example, Standish, 2005). To these threats to deliberation, the growing intrusion of the market and its distinctively non-deliberative characteristics can be added. As State funding declines and universities become more dependent on funds they are required to raise for themselves, they become increasingly beholden to corporate sponsors, and corporations as key players in a market orientated, international economy are notoriously unaccountable, positioning themselves beyond the reach of public deliberation about their conduct; although some would argue that not being beholden to the State only for funding could reduce the dangers of State interference in autonomy. As the imperatives of the market intrude in the affairs of universities, the danger increases that they will account for themselves as an exercise in accounting as marketing, resorting to 'spin' rather than self-critical assessment of their performance, and allowing unbridled market forces to influence decisions about curricular and research priorities. So if the conditional autonomy of our universities is indeed under threat, it would be naïve to attribute its causes solely to State intervention.

#### **4. GOVERNANCE AND REGULATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

Deliberative democracy has been defended as a framework for the work of universities and for their relationship with the State. In returning now to policy on the governance and regulation of higher education, the question as to whether provisions established in South Africa for this purpose are compatible with a deliberative democracy perspective is considered.

The Green Paper (Department of Education, 1996, Chapter 4:1-2) bases its proposed structures and relationships on the following assumptions:

- No single actor or agency can claim sole responsibility or authority for determining the policies and priorities of the higher education system.
- Competing and complementary interests, interdependence and common goals must be recognized.
- Participation and effectiveness must be balanced.
- Power, shared accountability and responsibility require cooperative behaviour from all participants.

These governing assumptions of cooperative governance, as a key feature of the new higher education framework, appear to be compatible with deliberative democracy. Deliberative theories emphasize the point that participation in deliberation is open to all affected by decisions, as free and equal partners in a reciprocal process of rational justification, based on norms and information that are publicly debated. Where agreement cannot be reached, those in the minority cooperate by accepting the outcome of the deliberative process, but the issue is open to later reconsideration. Authority is shared and as far as possible it is communicatively generated. Deliberative participation is not intended to prevent decision and action; participation does not trump the requirement that decisions be made after the issues have been addressed through a process of public reason. The four assumptions seem to imply that there must be a distribution of responsibility between agents (*inter alia*, the representatives of the State and the university) for the achievement of shared goals and for the protection of discrete interests.

Are these assumptions followed through in the formulation of policy provisions for cooperative governance? Roles and responsibilities for higher education governance are divided between the government through the Minister of Education, the Department of Education, the Council on Higher Education and other bodies which the minister may appoint to act on his or her behalf, and individual higher education institutions and the bodies they appoint to manage the functioning and governance of the institution, centrally the council and senate.

The White Paper of 1997 accords to the Minister of Education the role of driving policies and strategies for higher education transformation; and the Higher Education Act (1997) legislates roles and responsibilities for the Minister, who is empowered to determine higher education policy in consultation with the Council on Higher Education. The Minister may also determine the scope and range of operations of public higher education institutions, private higher education institutions and individual public or private higher education institutions (Section 3). The Higher Education Act gives the Minister authority to establish a university, technikon or college (Section 20), merge public higher education institutions (Section 23), and close public higher education institutions (Section 25). Ministerial approval is required should a public higher education institution wish to conduct its teaching and research activities beyond its seat. The Act provides the Minister with the power to appoint an independent assessor should this be requested by the council of a public higher education institution, or if circumstances arise that involve maladministration or threaten to seriously undermine the effective functioning of the institution.

As an independent advisory body, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) was created to facilitate the transformation of the system. It was intended to play a leading strategic role in the transformation of the system in accordance with the vision and goals of the Ministry. Clearly the potential of the CHE to contribute to and facilitate deliberation is considerable. The CHE is described in the White Paper as a ‘major statutory body established to provide independent, strategic advice to the Minister of Education on matters relating to the transformation and development of higher education in South Africa, and to manage quality assurance and quality promotion in the higher education sector’ (Section 3.15).

Reflecting further on the principle of shared responsibility, the division of responsibilities between the CHE and the Department of Education is described in the White Paper as providing ‘two important protections for higher education institutions: first, against the Department's intrusion on the autonomy of institutions; and second, against a punitive approach to the reduction of differences between institutions on the basis of input factors and qualitative performance’ (Section 3.30). The Green Paper suggests the CHE's role is as a “watchdog” over the Department's relations with institutions, so that if problems arise, they can be brought to the attention of the Minister and Parliament (Section 4.4.8).

Among the Ministry, the Department of Education and the CHE there is provision, then, for a sharing of responsibilities and authority. A crucial issue is how, through the principle of conditional autonomy qualified by accountability, this authority is shared with the higher education institutions, through policy provisions for their governance and through requirements for reporting on their activities.

The Higher Education Act makes detailed provision for the governance of universities, specifying governance structures that include a council, a senate, a students' representative council and an institutional forum. The required structure, role and responsibilities of the council of a public higher education institution led to the restructuring of many university councils in the 1990s to be more stakeholder driven and representative. This allows for a widening of participation in deliberative processes. Taken together with provisions for shared responsibilities among the Ministry of Education, the CHE and the Department of Education, there is, formally at least, *institutional* provision for deliberation. To what extent is this also reflected in the more fundamental aspect of provision for deliberative *justification*? Posing this question now moves the discussion in this and the following section from a focus on the principle of cooperative governance to that of conditional autonomy.

That institutional autonomy is qualified by the principle of public accountability, requires that institutions receiving public funds should be able to report how, and how well money has been spent; that they should demonstrate the results they achieve with the resources at their disposal and that institutions demonstrate how they have met national policy goals and priorities (Department of Education, 1997: Sections 1.25, 1.25).



Public accountability having been elaborated in terms of institutions being held responsible for their conduct to their own governing bodies, the institutional community and to the broader society, much store is set by reforms in institutional governance in the new policy framework, reflecting the assumption that appropriate governance structures are in some way necessary to both conditional autonomy and to the demands of public accountability. But, and this is reflected in some of the observations made in the CHE Report, *Governance in South African Higher Education* (2002), the existence of such structures is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of institutional autonomy, conditional or otherwise. And putting these structural provisions in place does not necessarily create conditions for deliberation either within those institutions or between them and the Ministry and the Department of Education. Neither does the Minister's requirement for frequent and comprehensive *reporting* from the institutions, as stipulated by the Higher Education Act.

In the White Paper, it was envisaged that institutions would be required to produce three-year rolling institutional plans developed in accordance with the national plan. These are to include the institutional mission, proposed programmes, enrolment level targets by programme, race and gender, equity goals and proposed measures to develop new programmes and human resource development plans and developmental plans for new programmes. They will also include plans for academic development, research development and infrastructural development (Section 2.13, 2.14). Triennial plans of institutions will encompass all their planned enrolments – both publicly and privately funded. The plans will show the fields and levels of study in which institutions plan to expand or contract their enrolments according to their missions and goals and in response to changing demands. In addition, institutions are required to develop strategic plans outlining their plans for their future development and providing evidence of progress towards the attainment of these goals. These plans should include a Mission Statement, an academic development plan, an equity plan, a capital management plan and a plan for the improvement of performance (Section 4.61).

Taken together with the CHE's initiative in establishing a framework for monitoring and evaluation (see Discussion Document, April 2004), it is clear that there are multiple requirements on higher education institutions to report and to account. As with other policy provisions, including the structures that comprise the institutional framework for cooperative governance, the extent to which these demands will lead to higher education institutions conducting themselves in a deliberative manner is not yet clear. On the contrary, requiring that institutions report extensively and frequently may foster a climate of performativity (Barnett & Standish, 2003) that undermines institutional opportunities and willingness to deliberate.

The potential role of the CHE in fostering a climate of deliberation cannot be underestimated. Its record in promoting deliberation through research into the higher education sector (promoting the epistemic benefits of deliberation), and its efforts in fostering communication are an encouraging feature of current deliberation about higher education issues. Assigned responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in South Africa by the Higher Education Act, the CHE's permanent

sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), has demonstrated commitment to deliberative principles through its consultative procedures in the development of its framework and criteria for institutional audits (CHE, 2004a, 2004b) and in the deliberative processes being followed in the first rounds of institutional audits. However, there is as yet insufficient evidence that the three-year rolling plans are receiving deliberative uptake from the Ministry or the Department of Education. It is noted too that deliberative accountability implies that institutions report publicly, that they are seen to deliberate about their performance, and that the principle of reciprocity applies to all, including the State. In addition, they are required to account for their performance in a manner that includes re-evaluation of policy direction and implementation strategies.

To sum up the discussion in this section: the formal provisions for cooperative governance are compatible with deliberative democracy and may foster it, although there is room for deliberation and action about how they could be implemented so as to achieve their deliberative potential.

## **5. CONCLUSION: CONDITIONAL AUTONOMY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

This discussion of conditional autonomy in the context of cooperative governance is concluded by returning to the central question: does conditional autonomy, as expressed in South African higher education policy and its implementation to date, constitute a significant reduction both in university autonomy and in academic freedom?

In observing that many regard the demands on universities made by external policies as an erosion of university autonomy, Jansen (2004a: 297; 2004b: 6-8) states that Government:

- has required that qualifications be reformatted to match the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework;
- influences how students will be taught by requiring the specification of learning outcomes;
- has given itself the authority through the Programme and Qualification Mix to decide which institutions may teach what;
- has established bureaucratic structures that constitute a series of barriers to the approval of new developments;
- has signalled that the funding formula will privilege some disciplines over others;
- has acquired the right to decide how many students may enter universities by capping enrolments;
- requires participation in a new quality assurance system, which regulates the credibility of qualifications and institutions;
- has carried out a far-reaching programme of mergers and incorporations; and
- has intervened in institutions to restore order.

It is significant that Jansen describes these measures as demonstrating an “interventionist” position on the part of the State.

Although Jansen associates these measures with the accountability requirement of current policy, not all of them can be construed as matters of *accounting*. All can be interpreted as evidence of the State ‘steering’ the sector, as against – to recap a distinction noted in Section 1 – ‘direct State control’ or ‘State interference as a combination of direct State control and pronounced institutional autonomy’.<sup>3</sup> Given Jansen’s account of university autonomy and academic freedom, in which he defines academic freedom as the absence of external interference, one can appreciate why he concludes that academic freedom is being eroded by State interference.

But Jansen’s position is problematic. First, the examples that he cites do not demonstrate that *academic freedom*, as deliberation, has been eroded in higher education institutions through these measures. The prerogatives acquired and exercised by the State do extend the principle of conditional autonomy beyond the now standard stipulation that it be qualified by accountability, but his claim that they constitute a significant reduction in academic freedom is exaggerated; so too is his associated suggestion (2004b: 15-16) that South African universities are coming under so much pressure to account for themselves that they may be in the process of ceasing to be universities at all. As Andre Du Toit has argued (2005), universities ‘come in a striking variety of forms and mixes including their basic relations to the State and the political economy’.

As Jansen himself implicitly concedes, there is no neat correspondence between institutional autonomy as traditionally interpreted (the absence of outside intervention) and the existence of a deliberative climate within an institution. While direct State control could plausibly undermine deliberative conditions, it is conceivable that State steering can allow or even promote a climate of deliberation. Whether the steering measures taken by the State are those most likely to promote its higher education aims is a question that requires public deliberation.

Secondly, given that academic freedom deliberatively exercised can be undermined from within institutions, by ideological orthodoxy or managerialism, academic freedom defined and defended exclusively in terms of the absence of outside interference does not assist in assessing the current state of the university. The issue is rather whether the degree of conditionality now attached to the autonomy of the sector threatens the deliberative conditions required for universities to perform their research and teaching roles.

This poses a challenge to the universities themselves in promoting academic freedom in a context of institutional autonomy conditioned by the State’s role in steering the sector. A defence of deliberative democracy indicates that much of the work required for promoting academic freedom in South African universities ought to be viewed as a matter of fostering research and teaching that meet the principles of deliberation, of governance that is deliberative, and of deploying their deliberative resources to meet their obligations to contribute to social justice. The resources that universities have had to commit to internal restructuring and to mergers and incorporations provides only some of the explanation for their weak performance of the function that they, of all national institutions, are best equipped to play – public deliberation.

<sup>3</sup> Conditional autonomy with an emphasis on accountability does not correspond neatly with the notion of State steering that, while distinguishable from State intervention, goes beyond the requirement that universities give account for themselves.

What necessary conditions would need to be met if future engagement with issues of university autonomy and its defence in the face of justifiable conditionality is to be appropriately deliberative, on the part of all key constituencies? This chapter suggests, first, that deliberation needs to engage realistically with the key values that underpin the system. Second, among the questions that need to be asked in doing so are: how, given their resources, can universities best pursue the goal of social justice, and what part can they best play in national development? Universities' research resources could play a far greater role in supporting the epistemic demands of deliberation for policy making and implementation. There are grounds to criticize the performance of South African universities since 1994; in spite of the critical traditions that some of them claim to exemplify, they have not been sufficiently engaged with either deliberative redefinition of their relationship with the State nor with other crucial issue about social justice, especially HIV/AIDS. While debate may continue internally in closed institutional environments, it is not sufficiently translated into the public arena. The universities are vulnerable to the criticism that they fail to exercise their own citizenship through prompting public deliberation. Doubts must be raised about the extent to which the universities themselves are behaving in a sufficiently deliberative manner, modelling, as they should, the virtues of free public reason to the citizens of a democracy. The universities themselves might regret the growing conditionality of their autonomy, but they also have an obligation, individually and as an organized sector, to be more internally deliberative, and to contribute more of their deliberative capacities to the benefit of the broader society, ultimately fostering ongoing public debate about the very terms of their conditional autonomy.

Defending their autonomy is thus not merely a matter of persuading the State to restore lost prerogatives, but of exercising their obligation to demonstrate accountability in a deliberative fashion, and one that eschews managerialist assumptions and resists the threats posed to academic freedom by the market and corporatization.

Having called on the universities to defend their academic freedom in the first instance by promoting deliberative conditions within the institutions and in the pursuit of their obligations to society, the paper ends with a concession to Jansen's argument. While the extent to which the State's actions in the framework of conditional autonomy for universities has undermined academic freedom has been questioned, there is no doubt that the measures that Jansen lists as evidence for his claim that institutional autonomy has been reduced indicate that the State has increased its power over this sector. This creates possibilities for future abuse of this power, of a shift from the communicatively generated power implied by cooperative governance towards administratively employed power. This is a key problem that requires ongoing deliberation.

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# INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AS KEYWORD

John Higgins

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Institutional culture has become a buzzword in recent discussions of higher education in South Africa. Indeed, as references to it proliferate, there is a growing sense that institutional culture may well be the key to the successful transformation of higher education in South Africa. Or – to frame the matter as forcefully as do many recent analysts – it is simply the massive fact and bulk of institutional culture that may be the main obstacle in the way of the successful transformation of South Africa’s higher education system. So it is that casual reference to institutional culture features in ministerial announcements and the Mission Statements of leading universities; that it is becoming increasingly the focal point of research surveys, articles, and dissertations; and that institutional culture is used to explain or explain away phenomena as different (or as related) as marking and manslaughter.<sup>1</sup>

In the currently dominant deployment of the term, institutional culture is used to refer to what is perceived as the overwhelming ‘whiteness’ of higher education in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> As Dean of Education at Pretoria University – perhaps South Africa’s leading controversialist in higher education matters – Jonathan Jansen put it recently, ‘the last frontier in the quest for social integration and non-racial communities in former white institutions will always be this hard-to-define phenomenon called “institutional culture”’ (Jansen, 2004:1). In this now dominant usage, institutional culture figures as a kind of shorthand term for the powerful currents of racial feeling still active in South African society a decade after formal democratisation. Yet, as Jansen indicates, for all the apparent confidence with which the term is used, there still remains a troubling sense that institutional culture remains ‘a hard to define phenomenon’ (Jansen, 2004: 1), or, in the words of another recent commentator, a ‘slippery notion indeed’ (Ensor, 2002: 285).

The starting point for this chapter is precisely this slipperiness, one that can perhaps best be defined as a certain tension between the term’s immediate appeal, and an underlying uneasiness regarding its precise referent and related conceptual coherence. Why is it that the phrase institutional culture can come so readily to the lips, yet at the same time appear so difficult to pin down, once and for all, in a singular definition?

The method of this analysis is derived from a particular stance within contemporary literary and cultural studies, a stance referred to elsewhere by the same author as that of a ‘critical literacy’. In this sense of the term, ‘critical literacy’ refers to the analysis and interpretation of ideas and representations in the necessarily intricate combination of their historical, theoretical and textual

1 See, for instance, Kader Asmal’s comment on President Mbeki’s meeting with Higher Education Working Group in Pretoria, Thursday 11 December 2003: ‘Among other challenges that lay ahead, said Prof. Asmal, were transformation, curriculum development, and cultural justice. The latter entails building a more inclusive institutional culture that embraced language and cultural diversity among staff and students’ (News@sameansciz.c.za); Erasmus & de Wet (2003); Ismail (2000 and 2002); Jansen (2000); Ndebele (2004); Ruth (n.d.); Steyn & van Zyl (2001); du Toit (1996). The use of closed marking books at UCT, and much of the internal public commentary on the Hahn murder case at UCT where a professor was attacked and killed by a former Ph.D. student also deploy the term.

2 ‘Whiteness’ is a term developed in critical multicultural writing in the USA to designate the blindness of white culture to its own assumptions. In South Africa, the term has notably been picked up by Melissa Steyn, and forms the basis of her study of institutional culture at UCT. Cf also Robinson (n.d.), and, for further details, see below.

dimensions. In this perspective, 'institutional culture' is treated less as an assured or given concept, one with a definite set of easily specifiable contents, and more as a 'keyword', an item of contested vocabulary in a conflictual and disputed social process. In this sense, the very fact that 'institutional culture' is a phrase on the lips of many educationalists may point to the difficulty of the term, as the term names and, by naming, seeks to control a contested reality.<sup>3</sup> The term 'keyword', in turn, is taken from the work of the British literary and cultural critic, Raymond Williams (1921-1988) and a brief discussion of his use of it may help to ground the analysis that follows.<sup>4</sup>

Williams has been described as 'the single most important critic of post-war Britain' (Eagleton, 1984: 108). Williams probably did the most of his generation of post-war critics in Britain to emphasize the links between culture and society. Taken as a whole, his work articulated the possibility of extending the powerful analytic tools developed in the study of literature to the broader processes of cultural and political life in ways that are highly relevant to public discourse in contemporary South Africa.

*Keywords*, first published in 1976, represents something like a central work in Williams's *oeuvre*.<sup>5</sup> Subtitled a 'vocabulary of culture and society', it extends the discussion of the changing meanings of words and concepts under the pressures of social and political change. While Williams's classic study *Culture and Society 1780-1950* had focused on the shifting senses of words such as industry, democracy, class, art and culture (Williams, 1979: 13), *Keywords* extended the same method of historical semantics to a much broader series of terms, ranging from 'aesthetic' and 'alienation' to 'work' and 'science'. In both books – as in Williams's work as a whole – the guiding principle remains the same. Attention to the fact that 'our vocabulary, the language we use to inquire into and to negotiate our actions, is no secondary factor, but a practical and radical element itself' (Williams, 1979: 323).

A useful starting point for this investigation of institutional culture is Williams's entry on the word 'culture' in his study *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983). Culture, he writes, 'is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (Williams, 1983: 87); and he offers a survey and summary of its various senses and definitions over the past three hundred years. Much of the discussion is generally useful for any careful consideration of institutional culture, but what, in particular, is taken from it is less its content than its form.<sup>6</sup> For the important stress in Williams's account falls on the fact of this variety, with his noting how 'it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought' (Williams, 1983: 87). 'Faced by [the]

3 A similarly sceptical stance underlies much of Adorno's work. See, for instance, his distrust of what he refers to as the 'harmonistic tendency' in much sociological analysis, what he describes as the 'tendency to explain away the constitutive contradictions on which our society rests, to conjure them out of existence' (Adorno [1968] 2000:7). It may well be that in some senses 'institutional culture' corresponds to this 'harmonistic tendency'. And compare footnote 13 below.

4 For much of this, see Higgins (1999), and, with special reference to Williams's *Keywords*, Higgins (2003). Compare also Christopher Norris's astute comments (Norris, 1997). The recent series *Keywords: For a Different Kind of Globalization*, edited by Nadia Tazi and published in South Africa by Double Storey books may also pay oblique tribute to Williams.

5 References here are taken from the second, revised and expanded edition of 1983.

6 In particular, his attention to the metaphorical shift in the use of the term, from its original meaning as the tending and cultivation of crops, to the 'process of human development', and used with reference to various forms of education, is particularly valuable. Also useful is the attention to Herder's criticism of Euro centrism in his *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784-1791), where he asserts that the 'very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature' (cited Williams, 1983:89). For a useful selection and presentation of key texts representing Enlightenment views of race, including a relevant portion of Herder's study and Immanuel Kant's critical response to it, see Eze (1997), especially pp. 65-78.



complex and still active use of the word', he writes, 'it is easy to react by selecting one "true" or "proper" or "scientific" sense and dismissing other senses as loose or confused' (1983: 91); but, he adds,

In general it is the range and overlap of meanings that is significant. The complex of senses indicates a complex argument...[and] within this complex argument there are fundamentally opposed as well as effectively overlapping positions...these arguments and questions cannot be resolved by reducing the complexity of actual usage. (1983: 91)

From this densely argued perspective, what makes institutional culture so 'hard to define' is not, in the end, simply the reality it names. It is rather the fact that naming that reality is part and parcel of a series of complex arguments about the future of higher education in South Africa in which there are (in Williams's terms) 'fundamentally opposed as well as effectively overlapping positions'. Rather than seek to settle on a single 'true, proper or scientific' meaning to the term, it is then precisely the 'range and overlap of meanings' at work in the existing uses of institutional culture that form the focus of this investigation. In emphasizing these, one aim in this project is to contest a pervasive mode of writing in higher education discourse. Much current writing tends to deploy a vocabulary that tends to represent change (perhaps in some distantly Hegelian fashion) as an organic process, and this effectively works to naturalize what is better understood as a complex and disputed social action.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter, therefore, examines several stages in what might be called the career of the term, although the sense of career is here less the usual one as progress and natural development to an assured professional outcome, and more the root sense of career as a swerving, shifting, or troping. The first part thus examines the emergence of the term in its (apparently) cognate form of organizational culture in business studies writing in the early 1980s, and some of the dynamics engaged in its first uses in higher education discourse in the mid to late 1980s, while the second looks at two major forms of its deployment in South Africa.

## 2. THE EMERGENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

William G. Tierney was one of the first writers to put the term to work in discussions of higher education management. In his influential article, 'Organizational Culture in Higher Education', he observed that the term organizational culture first emerged in the 1980s 'as a topic of central concern for those who study organizations' (Tierney, 1988: 2). Tierney mentions books, such as William Ouchi's *Theory Z* (1981), Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* (1982), Dale and Kennedy's *Corporate Cultures* and Edgar H. Schein's *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985) as standard works in a well-established field (Tierney, 1988: 2). This account focuses particularly on Schein's 1985 study, as it usefully embodies and exemplifies the constitutive contradictions at the heart of much writing on organizational culture.

In general terms, it is important to recognize that the emergence of a new term or idea, such as organizational culture, is always an active response to a changing social and political reality. 'Active response' is stressed, because it is important to understand the term 'response' not as

<sup>7</sup> For further examples and discussions of this 'pessimism of the will' see Higgins (2000a, 2000b and 2003b).

some passive and automatic registration of a changing reality, but as an active attempt to come to grips with that reality and, by naming it, to work on it. The idea of organizational culture came into focus as a distinct object of analysis in business studies at a very particular economic and ideological moment. This was the moment of crisis of the late 1970s and 1980s in which the perceived pressures of a global economic downturn led to a consequent awareness of, and emphasis on, the fact of increasing levels of global competition.<sup>8</sup> In particular, for US business, the term came into focus as a way of examining and dealing with the sudden disturbing visibility of Japan as a major competitor in the global economy in areas (electronics, motorcar manufacture) in which the US had previously prided itself on its dominance and superiority. Japan's newly visible success held up an unflattering mirror to what was perceived as the USA's comparative weakness and its increasing lack of competitiveness in many areas of manufacturing (this, at a moment when the economy as a whole was undergoing a major shift from manufacturing to finance as the focus of its interest and activity).<sup>9</sup>

In the immediate post-war period, as America's Occupation Authority helped in the rebuilding of its shattered economy, Japan figured in the US social imaginary as a figure of fun, a mere 'copycat culture' incapable of creativity and innovation, and no threat to US economic dominance.<sup>10</sup> With the suddenness that perhaps characterizes all cultural articulation of economic and political process, all that changed with the recognition in the early 1980s that the Japanese economy had become the third largest in the world (Pascale & Athos, 1981: 20), and of the fact that America was running a particularly large trade deficit with Japan.<sup>11</sup> By the 1980s, Japanese business culture became an object of anxious speculation and emulation, disturbing enough to feature in numerous mass cultural narratives, as well as in writing on business studies itself.<sup>12</sup>

Within business studies themselves, organizational culture was the ground of anxious comparison between Japanese and American business practices. In *Theory Z*, William Ouchi shows (to quote the subtitle of this seminal analysis of Japanese business practices) 'how American business can meet the Japanese challenge' (Ouchi, 1981). Ouchi argues that much of Japanese business success came from its different organizational culture, and the ways that culture produced more committed, energetic and innovative employees. In response, a whole series of analysts sought to bring the strengths and weaknesses of US business into focus through a consideration of organizational culture. Abegglen and Stalk argue that Japanese organizational culture, the *kaisha*, 'has gone farther than others to minimize conflicting interests and to integrate each of the members of the group into a whole that works in the common interest' (Abegglen & Stalk, 1985: 182), while Pascale and Athos sought to 'point out how our managerial blind spots [are] related to American culture and society' (Pascale & Athos, 1981: 22). While, in contrast to Ouchi, Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman found that '[b]usiness performance in the United States has deteriorated badly at least compared to that of Japan' (Peters & Waterman, 1982: 41), nonetheless the 'excellent companies [in the USA]...had cultures as strong as any Japanese organization' (1982: xxi-xxii). All in all, as Edgar Schein puts it in his landmark study, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, the 'discovery that some Japanese companies could compete

8 For a useful global survey of this moment, see Hobsbawm, 1994, especially Chapter 14 'The Crisis Decades'.

9 As Sir Peter Parker put it, 'Japanese competitiveness has become one of the paramount economic events of the post-war world. Nowadays our mirror on the wall is no longer giving the West the flattering answers of the fairy-tale' (Parker, 1986:vii). I say apparently deepening in the sense that the USA – where the phase of writings on organization culture are strongest – nonetheless remained by far the world's largest economy. For a useful comparison between US and Japanese economies in the period, see Fulcher (2004), especially pages 64-81.

10 For a deft critique of such attitudes at the height of their acceptability, see Philippe K. Dick's alternative-future novel, *The Man in the High Castle* (Dick 1964).

11 Pascale and Athos noted in 1982 that if present trends continued Japan would be the wealthiest country in the world shortly after 2000 (Pascale & Athos, 1982).

12 Eric von Lustbader's Nicholas Linneer's novels trace the rise of Japanese business dominance through the Second World War to the present day, beginning with the best-selling *The Ninja* in 1982; Michael Crichton – ever alert to changing trends and interests – produced *Rising Sun* in 1992, with its Japanese motto 'Business is War' standing as epigraph to the novel (and this was made into a successful film by Ridley Scott in 1994). The success and complex reception of the recent film *Lost in Translation* testifies to an ongoing cultural engagement with the dynamics (however fantasized in these cases) of what business studies named organizational culture.

successfully with their United States counterparts suddenly focused our attention on both national and organizational culture' (Schein, 1985: x).

In practical terms, the new focus on comparative organizational cultures seemed to promise or to offer an extra and crucial dimension in the search for ever-increasing efficiency in a situation of ever-increasing competitiveness. Peters and Waterman have presented one of the most influential cases for the importance of organizational culture. In their view, the idea of organizational culture is useful, because it enabled a challenge to the hitherto single emphasis in managerial theory on the importance of rational planning strategy. While key writers, such as A. D. Chandler, had established the importance of a rational planning strategy to the success of American business in the first half of the twentieth century, the crisis and reconfiguration of the new global economy suggested the need to turn away from received wisdom and to emphasize the equal if not greater importance of a more cultural understanding of business structures and management in the workplace itself.<sup>13</sup> For Peters and Waterman, the 'rational approach to management misses a lot' (Peters & Waterman, 1982: 30). The idea of the rational 'has come to have a very narrow definition in business analysis', they argue. 'It is the right answer, but it's missing all of that messy human stuff, such as good strategies that do not allow for persistent old habits, implementation barriers, and simple human inconsistencies' (1982: 31).

What Peters and Waterman found – in their investigation of the actual practices of a number of stable and profitable companies – was that efficient cost analysis alone (as argued by figures such as Chandler) could not explain their comparative success. Only something like organizational culture could: the recognition and working with the largely unconscious structures of work and production in the business environment. Once this recognition was in place, the control and management of organizational culture then promised to give a sharpened competitive edge to companies as they operated in an ever more competitive world economy. Organizational culture therefore presented a new dimension to the process of increasing competitiveness and market-share: not simply the product, or better processes of production, but a new dimension of improved management and control.<sup>14</sup>

The promise was of a new dimension of improved management, control and efficiency, a deeper penetration of Weberian rationality. But the question arises as to the extent to which it was or could have been fulfilled. The question, in turn, gives rise to what might be called the constitutive contradiction of the literature on organizational culture, one that is not only carried through, but is also even exacerbated in much of the thinking on the role and place of institutional culture in higher education debates.

This constitutive contradiction is perhaps best grasped by paying attention to the ways in which the instrumental promise of the term gives way to a nuanced and inevitable realization of the real difficulties of intervening in the complex reality that organizational culture names. It comes through most strongly in the representation and figuring of the nature and scope of leadership in successful organizations.

<sup>13</sup> For standard and influential accounts, see Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the American Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962) and his later *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Harvard UP, 1990). Peters and Waterman (1982) credit Chandler with 'the very powerful notion that structure follows strategy...[a] dictum that had the makings of a universal truth' (1982: 4).

<sup>14</sup> In this sense, the idea owed its growth and development to the forces so well-described by Bourdieu, who noted how an 'important part of orthodox sociological discourse owes its immediate social success to the fact that it answers dominant demand which often comes down to a demand for rational instruments for management and domination or to a demand for a "scientific" legitimating of the spontaneous sociology of those in the dominant [group]' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 50-51). Cf. Adorno's comments on the 'harmonistic tendency' in footnote 3 above.

## 2.1. LEADERSHIP VERSUS CULTURE

Edgar Schein's *Organizational Culture and Leadership – A Dynamic View* (Schein, 1985) – a standard reference point for work in the area – embodies with great force what this chapter calls the constitutive contradiction, which is seen at work in most uses of organizational culture. In large part, this is because of Schein's deliberate foregrounding of the issue of leadership within organizational culture, and the powerful role he ascribes or wishes to give to leadership. Indeed, it is Schein's assertions that 'the unique and essential function of leadership is the manipulation of culture' (Schein 1985: 317), or that the '*only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and manage culture*' (1985: 2; emphasis in the original) that are the most cited phrases from his work. These clearly provided a selling point for the book as well as the central rationale for Schein's own consultancy practices. Yet even in these strong formulations of the study's central assertion, there is already a crucial tension or hesitation present in the real differences and tensions between 'create and manage', since to create is to create anew or start afresh, while to manage is usually to work with something that already exists.

In fact, the substance of Schein's study always points to difficulties and contradictions in the idea of leadership that the assertions about it confidently or blandly dismiss. For all the emphasis on the power of leadership to create culture, the emphasis finally falls rather on the difficulties and limits of control, and the consequent need for managing culture, in the more awkward senses of having it to deal with, or putting up with it. 'All cultural definitions emphasize that culture is the product of shared meanings among group members, but the process by which something comes to be shared by a group is still not well understood', he admits (Schein, 1982: 313). He finds a paradox: that 'leaders create cultures, but cultures, in turn, create their next generation of leaders' (*ibid.*). Schein repeats this many times: the 'unique and essential function of leadership is the manipulation of culture' (317) and 'Culture is created in the first instance by the action of leaders; culture is also strengthened and embedded by leaders' (316-17). But there are also serious limits to all of this: 'Do not assume that culture can be manipulated like other matters under the control of managers' (314). Yet the substance of this interesting study is devoted to the largely unconscious aspects of culture, and the difficulty of raising these to awareness. In this process, the leader is caught up as well. The point is that a business needs a therapist to deal with the largely unconscious aspects of organizational culture. The leader may lead; but often in an unconscious and self-contradictory way that can benefit from the insights of a therapeutic advisor.

All in all, Schein's model of the dynamic process, which is organizational culture, is deeply indebted to the US appropriation of psychoanalysis (now generally referred to as 'ego psychology') in which – to recall Freud's words – '*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*': 'where id was, there shall ego be'.<sup>15</sup> This is apparent in Schein's own oft-cited definition of the terms and goals of his work, and how in it, the term culture 'should be reserved for the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate

<sup>15</sup> Freud's famous phrase is taken from the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. (Freud, 1966, *Standard Edition* XXII: 80). It became one of the assertions that the school of Lacan did most to challenge or complicate. For a brief discussion, see Higgins (1990).

unconsciously, and that define in a basic ‘taken-for-granted’ fashion an organization’s view of itself and its environment. These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group’s problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration. These come to be taken for granted because they solve those problems repeatedly and reliably’ (Schein, 1982: 6). With its emphasis on the unconscious as ‘learned responses to...survival in an external environment’ and ‘problems of internal integration’, Schein’s account falls squarely within the vocabulary and conceptual world of the ego psychology dominant in the period.

Yet, the past thirty years of work in cultural theory has contested the findings and assumptions of ego psychology as perhaps over-confident or misguided in its assumptions concerning the possibility of a cure or a full taming of the unconscious. From Lacan’s insistence on the illusory nature of any integrative idea of the ego psychology to the labile complexity of recent social theorists, such as Slavoj Žižek, the general trend in cultural analysis has been to point to the need for a much more complex appropriation of psychoanalysis for the understanding of social and political process than US psychology – at least in the 1950s – could dream of.<sup>16</sup> From this perspective, it is hardly surprising that many of Schein’s actual findings in his book tend to undermine rather than substantiate his claims for the power of leadership. In practice, Schein’s attention to the psychodynamics of organizational behaviour – present in the subtitle to the work, ‘Organizational Culture and Leadership – A Dynamic View’ – tends to undermine his (doubtless ideological) commitment to the leadership model, which seems to promise a straightforward implementation of intention. Despite his frequent and repeated emphasis on the power of leadership, a great deal of the substance of his study is taken up with detailing the limits of leadership when dealing with organizational culture. These limits are in part internal: the leader doesn’t know what he wants, and acts in contradictory ways; and partly inter-relational. In the end, the key point that emerges from a careful reading of Schein is one that works against much of his general claims. It is the simple fact that the leader cannot be regarded as being outside the process, and able to use the organization as if it were an instrument of his will; he (as pre-feminist writing has it) is better regarded as one of several interacting elements.

The founding contradiction in Schein’s view of organizational culture – the tension between a desired image of an omnipotent leadership and the messy reality of institutional complexity – is common to most discussions of organizational culture. In the next section of the argument, the question of how much of the same promise and, with it, the same structure of internal contradiction is carried over and reproduced – perhaps even with increasing force, as the term organizational culture is transposed into higher education discourse. Here, it

16 In this, ‘Lacan’s ‘re-reading of Freud’ is of paramount importance, with his findings reaching a much wider public after the publication of his selected writings in 1966 and their translation into English in 1972. It is probably not exaggerated to say that cultural theory and analysis in the last thirty years has been devoted to undermining too over-confident a take on Freud’s slogan. See, for instance, Ragland-Sullivan’s assertion: ‘Lacan’s campaign against ego psychology manifests itself throughout his thought. He naturally opposed the idea that there is a whole self that serves as an agent of strength, synthesis, mastery, integration, and adaptation to realistic norms’ (Ragland-Sullivan, 1986: 119). In many ways, the work of Slovenian cultural and political theorist Slavoj Žižek can be seen as elaborating the implications of Lacan’s rejection of ego psychology for social and ideological theory. Homer puts the point succinctly: ‘We like to think of our society as naturally and harmoniously evolving over time and through the democratic consensus of the people. For Žižek this is not the case: all societies are founded upon a traumatic moment of social conflict and the social ideological fantasy masks this constitutive antagonism’ (Homer, 2005: 113).

gradually takes on the form of the apparently cognate term, institutional culture. Here, 'apparently cognate' is used as a means of referring to the elision of the differences between educational institutions and business organizations operated by neo-liberal thought, noted by several commentators.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. FROM ORGANIZATIONAL TO INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

W. G. Tierney was one of the first scholars to propose the extension of the term 'organizational culture' to cover the work and running of universities as organizations in his essay 'Organizational Culture in Higher Education: Defining the Essentials' (Tierney, 1988). What is striking in his account, as in much of the related writing in which the term organizational culture is taken into higher education debates, is the failure or reluctance to name the external pressures that necessitate the importation of the new term. In this, it is, as has been seen, quite unlike the proponents of the term in business studies, who explicitly justify the need for the new coinage in terms of the threat of Japanese competition. This represents an internalization of external pressures in higher education discourse that perfectly embodies the pressures of hegemonic thinking. For hegemonic thinking is at its most visible when it seeks to make invisible its own enabling or directive presuppositions.

So it is that Tierney describes the aim of his work as seeking 'to provide a working framework to diagnose culture in colleges and universities so that distinct problems can be overcome' (Tierney, 1988: 2); 'to point out how administrators might utilize the concept of culture to help solve specific administrative problems' (1988: 3); but the problems themselves are never discussed as such. All in all, he suggests 'leaders in higher education can benefit from understanding their institutions as cultural entities' (5). Administrators, he writes, 'tend to recognize their organization's culture only when they have transgressed its bounds and severe conflicts or adversarial relationships ensue' (1988: 4); but it is never quite clear just what the content of these conflicts or the stakes in these adversarial relationships are.

In this perspective, and as the vocabulary of diagnosis and problem-solving indicates, the idea of organizational culture is an instrumental and prophylactic one, in ways familiar from Schein's account. The proper understanding of organizational culture is there to prevent or at least smooth over difficulties in managing change in institutions of higher education, and it is the process of managing change that provides the central justifying element for the application of the new term. As will be seen, the detail of the argument belies the instrumental claims made for the concept of institutional culture, in ways that repeat and reduplicate the tensions of Schein's arguments. In Tierney's article, the constitutive contradiction is figured in the very specific place, position and perspective that Tierney wishes to grant to or assume in the successful administrator.

17 While business organizations are constituted by their role in the production and distribution of economic goods and services to a competitive market, educational institutions are traditionally defined by their role in the production and distribution of cultural capital to a society for the public good. Robert Young (1992) argues the case forcefully. Peters and Waterman cite Selznick on the differences covered up in the substitution of one term for another: 'The term "organization" thus suggests a certain bareness, a lean, no-nonsense system of consciously coordinated activities...An "institution", on the other hand, is much more nearly a natural product of social needs and pressures—a responsive, adaptive organism' (cited in Peters & Waterman, 1982: 98).

This comes through in something like a moment of self-conscious acknowledgement, on Tierney's part, of the metaphorical nature of his whole enterprise. He writes of the anthropological nature of his study of how, in an influential definition, an 'organization's culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it' (Tierney, 1988: 3). '[W]e look at an organization', he writes, 'as a traditional anthropologist would study a particular village or clan' (4).

However, the similarity which this comparison invokes and promotes – that the researcher, and following him or her, the administrator, should stand in relation to his or her organization or institution as an anthropologist stands in relation to a village or clan – conceals at least one major difference, for the administrator or leader to whom Tierney's essay is addressed is himself or herself also a part of the village or clan; likewise, the administrator is a part of, rather than an observer of, the institution. Taken at face value, the position that Tierney establishes for the administrator or leader is, however, less that of the anthropologist than that of the colonizer, since the aim of the cultural understanding is to subordinate the village or tribe to the will of the administrator. What is revealed/concealed in the notion is the way in which the idea of institutional culture is related to questions of power and control in institutions of higher education. This is the unacknowledged centre of the discussion; and it is a centre interestingly at odds with its substance.

For, what is striking in Tierney's account of his research at 'Family State College', is that the best possibilities for positive change and transformation rely on the pre-existing disposition of the organizational culture. It is because Family State College has a pre-existing 'strong organizational culture' (Tierney, 1988: 17), one that enjoys the values of open communication and collegiality, and already respects its constitutive members, assuming that change and growth were experienced there as positive aspects. Something of the same paradox is apparent in the reports of other researchers in this area. To 'effect orderly change in the organization without creating unnecessary conflict' (19), the best thing is to have a pre-existing 'strong organizational culture'.

In this sense, organizational culture is double-sided, and is looked at in two ways or from two different and opposed perspectives. For administrators, organizational culture names the resistance that has to be overcome for successful change to occur, the theoretical premise is that by naming it, it can be overcome more easily. At the same time, a strong organizational culture is one to be desired if conflict is to be avoided. But – or so Tierney's analysis suggests – this aspect or dimension can only be seen from a 'native' perspective, one located within the institution and not (as in his figuration of the problem) from without, from the colonizer's 'anthropological' perspective. This constitutive contradiction – that is observed at work in Schein, and has now been seen again in Tierney – seems, in fact, to be a feature of the whole discourse on organizational culture.

## 4. INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE(S) IN SOUTH AFRICA

The brief and schematic survey of prior uses of institutional culture sets the scene for a comparative analysis of the term's deployment in South Africa. Comparative analysis is useful, since it helps to establish where there is continuity between local and global uses of the term. Where there are divergences, these are likely to signal new content and emphases within the use of the term.

In fact, many of the changes to the higher education system post-1994 correspond to the changes in higher education imposed worldwide by the new hegemonic 'common sense' of neo-liberalism, and some discussions of institutional culture in South Africa refer directly to these changes, as is seen later in this paper.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, what marks out much discussion of institutional culture in South Africa is the extent to which it is necessarily permeated by the difficult questions presented by racial identities in a post-apartheid, post-colonial society.<sup>19</sup>

In the first – and currently dominant – usage, institutional culture names or refers to the perceived 'whiteness' of academic culture, although it is often not clear whether this whiteness is ascribed to 'European' academic culture in general, or to the particular (and various) ecologies of inter-subjective exchanges in campus academic and social life at institutions as different as the University of Witwatersrand and the University of Pretoria, or the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University. In the second, respectively, institutional culture names the contested terrain of power and authority between administrators and academics as South Africa adopts and adapts global initiatives in the neo-liberal reform of universities.

### 4.1. INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AS WHITENESS

The current, dominant sense of the term in South Africa understands the institutional culture of higher education institutions through the lens of 'whiteness critique'. In this perspective, it is argued, institutional culture is – above all – experienced by black staff and students as the overwhelming 'whiteness' of academic culture. 'Whiteness' here refers to the ensemble of cultural and subjective factors that together constitute the unspoken dominance in higher education of Western, European or Anglo-Saxon values and attitudes as these are reproduced and inflected in South Africa. This 'whiteness' is or can be experienced as an alienating and disempowering sense of not being fully recognized in or by the institution, and a consequent impossibility of feeling 'at home' within it. In this regard, all the well-known pressures and dilemmas of African and other post-colonial universities come into play around the now central idea of institutional culture, and help to lend the term its considerable power and resonance in contemporary discussions.<sup>20</sup>

18 See, for instance, Orr (1997:62): 'the latest policy proposals...tend to give more emphasis to the "demands" of "international competitiveness", conceptualizing human resource development in a narrow "economistic" way'; Subotsky (1997); and Bertelsen (1998:150): 'while the rhetoric of "transformation" remains plausibly democratic, the change that this language is used to legitimate is essentially market-driven'; and, more generally, Higgins (2000a).

19 For two groundbreaking discussions, which place such questions in their necessarily historical and theoretical context, see Mamdani (1996) and Mbembe (2001).



Attempts to counter this alienation come through in a variety of ways. At the most general levels, some advocate a wholesale process of ‘Africanization’, while others call for the development and implementation of policies of ‘cultural justice’ at the university.<sup>21</sup> More specifically, a number of research projects in and including the implementation of transformation at universities are now focusing on the ethnic and existential dimensions of institutional culture.<sup>22</sup> For the purposes of this submission, Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl’s study, “‘Like that Statue at Jammie Stairs...’: Some student perceptions and experiences of institutional culture at the University of Cape Town in 1999’, may serve as an exemplary account in its characteristic mixture of immediate appeal yet theoretical weakness.

First published by the Institute for Intercultural and Diversity Studies of Southern Africa in 2001 (Steyn & van Zyl, 2001), the report has done much to establish the idea of ‘whiteness’ as the new referent for institutional culture, or at the very least, as the single most important element of the institutional culture of universities. The study continues to serve as a reference or even starting-point – for many new researchers in the field. In so doing, it embodies both the strengths and the weaknesses of a new usage in which the content of the term comes to refer almost exclusively to the racial dimensions or aspects of university life, with some emphasis on how these factors impact on pedagogic communication.

The core definitions of the report refer to, or confidently assume, the general understanding of institutional culture as ‘the prevailing ethos – the deep-seated set of norms assumptions and values that predominate and pervade most of the environment’ (Steyn & van Zyl, 2001: x). Institutional culture is the

“sum total” effects of the values, attitudes, styles of interaction, collective memories - the “way of life” of the university, known by those who work and study in the university environment, through their lived experience. (2001: 20)

As ‘sum total’, institutional culture has the capacity to refer to any and every aspect of experience at university, from parking to policing, from the sites and names of buildings to any and every joke told on campus (Steyn & van Zyl, 2001: 27, 28, 42).

At the centre of Steyn and van Zyl’s study is the assertion that ‘whiteness’ stands as the unacknowledged core of UCT’s institutional culture.<sup>23</sup> In the Abstract that heads the document, the claim is that ‘it is clear that in students’ experiences “whiteness” still largely characterizes the institutional culture’ (Steyn & van Zyl, 2001: n.p.). In line with this, they argue that the

20 In this regard, Castells’ warning regarding self-destructive conflicts in post-colonial universities may be apposite. In a report to the World Bank Seminar on Higher Education and Development in 1991, Castells had noted that the specificity of university systems in the third world lies in their colonial past. This specificity, he writes, ‘emphasizes their ideological dimension in the first stage of their post-independence period’ (Castells, 2001: 212), and he warns that ‘the contradictions between academic freedom and political militancy, as well as the drive for modernisation and the preservation of cultural identity, have been a fundamental cause for the loss of the best academic talent in most Third World countries’ (213).

21 See, for instance, Chirevo V. Kwenda on cultural justice (Kwenda, 2003), and on Africanization, amongst others, see Seepe’s call to place ‘the African world-view at the centre of analysis’ (Seepe 2000:59) and also (in the same issue of *Perspectives in Education*) Mangcu (2000) and Nekhwevha (2000). A founding reference point is Ajayi *et al.* (1996): *The African Experience with Higher Education*.

22 See, for instance, the work of the University of Western Cape Research Group on Institutional Culture, and notably, Lionel Thaver’s work within that group (Thaver, 2004).

23 And, by extension, that of the other historically white universities in South Africa.

‘institutional culture of UCT has been shaped by a very specific historical cultural positioning, and the worldview which informs this position has been normalised within the UCT environment. To a large extent this cultural milieu has been characterized by “whiteness” (2001:iii). And summarizing their sample of student opinion, they conclude that ‘the assumption is that the white norm fits all’ (37). Not surprisingly, the final conclusions and recommendations suggest that ‘Student testimonies reflect that the university unquestionably subscribes to the ideology of whiteness’ (68). All in all, the ‘perceived lack of attention paid to institutional culture...is experienced both as a symptom and consequence of this culture of whiteness’ (Steyn & van Zyl, 2001: 68).

As already argued, ‘whiteness’ is a key term taken from discussions about multiculturalism, largely in the United States. Several references are made in the survey to essays in David Theo Goldberg’s seminal anthology, *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader* (Goldberg, 1995) and particular use is made of Peter McLaren’s article, ‘White Terror and Oppositional Agency: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism’ (McLaren, 1995).<sup>24</sup> Steyn and van Zyl take from McLaren the centrality he gives to the notion of ‘whiteness’ as a pivotal but unacknowledged category in Western society and education.

For McLaren, ‘white culture’s most formidable attribute is its ability to mask itself as a category’ (McLaren, 1995:61). ‘[U]nless we give white students a sense of their own identity as an emergent ethnicity,’ he argues, ‘we naturalize whiteness as a cultural marker against which Otherness is defined’ (1995:59). ‘White groups’, he writes

need to examine their own ethnic histories so that they are less likely to judge their own cultural norms as neutral and universal.... Whiteness does not exist outside of culture but constitutes the prevailing social text in which social norms are made and remade. (McLaren, 1995: 59)

Whiteness, he concludes, ‘has become the invisible norm for how the dominant culture measures its own worth and civility’ (*ibid.*).<sup>25</sup>

Many of the details of Steyn and van Zyl’s account work to echo and confirm McLaren’s argument. Some students reported feelings of alienation and anomie, and maintained that ‘UCT is Eurocentric in tradition and practice’ (2001: 69). Others believed that ‘the institutional culture would only really change if the white section of the university made a conscious effort to open up to learning, rather than assuming that “others” were the only ones in deficit’ (Steyn & van Zyl, 2001: 66).

The central and repeated point – of ‘whiteness’ as the ‘invisible norm’ – offers a powerful new perspective on the institutional cultures of South African universities. The varied testimonies point to the difficulties and possibilities of dealing with this aspect of socially pervasive though often subliminal racism ‘still at work’ ten years after the formal demise of apartheid.<sup>26</sup> The findings call for an intensive consciousness-raising exercise around the issue of whiteness similar

<sup>24</sup> Franz Fanon’s discussion, (from *Black Skins, White Masks*) ‘The Fact of Blackness’, may be regarded as the starting-point for critiques of ‘whiteness’. ‘The white world,’ he writes, ‘the only honourable one, barred me from all participation’ (Fanon, 1990: 111).

<sup>25</sup> The stance is common to most of the contributors in Goldberg’s collection. For the pedagogical implications, see especially Henry A. Giroux’s essay in the collection, ‘Insurgent Multiculturalism and the Promise of Pedagogy’ (Giroux 1995).

in scope to the great consciousness raising around patriarchy enjoined by feminism in the sixties and seventies: a ‘conscious deliberate attempt to examine and question the “normal”’ (2001: 29). This would include, in the first instance, a commitment to education and training around ‘whiteness’ in pedagogical and other sites of inter-subjective exchange on campus. These and other recommendations from the survey continue to serve as useful guidelines for further initiatives, both at UCT and elsewhere.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, a number of visible inconsistencies and theoretical difficulties emerge within and from the report’s deployment of institutional culture as whiteness. These have to do with the explanatory centrality apparently assigned to whiteness in its survey and summary of student experience and perception.

The general theoretical problem may well be that of the tension between contrasting ‘objectivist’ and ‘subjectivist’ strands in sociological analysis; and it comes through in this survey as a problem of translation.<sup>28</sup> For while the study as a whole claims that nothing can be achieved ‘without understanding the sense-making of the students themselves’ (Steyn & van Zyl, 2001: 2), they acknowledge that students ‘may not always be able to articulate exactly what it is that they experience’ (n.p.). The survey, for instance, claims that most of the students ‘who discussed the issue of UCT’s institutional culture, had a solid grasp of its relation to institutional power – they could identify the centre, and the resultant tension of those on the margins’ (36); but it remains unclear whether the key terms of centre, margins, institutional power and institutional culture are the terms actually used by the students themselves, or the translated terms of the interviewers ascribed to the students. The danger throughout is one of a certain circularity, in which the central explanatory category of ‘whiteness’ is at one point taken as the starting-point of the analysis, but at another is represented as an end result or as a conclusion derived from it. The formulations vary, and seem to embody the always difficult, interpretive transaction that takes place between interviewer and interviewee.<sup>29</sup>

For a classic ‘objectivist’ sociologist, such as Durkheim, ‘social life must be explained not by the conception of those who participate in it, but by the deep causes which lie outside of consciousness’ (cited in Bourdieu, 1990: 125). No mere survey of opinion, based on personal experiences, would have a chance of getting through to the underlying causes of alienation and anomie in an institutional culture like that of the university. Yet, at the same time, the richness of texture enabled by subjective accounts is a resource no sociologist can ignore, and particularly not one who wishes to locate the dynamics of agency within structural constraint, and to resist

26 For a powerful and probing account of the concept of ‘subliminal racism’, see Kistner (2003).

27 At UCT, see especially the continuing work of the Institute for Intercultural and Diversity Studies of Southern Africa, and particularly the ongoing work in the Health Sciences Faculty (Ismail, 2002; Erasmus & de Wet, 2002).

28 I leave aside the more problematic dimension of the translation of experience itself in terms of the Freudian concept of transference. This attends to the ways in which the subject’s most apparently spontaneous experiences in the present are in reality strongly influenced by past traumas. As opposed to this repetition, psychoanalysis seeks a working through that allows the analysand to ‘re-experience some portion of his [sic] forgotten life, but must see to it, on the other hand, that the [analysand] retains some degree of aloofness, which will enable him, in spite of everything, to recognise that what appears to be reality is in fact only a repetition of a forgotten past’ (Freud 1966, *Standard Edition* XII: 18-19). Given the psychodynamics of the teaching situation, transference plays a significant role in much student-teacher interaction in both positive (it is, after all, the source of the learning impulse itself) as well as negative.

29 The lack is somewhat surprising given the attention paid precisely to this problem in McLaren’s account, one of the acknowledged sources of the survey. See fn. 37 for further discussion.

the tendency to reduce the respondent in the interview to an object of analysis.<sup>30</sup> The middle ground is hard – if not impossible – to find; but a stricter attention to the inevitable complications of the process than is evident in the survey might have yielded less problematic results.<sup>31</sup>

It is for these and other related reasons that many sociologists suggest a control on opinion surveys – including those done by in-depth interview – through two related procedures. The first is in terms of internal coherence, necessitating a very careful scrutiny of the match between data and explanation; the second, is an external check through the comparative application of other explanatory hypotheses, existing elsewhere in the literature.<sup>32</sup>

In terms of the survey's internal coherence, two problems emerge. First of all, a certain undermining of the explanatory primacy of whiteness emerges from the report's own attention to significant cultural divisions within the black student body itself, a body assigned an essential unity in the binary oppositions engaged by whiteness critique. Significant divisions are reported between black students from Model C schools and those from poorer schools (often paralleling or reinforcing a divide between those from urban and rural backgrounds). The significant division here between different schooling at primary and secondary levels undermines the cohesiveness of a purely racial categorisation, such as whiteness as the primary explanatory factor in experiences of alienation within higher education; and it may well be that such alienation is perhaps better viewed as part and parcel of structure of racialized rather than racial inequalities.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, there is the uneasy way in which whiteness is joined as a vantage point for critique of institutional culture by questions raised by issues of sexual orientation, gender, and disability. In the report, these come together as simply different aspects of the general power relations at work in the institutional culture of the university; but this again undermines the report's general claim (illustrated above) for the central explanatory role apparently given to whiteness. This is particularly apparent in those moments where a vocabulary of centredness replaces or subsumes that of whiteness, as, for instance, in the Executive Summary that precedes the report proper. This paraphrases the arguments that follow as indicating 'that those who were in subject positionalities [*sic*] that are centred were able to move through the university a great deal more comfortably than those toward the margins' (Steyn & van Zyl, 2001: n.p.) and goes on to explain that 'these centres include: whiteness, Euro-American worldview, English-speaking as mother-tongue, maleness, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, (upper) middle-class-ness, South African nationality, urban background, etc.' (*ibid.*).

30 For useful general discussion of these tensions, see, for instance, Giddens (1979), particularly Chapter Two, 'Agency, Structure' as well as Bourdieu (1990a).

31 Bourdieu's useful analysis of the dynamics of the interview situation is particularly useful here. See especially his insistence that 'Social agents do not innately possess a science of what they are and what they do. More precisely, they do not necessarily have access to the core principles of their discontent or their malaise, and, without aiming to mislead, their most spontaneous declarations may express something quite different from what they seem to say' (Bourdieu, 1999: 620). The essay's warnings regarding style and point of view could usefully supplement the current discussion of the Steyn and van Zyl report (1999: 621-26).

32 Giddens, for instance, in his standard account of sociological practice, recommends some form of triangulation to seek to lessen the problems arising from situations in which the influence of the interviewer may be present (Giddens, 1989: 679-683).

33 A finding significantly echoed in much other research. Compare, for instance, Erasmus's comment: on how an essentialist way of working with race is at play in the new division arising among South Africa's youth: apartheid's children versus democracy's children. Many young black people...use a racially dichotomous language in which those who are not seen as 'truly' black are referred to as 'coconuts' – black youth, most likely from Model C schools, who are seen to speak, dress and act like white people; while those seen to inhabit a 'backward blackness' – rural ways of being and/or black youth who seem to be stuck in 'old struggle politics' – are called 'dusty-crusties' (Erasmus, 2005: 27).

In theoretical terms, these inconsistencies suggest that whiteness alone does not play the primary role in institutional culture that the report appears generally to ascribe to it. Whiteness may instead be better regarded as just one (and a secondary or over-determined) factor among others, such as the maleness, heterosexuality, being able-bodied, urban background and/or South African nationality mentioned in the survey. The existence of such internal inconsistencies suggests a strong need for the consideration of alternative explanations, and prime among them, perhaps, Pierre Bourdieu's notable theories of education and social reproduction, for Bourdieu's writings are particularly attuned to the feelings of alienation and anomie at work in education systems. Indeed, the existence of such feelings is held to play a constitutive rather than (as it were) incidental role in social reproduction as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

Many of the feelings expressed by students in the Steyn and van Zyl report correspond very strongly to the dilemma faced by the working classes and the lower-middle classes in a higher education system geared to the success of the already privileged. For these – in Bourdieu's terms, the 'naturally' distinguished – the institutional culture of higher education poses no problems of adaptation. They 'merely need to be what they are in order to be what they have to be, that is, naturally distinguished from those who are obliged to struggle for distinction' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 11). In this struggle for distinction (the cultural marker of social and economic privilege), the natural is, of course, the precisely constituted materiality of prior privilege that makes even the most democratic educational structures still a prey to social and economic inequalities. All in all, Steyn and van Zyl's account, in placing its main emphasis on 'whiteness' as racial differentiation, tends to 'background' (in a reverse of the more usual term 'to foreground') the broader issues of reproduction and cultural capital at the heart of Bourdieu's account.<sup>35</sup>

If, indeed, Bourdieu's insights can help to smooth out several contradictory findings in Steyn and van Zyl's survey, this works to suggest that though race may be an obvious and immediate factor in the experience of alienation and anomie, it may well be a secondary phenomenon in terms of explanation. In other words, race is secondary to the deeper logic of social subordination and reproduction that divides racial groups internally according to the fore of class distinction.<sup>36</sup> This, indeed, is the general conclusion of many of the contributors in Goldberg's anthology (and elsewhere), who argue that multiculturalism needs to be attuned to the material conditions of cultural differentiation.<sup>37</sup>

Certainly, one of the surely unintended consequences of a focus on institutional culture as whiteness is a consequent marginalization of the changes occurring at the interface between

<sup>34</sup> See, notably, Bourdieu & Passeron (1990), and Bourdieu (1990a); and, for a powerful 'internal' account, Willis (1977).

<sup>35</sup> For a useful survey of staff attitudes towards race at historically white universities – but one whose argument perhaps also calls for the deployment of a concept of cultural capital to strengthen its analytic reach and explanatory power – see Gwele (2002). The survey raises the question – without addressing it directly – of whether differences of *habitus* can be used as evidence for active racism. For a useful explication of the concept of *habitus*, see Bourdieu (1990b: 52-79).

<sup>36</sup> For a useful discussion of the complications of class versus racial analysis in South African historiography, see Neville Alexander's essay, 'Race and Class in South African Historiography' (Alexander, 2002). In a frustrated moment, Alexander concludes that 'in the final analysis, it is empirical research that is required to give an approximation of the relationship between race (or gender, or ethnic group, etc.) and class, rather than any reductionist formula derived from abstract models of society' (25). Erasmus's key phrase – 'racialized inequality' – may offer the most useful distinction (Erasmus, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, left-liberal multiculturalism 'emphasizes cultural differences and suggests that the stress on the quality of races smothers those important cultural differences between races that are responsible for different behaviours, values, attitudes, cognitive styles, and social practices' (McLaren, 1995: 51). For McLaren, it tends to 'exoticize "otherness" in a nativist retreat that locates difference in a primeval past of cultural authenticity' (*ibid.*), a retreat that at the same time authorizes a 'populist elitism' in which 'one's own location as an oppressed person is supposed to offer a special authority from which to speak' (52). While not arguing against 'the importance of experience in the formation of political identity' (*ibid.*), McLaren is wary of the ways in which an appeal to experience 'has become the new imprimatur for legitimating the political currency and incontestable validity of one's arguments' (*ibid.*). 'This', he concludes, 'has often resulted in a reverse form of academic elitism' (*ibid.*).

academics and administrators (and beyond these, between the universities and the State). This interface also forms an important aspect, dimension or referent for debate concerning institutional culture, although one somewhat overshadowed by the currently dominant definition discussed above.

#### **4.2. WHOSE INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE? ACADEMICS VERSUS ADMINISTRATORS**

Although the sense of institutional culture as whiteness is dominant in South African discussions, a second sense is also present and in use, though overshadowed by the first. This second sense aligns itself more directly to overseas debates, and addresses a powerful trend in university systems across the world, as well as in one dimension of what transformation in South African higher education has meant in practice. It understands and defines institutional culture from the standpoint of the newly emerging interests that are usually referred to as the 'new managerialism'.<sup>38</sup>

From this standpoint, in Bill Readings's succinct characterization, 'the administrator rather than the professor [becomes] the central figure of the University' (Readings, 1996: 3), while the university as a whole is subjected to a 'generalized logic of "accountability" in which the University must pursue "excellence" in all aspects of its functioning' (*ibid.*).<sup>39</sup> In this usage, institutional culture refers to the site of a conflict and contest between two different and opposing definitions of the purpose of higher education, definitions that are uneasily conjoined in South African policy.

The first of these – akin to the values of academic freedom embodied in the 'English liberal' view of the university's social function – comes through in the repeated emphasis, in South African policy, on the development of 'critical citizenship', and the need for an educated citizenship for the promotion and development of democracy. A central aim of higher education from this perspective is thus described as 'the socialization of enlightened, responsive and constructively critical citizens' (*Programme for Higher Education Transformation*, 1997: 1). This point of view sees higher education as playing a constitutive role in the development of a democratic society, in a line of thought extending at least as far back as Immanuel Kant's championing of Enlightenment values, and particularly the value of public deliberation, in his seminal essay 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"' (Kant, 1991).<sup>40</sup>

The second is more in line with the State-centred view of higher education promoted by the Afrikaans establishment, but now carried forward in the post-apartheid State, and in line with

38 Though the limits of this may also be becoming apparent. See, for instance, Cath Bargh *et al.*: 'the government has encouraged the belief that the corporate sector provides the most appropriate model of governance for higher education in the age of massification and marketization. The discussion of recent developments in corporate governance suggests that this second assertion should be treated with considerable caution...there is little evidence to suggest that the corporate sector has useful models of governance to offer higher education' (Bargh *et al.*, 1996: 167), and again, the '(perhaps obsessive) focus has been on more effective management, which has been interpreted as an elevation of the managerial interest at the expense of professional perspectives' (168).

39 For useful discussions of this, see Readings (1996), especially pp.21-43.

40 For a useful discussion of Kant's contribution to the formation of the very idea of public opinion, see especially Habermas (1999: 102-117), and also Derrida's informative and provocative discussion, *Mochlos ou le conflit des facultés* (Derrida, 1990). For an interesting recent highlighting of the complexities and antinomies within Kant's position, Kouvelakis (2003, especially pp. 12-23).

neo-liberal policies across the globe.<sup>41</sup> It emphasizes the need to ‘address the development needs of society and provide the labour market, in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society, with the ever-changing high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy’ (*Programme for Higher Education Transformation*, 1997: 1). From this perspective, education and higher education needs to be carefully controlled and directed, and tailored to the dynamics of the economy. It sees education and higher education as playing a largely instrumental role, and one subordinated to the State’s interpretation of economic needs.

Schein’s statement – that ‘Organizational cultures are created by leaders, and one of the most decisive functions of leadership may be the creation, the management, and – if and when that may become necessary – the destruction of a culture’ (Schein, 1975: 2) – might well have provided the *mot d’ordre* for many university administrators in the post-94 period. In an interesting attempt to turn the tables, institutional culture became the name for academic culture itself, as the substance of what was being attacked and threatened by the new managerialism.

In a useful survey of post-apartheid South African higher education policy, Gibbon and Kabaki suggest that ‘by 1998, the emphasis [in government policy] had decisively shifted from demands for democratisation to demands for efficiency and effectiveness’ with a consequently important shift in the balance of power between academics and administrators. Research showed that ‘the overwhelming majority of [academic] respondents felt that their relationship with management had been reconfigured in a way that now defined them as subordinate employees rather than colleagues’ (Gibbon & Kabaki, 2002: 217). One of the prime effects of ‘transformation’ was a definite shift from ‘academic self-rule to academic managerialism’ (217), with an increasing salary gap developing between senior managers and senior academics (from a ratio of 2:1 during the late 1980s to a ratio of 4,5: 1 in the late 1990s) (218). In this assessment, the “democratic phase” currently being experienced by South African institutions had long since been superseded in the developed nations by the “managerial phase” (Gibbon & Kabaki, 2002: 216). That this phase represents an attack on rather than a dialogue with and improvement of academic culture – an intuition present implicitly in many responses to the pressures of neo-liberal change – was explicitly stated and argued by Olajide Oloyede.<sup>42</sup>

Writing in response to managerial changes at the University of Fort Hare, Olajide Oloyede (2002) argues that it is precisely that ‘destruction of a culture’ (championed by Schein) that academic culture is threatened with in South Africa. He sums up his case in the following terms: ‘My main goal is to alert those involved in the transformation of universities to the fact that universities are fragmented into diverse disciplinary cultures and as such are loose and complex organizations. Precisely because of this, management discourse is not sufficient and cannot be the basis for the effective and efficient steering of the university’ (Oloyede, 2002: 118). “False managerialism” tries to force disciplines into the same mould, impose crude accountability and

<sup>41</sup> For a usefully skeptical discussion of the main differences between Afrikaner-authoritarian and English-liberal stances on the question of the university’s relation to the state, see Bunting (2002), while for a clear call for greater state control of the universities than currently exists by the then minister of education, see Asmal (2002).

<sup>42</sup> For a useful comparative argument, also locating the new managerialism firmly in the imperatives of the post-Reagan neo-liberalism, see C.F.S. Chachage’s unpublished paper, ‘Higher Education Transformation and Academic Exterminism’ (1999). Summing up the changes introduced by the new managerialism, Chachage charges that they amounted to ‘a call for the “market” to dictate biases in universities. Thus, there would be a bias for professional as opposed to liberal faculties and within faculties a bias for the imparting of “technical” skills rather than critical analytical ones’ (4).

over-simplified indicators of performance which are hardly appropriate to academic work' (117). Yet, asserts Oloyede, 'disciplinary values and cultures are critical for any effective steering of the university. This is because in each discipline, there exists a "self-organized" collective control, which tends to take quite different forms from that of official regulation. This is grounded in collegiality.... To this extent, roles, norms, values, beliefs and ideology – generally referred to as "organizational culture" – serve as the essential elements of interaction' (117).

In this deployment, something of a repetition of the dynamics of the term present in the earlier uses of a Schein or a Tierney can be seen. Institutional culture is what has to be controlled or managed by the colonising administrator; it is what has to be defended by the academic worker. The dispute over programmes – perhaps the first concrete point of higher education policy in South Africa that placed administrators and academics in more or less direct conflict – similarly reveals the constitutive contradiction at work within it.<sup>43</sup> Institutional culture plays a contradictory role in these debates. As an instrumental concept, it appears to promise successful control over institutions for managers, while for academics resisting imposed change, it refers to the substance of their practical activity as teachers and researchers.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As Williams has reminded us, and as this brief discussion of different uses of institutional culture has shown, the act of naming involves an agent as well as an object. The instability of the term institutional culture – its capacity to name different things, or to refer to different aspects of the same complex object – arises from the fact that institutional culture looks different, depending on who is seeing it and from where; or, more accurately, who is looking for it and with what purposes in mind. Though a singular name, its referent is best understood as multiple and complex, in ways that most users of it tend to ignore in the passion of their arguments.

As has been argued, the term emerged (as organizational culture) in business studies in the early 1980s as a strongly instrumental one, promising to be able to bring US business culture in line with the perceived success of Japanese business culture. It was to do so by oiling the wheels of management, and restricting unproductive frictions between leadership and workforce. In the later 1980s, although by now as institutional culture, it began to appear in higher education discussions. In its dominant uses overseas, it referred to the restructuring of academic life, its re-centring on the administrator rather than the academic.

It is important to note, in summary, that the more recent writings on organizational culture suggest that in reality, and despite the claims made for it by its prime originators in business

<sup>43</sup> In her survey of programme implementation, Ensor's conclusion regarding the success of programmes illustrates the difficult dynamics of institutional culture from any instrumentalist perspective. The National Council on Higher Education had sought to impose from above academic programmes that sought to promote the managerial virtues of 'interdisciplinarity, portability, coherence and responsiveness'. To the question 'has this been achieved?', Ensor's answer is 'unequivocally "no" in respect of portability, but with respect to the others, contingent upon how one defines an academic programme and the descriptors involved' (Ensor, 2002: 287-88). Despite this sugaring of the pill ('contingent upon how one defines an academic programme'), the article makes clear that the response to the perceived imposition of programmes revealed levels of an academic institutional culture still strong enough to resist change when regarded as pedagogically inappropriate. Indeed, as Ensor ultimately concedes, 'the central organizing principle of university undergraduate curricula remains the disciplines. In this sense, contemporary curricula in sciences and humanities look little different from the way they did before academic programme implementation began' (Ensor, 2002:289).



studies, its use as an instrumental concept is extremely limited. This recognition – argued here in terms of the constitutive contradiction at its core – has been increasingly recognized in more recent literature. Against the mythology of strong directive leadership, Simsek and Louis argue that ‘real organizational change requires leadership strategies that emphasizes interpretation of organizational values and meaning rather than emphasize organizational restructuring and administrative control’ (Simsek & Louis, 1994: 690). And, in a point which should but didn’t have much resonance in South Africa, they point out that despite ‘what the strategic management and planning models assume, change is a highly decentralized yet community-based activity. Change that is orchestrated from the top and which reflects the “vision” of subjective realities of an elite group cannot define institution-wide change processes unless it takes into account the alternative competing paradigms that have typically emerged in different parts of the organization’ (Simsek & Louis, 1994: 691). Similarly, Kesar and Eckel write that while ‘[l]eaders might be more successful if they understood the cultures in which they were working (Kesar & Eckel, 2002: 457), they need to recognize that ‘where strategies for change violate cultural norms, change most likely will not occur’ (2002: 456). All in all, as Simsek and Louis suggest, ‘[m]anaging meaning is a considerably more slippery than traditional models of leadership would suggest’ (Simsek & Louis, 1994: 690).<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, it may be that the most substantial result of the study of actual institutional cultures is – paradoxically enough - the undermining of the instrumental promise or lure that the originating theorists insisted the concept held. Rather than serving as a resource for the ‘traditional model’ of top-down authoritarian leadership, the study of institutional cultures tends to promote a very different image of successful leadership from that of the colonist or anthropologist that has been offered. The reality of institutional cultures suggests rather the need for a full recognition of the workings of democracy in action. A strong image of this alternative model of leadership is exemplified in the principles that Nelson Mandela found at work in the village of his youth, Mqhekezweni, where he learned ‘to listen to what each and every person in a discussion had to say before venturing my own opinion’ (Mandela, 2002: 25). ‘I always remember the regent’s axiom,’ he later recollected. A leader, ‘is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being led from behind’ (25-6).<sup>45</sup>

If much of the overseas’ discussions of institutional culture have focused on the institutional aspects, the main focus of interest in South Africa shifted to its cultural aspects and dimensions. Many discussions here have, above all, emphasized the need for a thorough critique of the dominant whiteness of institutional culture in higher education. However, as has been argued, while the focus of this critique brought some strong feelings to light, these discussions were

<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the very useful ERIC digest, ‘Organizational Culture and Institutional Transformation’ (2001) sums up and amplifies the same tensions. On the one hand, the idea of OC is intended as an instrumental one: for successful transformation to occur in higher education institutions, ‘it becomes critical to understand and explicate the values and personal meanings that define organizational culture’, and they cite Farmer (1990) in support of the contention that ‘failure to understand the way in which an organization’s culture will interact with various contemplated change strategies thus may mean the failure of the strategies themselves’ (1990: 8). Such a sceptical and warning note rings particularly true with regard to the massive challenges and changes at work in the planning and discussion of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa.

<sup>45</sup> In its careful attention to the demands of changing habitués, Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom* can be regarded as a classic text of moving through very different institutional cultures.

weakened by a tendency to over-unify the category of race. Even the most powerful of these analyses would, in any event, have to take into account Henry Louis Gates's astute point that 'a redistributionist agenda may not even be intelligible with respect to cultural capital [since] once cultural knowledge is redistributed so that it fails to mark a distinction, it loses its value... (Gates, 1995: 206). Following Bourdieu, Gates's hard lesson is that while the currency of cultural capital (and by extension, institutional culture) can change, it is likely to leave intact the structures of distinction that support it. 'What could confer "equity" on "culture" is, Gates argues, unanswerable within a divided and unequal society (ibid.).

In more general terms, it may be that addition, too exclusive an emphasis on whiteness also runs the risk – common to many postcolonial societies – of reaffirming the very racial categories and identities that the new post-colonial orders sought to disperse. In her powerful survey, 'Race and Identity in the Nation', Zimitri Erasmus warns of the dangers of equity policies that in fact 'perpetuate apartheid race categories and race thinking' (Erasmus, 2005: 20). At one and the same time, she recommends, it is important 'to remember and recognize the historical legacies of race and white supremacy and their influence on the present' while also moving away from 'holding onto race as a form of cultural and political armour' (27). 'The challenge before us,' she concludes, 'is to find ways of recognizing race and its continued effects on people's every day lives, in an attempt to work against racial inequality, while at the same time working against practices that perpetuate race thinking' (30).<sup>46</sup> Acceptance of this challenge is the difficult task that faces those participating in the ongoing debates around institutional culture.

It may be that in the end institutional culture is less of a concept than a representation that screens a number of problems, in both senses of the term. It serves as a surface on which various social contradictions and tensions can be projected, while at the same time, often disguising or translating these into other terms according to the dynamics of displacement.<sup>47</sup> It is a term that mimes conceptual density, but lacks conceptual force, while its apparently appealing explanatory force is often undermined by its actual contents. From the textual point of view, institutional culture is, of course, an uneasy conjunction of the given (the cultural) and the imposed (the institutional). It perpetually threatens an explanatory redundancy since if culture is understood to be the 'whole way of life' of a society, then any social institution of necessity is part and parcel of the reproduction of that whole way of life.

A more restricted definition of institutional culture as regards higher education may be less immediately grand and satisfying, but in the end more productive. Such a definition would be restricted to the core problem of pedagogical culture and the forms of its transmission, seeking to take into account what is all too often taken for granted: the reality of the uneven distribution of cultural capital. Universities need to develop a more self-conscious pedagogy if the real problems of institutional culture are to be addressed.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> More broadly, Mahmood Mamdani has recently noted, 'Africa's real political challenge is to reform and thus sublate the form of the State that has continued to reproduce race and ethnicity as political identities'; it is 'to create a single political community and citizenship from diverse cultural historical groups and identities' (Mamdani, 2004: 22). In similar mode, Neville Alexander warns against all forms of 'ethnic mobilization', and suggests that the 'real challenge' for South Africa 'lies in moving away from the notion (and the reality) of separate racial, and to some extent also ethnic, groups towards a situation where the multiculturalism of the society can find its expression in the fact of multiple identities of the individual held together by an overarching national identity' (Alexander, 2002: 98). Compare also Charles Taylor's frustrated assertion, after a consideration of the conceptual dynamics of contemporary identity politics, 'There must be something midway between the unauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other. There are other cultures, and we have to live together more and more, both on a world scale and commingled in each individual society' (Taylor, 1995: 101).

<sup>47</sup> For a useful discussion of such displacement, see Bourdieu *et al.* (1999: 620-621).

<sup>48</sup> For some of the classic resources in this regard, see Bernstein (1975) and Giroux (1995).

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# EQUITY, ACCESS AND SUCCESS: ADULT LEARNERS IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

Michelle Buchler, Jane Castle, Ruksana Osman,  
and Shirley Walters <sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. GENERAL CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

Unlike research into access and success for school-leavers entering higher education (HE) in South Africa, very little research has been conducted into adult learners in HE. Apart from generalized, albeit extensive, socio-economic studies on poverty and inequality, including changing patterns of participation in education more generally (for example, Gelb, 2003), there is little information, at the systems level, on ‘deeper’ questions, such as the push/pull factors for adult learners entering higher education, the barriers they face and experience once in higher education institutions, their success and completion rates, and their reasons for entering HE institutions. These issues have taken on a much greater significance than before in post-1994 higher education policy developments that call for the widening of the social base of higher education to include, *inter alia*, adult learners.

In this context, the broad purpose of the research was to find out whether a higher education system that facilitates access, equity and success for adult learners exists or is being formulated in South Africa. One aspect of the research was to investigate the participation rates of adult learners in the higher education system, in general, and to attempt to identify variables (apart from age), such as gender, class, race, marital status and family obligations, employment status and sectors, and funding sources, which may characterize adult learners as a distinct group. The second aspect of the research was to study the ways in which three public institutions – the Vaal University of Technology (VUT), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) – engage with adult learners as a ‘special’ category of student. This aspect of the study was designed to identify systemic and contextual factors that facilitate or hinder the participation of adult learners, and to provide insights into the nature and quality of adult learners’ experiences of particular institutions and programmes. The questions that framed the research were:

- Who are the adult learners in public higher education? How are they defined and characterized? How are these understandings of adult learners reflected in programme design?
- Which programmes do adult learners access? What is the nature and quality of these programmes?
- Are institutions responsive to adult learners, and to policies advocating an increase in their participation? Why, or why not?

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- What systems are in place to attract adult learners to the institution (or programme), and to support them once they are there? What systems are in place to monitor the retention and success of adult learners?

## **1.2. ADULT EDUCATION WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Although there is a history of adult learners in public higher education in South Africa, it is largely an undocumented one. Adult learners, whether part-time, full-time, occasional or continuing education students, have gone unnoticed. At several of the historically black Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), working adults attended classes after normal working hours, because civil servants, teachers, nurses, and others were to be upgraded to administer the former apartheid structures. Extensive ‘evening classes’ were set up in the 1970s in several of these institutions. The major distance education university, the University of South Africa (Unisa), also had many working students.

There is a history of adult and continuing education departments at many of the South African universities, for example, after World War 2, returning soldiers attended universities, like Wits.

But the brief of the universities has not been to focus on adult learners within the academy. There have been different traditions at the historically English, Afrikaans, advantaged and disadvantaged, universities and technikons. For example, at the historically advantaged English-speaking universities, there have long been the equivalent of ‘extra-mural studies’ departments, which conducted public education through lectures, short courses and events. At all the HEIs, there were also professional continuing education programmes, sometimes offered through a central unit, or decentralized and offered by different faculties and departments. From the early 1980s, departments of adult education concentrated on the professional development of adult educators, the study of adult education, and community service to poor communities (Gush & Walters, 1995; Aitchison, 2003). At the Afrikaans speaking universities, bureaus for teaching and learning were established.

In the last ten years, there have been various changes to those structures that support aspects of adult learning in higher education. A number of examples demonstrate these trends: at Wits, a structure like WitsPlus has been established to run classes, especially for part-time students, while the department of adult education has been incorporated into the school of education; UWC has set up a new structure distinct from its department of adult education, the Division for Lifelong Learning, to work across the campus to promote a culture and institutionalization of lifelong learning; UCT has disestablished its department of adult education, but has created the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) within which a range of adult learning concerns are addressed.

At several public HEIs, there seems to have been a sharp increase in the provision of continuing

2 Courses approved by professional bodies for the purposes of registration and professional development.

3 In particular, the introduction of RPL in South Africa has its roots in the labour movement, and the struggle by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) to introduce adult education and workforce development initiatives in the workplace (see Lugg *et al.*, 1997; Ballim *et al.*, 2000: 187).

education courses ('short courses' as they are sometimes called) through faculties, schools and departments. Figures on these students and programmes are, however, not readily available. These courses fall outside the mainstream degree provision, but some articulate into accredited academic and professional development<sup>2</sup> programmes. Another development has been the emergence of degree programmes, albeit on a limited scale, which specifically target working adults in the corporate sector. Examples are the Bachelor in Management Leadership at Free State University, and degrees offered by WitsPlus at the University of the Witwatersrand.

As the above sketch indicates, adult learning and adult education at HEIs are undergoing shifts of emphasis. There are no studies as yet which analyse and explain these. But there is substantial movement in the institutional configuration of areas, which are related, but differently named: adult education, adult learning, continuing education, academic development, staff development, and lifelong learning. These shifts are not peculiar to South Africa as Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) signal in their reflections on the field of adult and continuing education since the late 1980s in the UK.

### **1.3. POST-1994 POLICY TRANSFORMATION AND ADULT LEARNERS**

One of the first acts of the new South African government was to establish the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA Act, 1995). SAQA was established to oversee the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which in turn was to assist in the creation of an integrated education and training framework that would overcome the fragmentation and inequalities of the previous systems. The development of an NQF in South Africa was strongly influenced by the discourse on and practice of qualifications frameworks elsewhere, and was thus accompanied by notions of lifelong learning, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL),<sup>3</sup> flexibility and portability of learning, and qualifications that have generally come to characterize NQFs around the world.

With specific reference to policy change and transformation in the higher education sector in South Africa, references to broadening the base of higher education are explicit and frequent in the key higher education policy documents emanating from government over the last ten years. They are directly related to the inherited disparities of access, opportunity and resources for staff, students, and institutions across racial, gender, class and geographical lines. These policy documents locate key changes within the discourse of lifelong learning and the development of a 'learning society', and make reference to key principles located in the NQF, such as RPL.

A key feature of the projected new system is that it will reflect 'a broadening of the social base in terms of race, class, gender and age'. In addition, 'The system will open its doors, in the spirit of lifelong learning, to workers and professionals in pursuit of multi-skilling and re-skilling, and

<sup>4</sup> During the course of the research there have been formal and informal attempts to gain a better understanding of who, in the NPHE, the target group of 'adult learners and workers' is intended to be. In an interview with a senior Department of Education official, the view was given that officials/policy makers at the time had a tacit and shared understanding that this category of potential student was a product of the political and labour movements (hence 'workers'), and had been active in a variety of the political, trade union and community organizations during the 'struggle years'. To what extent this is a general understanding across different role-players within higher education in South Africa is not possible to say.

adult learners whose access to higher education had been thwarted in the past' (DoE, 1997: 17). Three additional points are worth noting from the White Paper at this stage. Firstly, there is an explicit recognition of the fact that inequalities in the sphere of higher education cannot be resolved in isolation from the broader challenges of political and economic reconstruction and development, nor from the 'distinctive pressures and demands of the late twentieth century, often typified as globalization' (DoE, 1997: 9). Secondly, there is provision for changes in the funding formula to include earmarked funds for institutional redress, student financial aid, improving completion rates, and building research capacity. These are subject to fiscal constraints and the high costs of realizing equity and growth objectives over time. Thirdly, the inclusion of private and publicly funded colleges and of distance education institutions within the new coordinated higher education system is provided for. These include the colleges of education, nursing, police, military and agriculture, through which large cohorts of the current workforce had attained their formal qualifications, many of which were recognized as discriminatory and inadequate, and in need of upgrading.

Following the *White Paper 3*, the *National Plan for Higher Education* (DoE, 2001a) advocates an increase in the general participation rate in public higher education in South Africa, with the aim of facilitating lifelong learning, developing the skills base of the country, and redressing historical inequities in the provision of education. The *National Plan for Higher Education* (NPHE) acknowledges that in the short to medium term, a shortage of qualified matriculants (school leavers) made the targeted increase (from 15% to 25% of the population, over a period of 10-15 years) unlikely. The NPHE suggests that participation rates in public higher education in South Africa could therefore be augmented by recruiting increasing numbers of 'non-traditional' learners, identified as workers, mature adults, women and disabled people. This should be 'an important policy goal in its own right', but the NPHE notes that institutions have done little to initiate RPL opportunities or 'programmes to attract workers, mature learners, in particular women, and the disabled, who were denied access to higher education in the past' (DoE, 2001a: 2.4). It also notes that there is a 'large potential pool of recruits' indicated by the 1996 census data: 1,6m adults were then in the 25-39 age group with a Matriculation (School Leaving) Certificate.

However, the NPHE was finalized during the period of a rapid increase of total student numbers, and concerns emerged in government and bodies, such as the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) about the effects of this growth on quality of provision, and the impact on throughput rates. One response by government has been to review growth rates and to insist that in the short-term, at least, the system focuses on retention (including quality of provision and improvement of throughput) and not growth. At this point, the impact this may have on the increased participation of adult learners is not yet clear.

For the purposes of this research, one of the key problems of the NPHE, as it relates to adult learners, is that the terms 'adult learner' and 'workers' are not defined.<sup>4</sup> This lack of definition causes some difficulty for the researchers. The relevant literature was therefore used to assist in developing a more nuanced understanding of the term 'adult learner'.

## 2. WHO IS AN ADULT LEARNER?

There is a great deal of debate in the literature on what it means to be an ‘adult learner’ besides the notion of chronological age. Different terms are used to describe people, who do not come to higher education straight from school, or who may be working or who are older than the average student. Sometimes these are referred to as ‘non-traditional’ learners or ‘part-time learners’. The most significant dimensions appear to be that adult learners carry ‘adult responsibilities’ through their economic, family or community commitments. They bring complex life experiences to the learning environments and their time is often very constrained precisely because of their multiple roles and responsibilities.

In addition, Bourgeois, Duke, Guyot and Merrill (1999: 3) define ‘mature adults’, for the purposes of higher education contexts, as having had ‘a significant break, with other life-[experience] and work-experience, prior to entering higher education’. Furthermore,

More than half of those in modern [Higher Education] systems are adults in the sense of having left full-time education for other roles before returning later to full-[time] or part-time study. Such students commonly combine study with other major life roles: work, family and community. Their dedication to the business of being a student is less exclusive. On the other hand their occupancy of the student role may be more single-minded and purposeful: getting a degree, not living the life of a student who is growing up. (Bourgeois *et al.*, 1999: 17-18)

In defining ‘adult’ in HE in the United Kingdom, ‘young’ students and ‘mature’ students are defined as being either under or over the age of 21, respectively, in the year of entry. For the purposes of employment benchmarks, this ‘mature’ cohort is further split into under or over 25 (McGivney, 2004: 35). According to McGivney, students in their early to mid-twenties are quite likely to have more in common with those in their late teens, than ‘those in their late 30s, 40s and 50s whose lifestyles, learning goals and aspirations are often qualitatively different’ (2004: 33).

In a context like South Africa, where there may be child-headed households through loss of parents due to AIDS, where many black school students are older at entry, or where poverty has meant “stopping out” of school for a time, the issues of what it means to be an adult learner become even more complex.

For the purposes of this study, the current legislative definition in South Africa of the ‘mature age’ learner, who is 23 years or older, has been adopted. Current policy regulates that from the

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- 5 The literature search yielded little on adult learners and higher education in developing countries – in Africa, the focus on adult learners is generally on expanding literacy initiatives and skills development programmes, often in combination. Almost the only exception to this is the further training and ‘upskilling’ of in-service teachers (but even in this field it is recognized that the qualification levels of teachers are on a downward trend in developing countries, and that not all in-service teacher training is provided by universities [Bennell, 2004]). In Latin America, Adult Education and ‘Permanent Education’ (the equivalent of lifelong learning) are concepts and disciplines that are increasingly being incorporated into Latin American education systems. However, even if it is generally acknowledged that adult students have particular needs, the overall social context mostly determines that the education priorities for adults are literacy, the completion of primary and secondary schooling, social development and the eradication of poverty through the insertion of adults into the market place (Pieck, 1999).
  - 6 An exception is in the area of the Recognition of Prior Learning (see Castle & Attwood, 2001; Castle, 2002; Breier, 1998, 2003; Breier & Burness, 2003; Osman & Castle, 2002, 2004). Also see Walters (2004) for an overview of adult learning in higher education. There is also an emerging literature on lifelong learning in higher education (e.g. Volbrecht *et al.*, 2000; Walters, 2005).
  - 7 Lifelong learning is also associated with personal growth and change, including self-initiated learning projects, but this meaning receives scant attention in education policy documents.

age of 23, people are able to obtain ‘mature age exemption’, which means access to higher education without a Matriculation Endorsement [for University Entrance]. At 45 years of age, access is possible without a school-leaving qualification. This includes ‘workers’, ‘professionals’ and ‘adult learners’, as mentioned in the NPHE, under the term ‘adult learner’. The use of this definition raises a number of issues, not least of which is the question about the history of the definition of ‘mature age exemption’ in South Africa. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore this, but this study certainly raises questions about the appropriateness of the current definitions. While 23 years and older has been taken as a marker for ‘adult learners’, the limitations of the data available have not allowed the distinction as to whether students have been working or holding other family responsibilities. The age of the students has therefore become the primary distinguishing feature, which is not ideal and which will need much more refinement in later research.

### **3. KEY THEMES ON ADULT LEARNERS WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This review is limited to a number of key themes primarily found in the Anglophone literature.<sup>5</sup> Little has been published in the area of adult learning in higher education in South Africa,<sup>6</sup> especially from the perspective of students and their experiences of access and exclusion.

#### ***3.1. Lifelong learning***

Throughout the 1990s, internationally and in South Africa, increasing the participation of adults in higher education has been seen as a way to develop a culture of ‘lifelong learning’ – a key objective of governments attuned to economic development and competitiveness in global markets, and concerned to enhance social inclusion, active citizenship, redress and cultural enrichment. Lifelong learning is a notoriously slippery term, which is used in at least two ways in educational debates (Aspin & Chapman, 2000; Pendlebury & Enslin, 2000; Walters, 1999, 2004 & 2005).<sup>7</sup>

In one version, lifelong learning emphasizes the economic relevance of education and its relationship to global markets. In the second version, greater emphasis is placed on social justice, democracy and responsiveness to the community. Those concerned with preserving traditional values and academic standards in higher education view both versions of lifelong learning with some scepticism (McGivney, 2001: 6-7). The ways lifelong learning is understood relate also to the ways in which the purposes and functions of higher education are interpreted.

Both the above versions are embedded in the NPHE, with greater emphasis placed on higher education as an instrument to advance the national human resources development strategy. The major structural shifts in the economy over the last twenty-five years, the endemic shortage of high-level professional and managerial skills, and the impact of HIV/AIDS on the labour force, have ensured that there is recognition of the significant need for the continuing education of

<sup>8</sup> An influential international conference was held in 2000 by UWC, Unesco Institute for Education and the Danish Pedagogical University, which produced a guide, ‘Characteristic elements of a lifelong learning university’ (UWC and UNESCO Institute for Education, 2001). This has since been translated into Spanish, Arabic, Hungarian and Chinese.

workers. In addition, the inadequate numbers of school-leavers with the necessary entry requirements for tertiary education mean that the demands for higher education graduates in the economy have to be met by ensuring that adult learners gain access to further education and training. But the debate about the meaning of lifelong learning within HEIs in South Africa has been confined to a small core of academics and activists.<sup>8</sup>

McGivney (2001) points out that ‘increasing participation’, like ‘lifelong learning’, is an elastic term understood in different ways. It may mean that those who have been excluded from formal education and skills development should be given such opportunities in the interests of enhancing their employment and promotion prospects in a shifting labour market. This would help to reduce poverty and make a contribution to the national economy. ‘Broadening’ (rather than increasing) participation may mean redressing imbalances in the kinds of people that educational institutions attract. This could imply a very wide, inclusive process, which puts the onus on institutions to adapt their practices to a student body, which is changing in terms of race, class, gender or age. Or it could mean a much narrower process, which simply means recruiting learners from different communities from those traditionally served. In the latter case, learners are expected to adjust to the institution, which remains essentially unchanged.

Internationally, there has been a growing debate on issues of access to HE, particularly for disadvantaged groups. In the UK, broadening or widening access policy developments and systemic change have been driving change in both HE and Further Education (FE). In Scotland, funding has been provided to promote widening access initiatives, including part-time study (Murphy *et al.*, 2002). The strategy of expanding part-time study, as well as increasing flexibility in pace of learning has emerged as one part of a more coherent strategy by HEIs to attract students who might access HE if it was delivered differently (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2006). Funding has also been allocated to support adult students and for childcare support.

However, despite these changes, ‘the increase in the participation in the 1990s has in fact done little to *widen* access, giving rise to what has been called a “crowded traditional system”’ (Murphy *et al.*, 2002: 15). Similarly, European comparative research into access in HE shows that under-represented and disadvantaged groups’ access to HE has not significantly improved in the last decade or two (Murphy *et al.*, 2002: 17). Furthermore, in the UK, where access has increased, this reflects the sectoral differentiation of the HE system. Post-1992 institutions are more likely to widen access than pre-1992 institutions (generally seen as the more elite, research-focused institutions), and access is thus stratified within a differentiated system.

Among policymakers and academics, then, there are at least two quite different perspectives on what ‘lifelong learning’ and ‘widening participation’ mean. One perspective is about designing education to meet the needs, interests and priorities of previously excluded groups. The other is about enabling greater access to unchanging patterns of provision (McGivney, 2001: 10-11). Given these two understandings, it is possible to find the terms used in a variety of ways. In South Africa, for example, ‘widening participation’ is increasingly used to mean the provision of education for ‘previously disadvantaged’ groups – those with poor educational qualifications and low levels of academic literacy, as well as those who were unable to enter higher



education as school leavers at the age of eighteen.

Lifelong learning in higher education, therefore, is contested. It is contested in terms of the social purposes of higher education and in terms of how it translates into institutional practices. The economic and political environments in which lifelong learning takes place largely determine the terms of those contestations. Those who understand lifelong learning to be about 'designing education to meet the needs, interests and priorities of previously excluded groups', identify the need to adapt teaching and learning practices, as well as administrative and support systems in order to be responsive to the contexts in which students operate.

### **3.2. ADULT LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Historically, adult learners in higher education attracted no special attention and were rarely studied. The picture that holds most higher education administrators and policy makers captive is of young full-time learners. One of the first educationists to draw attention to the particular characteristics and needs of adult learners was Malcolm Knowles (1970; 1978), who drew on his experience of postgraduate students at Harvard University to develop a theory of 'andragogy'. Andragogy has been eclipsed by critical, feminist and post-modern theories of adult education, which place greater emphasis on the socially constructed nature of learning and the way the context shapes the individual and the learning (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Kilgore, 2001; Merriam, 2001). These theories highlight the omissions and deficiencies in the present education system (including efforts to broaden access to higher education), the need to guard against an uncritical acceptance of existing structures, philosophies and practices, and the importance of working towards alternatives. This is the stance adopted in this paper.

Part-time undergraduate degree seekers, graduate students, occasional students and adults who participate in non-accredited, short courses and extension work are frequently blurred in the discussion of adults in higher education. Because of the links between student numbers (typically full-time equivalent students, or FTEs, in credit-bearing courses) and funding formulae, the question of who counts as a student becomes a key issue. Kasworm, Sandmann and Sissel (2000) note that funding formulae do not take account of the increasing number of part-time adult learners, the intermittent nature of their participation, and their increasing demands for flexible access to cutting edge knowledge and skills development. Present formulae 'suppress the fact that what may be reported and counted as only one full-time student may in actuality be three part-time adult students each of whom has diverse interests and unique needs in relation to institutional support' (Kasworm *et al.*, 2000: 454). In addition, the way in which completion rates are calculated often fails to take part-time students into account. In these ways, the policy frameworks and the funding formulae can work as disincentives to institutions taking adult learners seriously as an important constituency.

The growth in numbers of adult students in higher education in North America and the UK has been both applauded and ignored, because adult students challenge historic conventions of higher education structures, purposes and processes. On the one hand, adult students bring the world of adult aspirations and life engagements into the lecture hall, and may be viewed as valuable learners and alumnae (Kasworm *et al.*, 2000). On the other hand, many in higher education

categorize these adults as ‘second class’ learners, because the nature of their knowledge may be informal and experiential rather than academic. They are marginalized because of their part-time participation. Their lives are filled with significant transitions and commitments. They both engage and at times withdraw from participation in education, owing to life priorities of work, family, community and personal commitments.

### **3.2.1. ACCESS, RETENTION AND SUCCESS OF ADULT LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

One area of adult learning in higher education that has received attention in both international and South African studies is the reform of admissions policies and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). In North America, Australia and New Zealand, RPL usually refers to the processes of reflection and assessment of experiential learning – a process that attempts to establish the value and equivalence of prior learning in relation to formal qualifications. These reflective processes are often documented in a portfolio of evidence that may be supported by interviews, observations and challenge examinations for the purpose of assessment (Buchler, 2002). Research by Breier and Burness (2003) into RPL practices in public higher education institutions in South Africa indicates that RPL is practised more widely than in 2000 (see Breier & Osman 2000) with at least 20 institutions practising some form of RPL. However, this research has also raised questions about the scope and limitations of RPL as a basis for credit exchange in higher education and points to the need for more qualitative research into its potential as a mediator of knowledge and learning transactions when adult learners move between different communities of practice at work and in the academy.

Cross (1981: 97-108), working in the USA, classified obstacles to participation in adult learning in three broad categories. ‘Situational barriers’ arise because of the individual’s life situation, and include issues such as learners’ work commitments, domestic responsibilities, as well as problems of childcare, finance and transport. ‘Institutional barriers’ include physical location, entry requirements, timetabling problems, as well as practices and procedures that hinder participation. ‘Dispositional barriers’ are attributed to factors, such as self-esteem, the opinions of others, past experiences, values, attitudes and beliefs about learning. In South Africa, Morrow (1993/4) has distinguished two types of barriers which affect students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds: ‘physical access’, which he sees as being similar to the institutional and situational barriers described by Cross; and ‘epistemological access’, or the knowledge learners have acquired in schooling, their previous experience of education, and the extent to which these relate to academic standards and practices.

In the UK, several studies (Blaxter & Tight, 1993; Merrifield, Macynntyre & Osaigbovo, 2000; Schuetze & Slowey, 2000) have confirmed that situational and institutional barriers form a major constraint to participation in higher education. The cost of tuition and learning materials, often self-financed, is a major factor. Another significant factor is lack of information, written in a clear, accessible way for its target audience, about available study paths, RPL and admissions procedures. Wright (1989) believes that these factors are not only implicated in the access and retention of students from ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds, but they point to the extreme inaccessibility and exclusiveness of higher education.

As Usher (1989) has pointed out, success in university studies requires mature adult learners to demonstrate competencies for progression in higher education when much of higher education itself does not know what skills or abilities are needed for particular courses and qualifications. At most

institutions, criteria for progression are implicit rather than explicit, and are expressed in terms of prior qualifications which act as proxies for criteria. Yet for adult learners entering higher education, it is important for admission and progression criteria to be explicit and transparent, and for the links between diplomas and degrees to be coordinated. Usher's observation draws attention to institutional and departmental complicity in the success and failure of students, and warns against simplistic (and deficient) explanations for poor retention and pass rates.

Studies in the UK (Murphy, 2003) and in the USA (Belenky *et al.*, 1986; 1989) have drawn attention to the 'affiliation needs' of learners as a vital component of the learning process, particularly for women. Affiliation needs include the desire for learners to be connected and supportive of one another's learning, and the importance of forming relationships that encourage learning. Betts (1999) and McGivney (1999), cited in Murphy (2003), suggest that gender differences exist in the "triggers" which affect mature adult learners' involvement and retention in higher education. Male students are generally more motivated by employment prospects than women, and men find the support of tutors and peers less significant than women.

A study conducted from a black feminist perspective into the factors that motivate and hinder the participation of black women in nursing education in the USA (Aiken *et al.*, 2001) found that gender and race were significant factors. Black women were aware of themselves as being 'the other' in the classroom. Their experience of a culture of racism at individual and institutional level discourages participation. They believe their position in society is replicated in the educational environment.

Questions of participation and exclusion in learning are inextricably linked to the values of the social system in which learning takes place, as Merriam and Caffarella (1991) point out. In response to questions about who decides about participation, for what purpose, and who benefits from participation in higher education in North America, they conclude that the answers lie in the hands of the white middle class elite 'whose interest in self-preservation and self-perpetuation determines the answers' (1991: 280). Adult and higher education is thus a vehicle for entrenching existing socio-economic structures, contrary to stated goals of access and equality.

### **3.2.2. INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AND POLICY CONTEXTS**

There is a growing literature which emphasizes the institutional culture of higher education and what it will take to change the cultures of HEIs to be supportive, lifelong learning institutions, which enable successful participation by adult learners. Volbrecht and Walters (2000) argue that an understanding of lifelong learning, which is concerned with access, equity and success, demonstrates a systemic awareness of the interconnections between the macro-environment, the meso-organizational contexts and the micro cognitive and affective learning interactions. A lifelong learning framework, they argue, forces gazes both inwards towards individual and organizational learning, and outwards towards relationships in the broader society.

Changing the culture and the practices within higher education institutions is a daunting task. The literature that refers to the struggle to create adult-focused universities is illustrative of this. Bourgeois *et al.*, (1999) argue that the 'struggle for adultification' requires a combination of 'successful actor strategies in decision-[making] and policy-making', and 'conducive conditions

related to organisational structure and context'. They too emphasize the interconnectedness of the macro, meso-levels and micro-levels both within the institution itself and reflecting the institution's place in the broader society.

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The overarching frame of this research has been qualitative, by focusing on three institutional case studies. In addition, the national Department of Education's Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) was accessed in order to develop a systemic picture of the numbers and characteristics of adult learners present in all public higher education institutions between 1999 and 2002.<sup>9</sup>

Case studies were undertaken at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT), the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).<sup>10</sup> These institutions were chosen for their diversity and perceived uniqueness in a number of areas:

- institutional type: being a university or university of technology may highlight different responses to, and/or access and participation rates for, adult learners;
- status as former historically advantaged or disadvantaged institutions; and
- focus on adult learners; for example, decentralized versus more centralized and coordinated responses to adult learners.

Within each institutional case study, two or three programmes were chosen to highlight the ways in which responses to, and practices around, adult learners take place at the micro-level, perhaps because of or despite institutional policies and practices. These programmes were specifically chosen for the presence of adult learners, and included both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.<sup>11</sup> In all three cases, interviews were conducted with students and key staff members (in the latter case, both at programmatic and institutionally strategic levels); documentary analyses of institutional and national policies were undertaken; institutional Management Information Systems (MIS) data was accessed,<sup>12</sup> and questionnaires were administered to some of the students in the programmes selected for study at all three institutions.

9 1999 was the first operational year of HEMIS, while the last year for which systemic data was publicly available (at the time of data collection) for all HEIs was 2002.

10 The description of the case studies and findings can be found in fuller detail in the research report from which this chapter is derived. The research report is available from the Council on Higher Education.

11 The choice of programmes was delimited to exclude in-service teacher education, MBAs and related programmes, and short/occasional course participation. There were a number of reasons for these exclusions: Firstly, while programmes such as the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) have attracted large numbers of under-qualified teachers, it is seen as a temporary and 'non-mainstream' qualification. Secondly, and with regard to MBA and related programmes, the researchers made the assumption that these programmes will, in the main, attract people from the corporate and public sectors, i.e. those already advantaged economically, educationally and socially, albeit in different ways. Thirdly, short courses and participation in occasional studies also fall outside of the mainstream of degree programmes (although occasional students may do existing modules of degree programmes, they are not always allowed access into the programmes).

12 However, in at least one case, the institution's MIS data was of limited value in that the extraction of certain variables created duplications across the datasets.

13 The only information available is the distinction between unemployed/employed. No further information, beyond this very broad distinction of employment status – such as part-time or full-time employment, sector of employment, or occupational category – is therefore available through HEMIS. Attempts to link employment status of particular individuals might be possible by using date of birth and searching the South African Revenue Services (SARS) datasets, for example, but this would be a cumbersome and costly research exercise.

14 The only funding of fees information that is captured is for NSFAS funding.

15 However, this first cohort analysis was not publicly available at the time of writing this chapter.

## 5. ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF ADULT LEARNERS ACROSS THE PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Whether at national or institutional level, there is no specific data on adult learners, and age cohorts must be filtered in order to isolate adults. Datasets at institutions mainly capture data from registration forms, but these are usually tailor-made to conform to the Department of Education’s requirements for its HEMIS submissions, used for policy-making decisions and subsidy allocations. The HEMIS data comprises a number of datasets that are submitted by all HEIs, relating to student information (mostly biographical and Classification of Educational Study Material [CESM] categories), course registrations, credit values, qualification/CESM/course files and staff files.

**Table 1: Total adult students and year-on-year increases/decreases**

Year	Adult student numbers	Percentage as proportion of total student numbers	
1999	328 375	59.1%	
2000	341 097 (+12 722)	58%	(-1.1%)
2001	354 611 (+13 514)	55.6%	(-2.4%)
2002	381 581 (+ 26 970) <sup>17</sup>	54.4%	(-1.2%)

Source: HEMIS

The research team encountered a number of difficulties in accessing certain types of information, more specifically indicators that relate to adult learners and participation patterns. For example, the HEMIS data cannot provide detailed information on previous employment in the year prior to registration,<sup>13</sup> nor can it provide information on part-time versus full-time registration numbers (as the DoE is primarily concerned with FTEs for subsidy purposes), or information on who is currently funding students’ fees,<sup>14</sup> “stop-out” trends, and so on. The issue of tracking time-to-degree is still limited in the case of adult learners as the first cohort analyses from 2000 are now possible<sup>15</sup> in the case of students who complete their degrees in the requisite time, but not yet for part-time students who may take five to six years (or even longer). In addition, because of the way the datasets are constructed, it is not possible to obtain certain types of information from HEMIS, as some queries would require a ‘cobbling’ together of fields from across the different datasets, introducing a high level of complexity and a potential for error, according to a DoE official. One such query related to FTE count by age cohorts.<sup>16</sup>

Given these limitations, what has HEMIS been able to reveal about the participation of adult learners in public higher education institutions? While there was a general increase of nearly 22% in the number of students in public higher education between 1999 and 2002, in contrast, the number of adult learners as a proportion of total student numbers has been decreasing slowly

<sup>16</sup> The interest was in comparing headcounts versus FTEs by age cohorts in order to isolate adult FTEs and to relate these to adult headcounts. Such information/trends may point to altered institutional arrangements, requirements and resourcing to accommodate adult learners. This may, in fact, be a better indicator of participation patterns of adults than full-time/part-time registration figures.

<sup>17</sup> This jump in adult student numbers may be partially explained by the fact that 2002 saw the first mass intake of upgrading teachers into the NPDE. In this year, the DoE and ELRC paid bursaries for approximately 11,500 NPDE teachers. In 2003, according to HEMIS, there were a total of 21,866 NPDE and Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) students over the age of 31.

**Table 2: Students in public HEIs in 2002**

Age cohort	Total students <sup>18</sup>	Number of students at distance education institutions	Number of students at contact institutions
Younger than 23	293 579 (43.5%)	40 742 (6%)	252 837 (37.4%)
23-25	102 955 (15.25%)	28 915 (4.3%)	74 080 (11%)
26-29	56 286 (8.3%)	36 594 (5.4%)	19 690 (2.9%)
30-34	79 718 (11.8%)	36 900 (5.5%)	42 818 (6.3%)
35-39	60 792 (9%)	25 187 (3.7%)	35 605 (5.3%)
40-44	42 445 (6.3%)	14 946 (2.2%)	27 499 (4.1%)
45-49	25 076 (3.7%)	7 457 (1.1%)	17 619 (2.6%)

Source: HEMIS

**Table 3: Total undergraduate/postgraduate students per year**

Year	Undergraduate students	% of UG <sup>19</sup>	Postgraduate students	% of PG	Total	Occasional students <sup>20</sup>	Total <sup>21</sup>
1999	472 623	86.6	74 573	13.4	547 196	6 643	553 839
2000	488 560	85.0	88 712	15.0	577 272	10 233	587 505
2001	519 456	85.0	95 308	15.0	614 764	22 897	637 661
2002	534 918	83.3	112 868	16.7	647 786	27 374	675 160

Source: HEMIS

over the same period. However, in terms of headcounts, the number of adult learners has risen steadily over this period.

While at first glance the participation rates of +23 year olds in public HEIs are certainly not that of a marginalized minority, at over 50%, accepting these figures at face value, without further disaggregation, should be done with due caution. An attempt was made to further disaggregate this broad category (+23) into more refined cohorts of adult learners in order to better understand why the numbers might be so high. As Table 2 shows, most of these adult students are in the age category 23-29, with numbers tending to drop after age 30. However, the number of 30-49 year olds in HE in 2002 is not insignificant at 208,031 or 31% of the total student body of 675,160.

In terms of the breakdown between undergraduate and postgraduate adult student numbers, over 80% of the +23 year olds are in undergraduate programmes. There has been a gradual

18 The percentages in this table reflect age cohorts as a percentage of the total student body of 675,160.

19 The percentages of undergraduate and postgraduate students are based on total number of students per annum.

20 Occasional students are students who are registered for usually one course/module, but not for degree purposes.

21 This number includes occasional students.

increase in the postgraduate proportion in the years under study. The number of occasional students increased by 412% over the period 1999-2002.

With regard to an analysis of adult participation at the level of qualification in the three case study institutions using HEMIS data, the trend seems to be that, at UWC and VUT, the 23-29 age cohort is most likely to be engaged in undergraduate/Honours level programmes, whereas at Wits there is an almost even split across undergraduate and postgraduate participation for this group (see Table 4 below).

**Table 4: Over 23 years of age by qualification in three institutions 2002**

Institution	Undergraduate	Postgraduate students	% of PG students	Total 23+ students	Total number of students
UWC <sup>23</sup>	3 856	2 443	38.7	6 299	12 729
Wits <sup>24</sup>	3 181	6 078	60.2	10 097	22 181
VUT	4 587	79	1.7	4 666	15 340

Source: HEMIS

**Table 5: 2002 adult learners refined by age cohort in three institutions and reflected as percentages of total adult student population**

Age cohort	UWC		Wits			VUT	
	UG	PG	UG	PG	Occasional	UG	PG
23-29	32.4	13.7	21.4	25.4	2.5	81.6	0.6
30+	28.9	25.1	10.1	34.8	5.6	16.7	1.1

Source: HEMIS

However, the picture changes significantly when the +30 cohort is examined: while at UWC +30 students are almost equally spread between undergraduate and postgraduate courses, at Wits only 10% of this cohort are to be found at the undergraduate level. Generally, participation rates at VUT for higher degrees are much lower than at either of the universities.<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that at Wits and UWC the proportion of postgraduates in the 23+age category is much higher than the composite national average. Given VUT's low postgraduate rate, it is likely that there are substantial differences between the former technikons and universities when it comes to this split. This highlights the need for more detailed mining of the data to understand the trends within and between institutions.

The macro-data have been useful in providing an overview of adult participation rates across the system. The numbers of higher education students, particularly at undergraduate level, who are over

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that technikons were only allowed to offer degrees from the mid-1990s.

<sup>23</sup> The HEMIS data for UWC in 2002 does not show occasional adult students.

<sup>24</sup> These figures for Wits exclude occasional +23 students, who number 838 in total.

23 years, is significant. The differences between the three case study institutions, by age cohort (23-29 versus +30), are particularly interesting. However, as is pointed out in the literature, it is unwise to assume that the 23+ groups are homogeneous. It is known that their learning experiences within higher education are shaped by a host of biographical factors. The phenomenon of such a large percentage of older learners in higher education in South Africa is difficult to explain. It is possible that the school-leaving age of many learners has risen, and with the (arguably) increasing under-preparedness of school-leavers for HE, there is a trend whereby the traditional school-leaving cohorts start later at tertiary education, and take longer to complete their qualifications. The VUT case study figures support this conclusion: in 2002, 23-25 year olds studying at National Certificate or Diploma and four year BTech. levels represent 58% of the total adult student body; the corresponding figure for 26-29 year olds is 23.3%, while 30-34 year olds comprise just 9.1%.

## 6. ADULT LEARNERS IN THREE INSTITUTIONS

The HEMIS data presented above provide a systems-level overview of adult learner participation in public higher education. In contrast, the student vignette that follows provides a window that looks in on the life of a real adult student and highlights many of the issues discussed in the rest of this chapter. It is based on an interview which was conducted with a part-time student in his first year of a Law degree.

*Joe (not his real name) was admitted under 'age exemption' regulations (at the age of 28). He had good results in his matriculation or school-leaving examinations, but no matriculation exemption [giving him University Entrance]. He took a six-month certificate course at the University of Stellenbosch three years after leaving school. He was asked to submit a salary slip as evidence of his ability to pay his fees.*

*Joe described a nexus of material problems around finance, transportation and security. He had expected to be able to use taxis to and from UWC, allowing his wife to use the family car. However, he found that he needed to stay late after classes finished in order to use the library and computers and his wife felt it was unsafe to fetch him so late. As a result, he felt compelled to buy a second car. This has prejudiced his financial situation, resulting in him currently being behind with his fees. He doesn't qualify for bursaries as he did not get the required 65% average. He was unaware that NSFAS had extended its scheme to part-time students.*

*Joe's employer (a large company in the wine industry with 7,000 employees) offers loans at 2% below bank rates for employees studying in areas related to their work, with 50% of the sum advanced being written off when the student successfully completes. As a production scheduler, Joe's study of law was not considered to be relevant to his job, although he expressed aspirations to working in the company's small legal department.*

*Joe has unreliable access to computers. He has a computer in his office at work but does not get much undisturbed time to use it for his studies. He described a complex juggling act required to ensure sufficient access to a computer. His employer has now announced the intention to remove all 'A' drives from the computers, as they are not required for work. This will make his computer access significantly more difficult as it will affect the portability of his work.*



*Joe experienced himself as having “wrong study methods” and it took him time to find his feet. He took a month of leave that he had accrued at the beginning of the programme. In retrospect, he feels he should have kept a lot of that leave to use around examination time and at other pressure points. He could have done with guidance and counselling from the beginning. His lecturer had informed the class about the Writing Centre and, although he had little time, he tried to use it. However, he had been told that it would only be possible after hours if a number of students wanted to use the service. His lecturer had no consultation times after hours. “For me there is no support for part-timers; there’s plenty if you are full-time.”*

*Joe’s experience was that the lecturers understood his problems as a part-time student; in fact, his experience was that the majority of them were, themselves, part-time students. He found the practice of advance e-mailing of notes by one lecturer helpful, because he arrived in the lecture having studied the notes, able to listen and engage, because he didn’t have to copy or note.*

*Joe would have benefited from having key course information ahead of time so that he could plan his study life in relation to other pressures he faces at work and at home. The student attributed “50%” of his lack of success in the first semester to this lack of administrative and academic support. He failed one of his four courses.*

### **6.1. VAAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

At its inception, and also because of its location in one of South Africa’s industrial heartlands, Vaal University of Technology (VUT) has traditionally enjoyed strong industry partnerships with parastatals like Sasol, Telkom, Eskom and Iscor. At least until the late 1980s/early 1990s, VUT served a predominantly white, Afrikaans artisan/technical student body. The mid-1990 to late 1990s at VUT were characterized not only by transformation, but also by the upheaval that so often accompanies change. Since the late 1990s, VUT management has been hard at work to turn the institution into a more representative centre of excellence.

VUT opened its doors in 1966, operating as the Vaal Triangle College for Advanced Technical Education. In 1979, in line with national policy, Colleges for Advanced Technical Education were renamed ‘Technikons’, and VUT was then known as Vaal Triangle Technikon (VTT). Senior management lobbied for many years to change VTT’s status to that of a University of Technology, and this was granted in 2004.

VUT has experienced massive growth in undergraduate numbers since the early 1980s, with accelerated growth in the 1990s. Student numbers grew from around 3 000 in 1978 to 7 800 in 1993 and 16 500 in 2001. In 2002, black Africans constituted 88% of the student body, in contrast to VUT’s origins as a “white” institution. While there has been an increase in numbers across all HEIs, the Human Sciences Research Council survey of student choice (Grade 12s) in selecting HEIs shows that VUT was overall the fourth most popular choice across all students, and the third most popular institution for African students (Cosser & du Toit, 2002: 80 & 89).

The institution's vertical growth, since being conferred with degree-awarding powers in 1994, is less significant numerically but of strategic importance in positioning the institution and building its research profile.

The programmes focused on at VUT for the purpose of this research were the National Diploma and BTech in Electrical Engineering, and the Higher Diploma in Community Nursing (HDCN).

A number of issues emerge from the VUT case study:

#### **6.1.1. SUPPORT SERVICES**

Adult student responses at VUT show that few of them made use of student support services in areas such as academic support, financial advice and personal counselling (it appears that time constraints and the availability of support services outside the institution play a role in the low take-up of student support services). Adult learners were satisfied with their access to and use of the library and computer laboratories. It appears that adult students have made their lecturers their first port of call in seeking support and mentoring. What this means, though, is that lecturing staff have an added responsibility in terms of the support they provide to adult learners, and which is unlikely to be recognized as part of their formal workloads.

#### **6.1.2. INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS**

Faculty and departmental responsiveness to adult learners has in some cases preceded institutional initiatives. This is probably a result of the decentralized way in which departments and faculties are responsible for decisions relating to teaching and learning, and provisioning. On the issue of adult learners, Engineering Faculty staff indicated that they were encouraged by industry to target young female students. In contrast, they said, there had been no demand from industry to target adult learners. However, in trying to deal with declining student numbers in BTech. Engineering programmes, adult learners were specifically targeted, and the delivery of the BTech. Engineering programmes was altered to accommodate their working lives. This meant that full-time, younger and unemployed/not yet employed students have had to adapt to a schedule that favours flexible learning and after-hours attendance.

#### **6.1.3. QUALITY OF PROGRAMMES, AND TEACHING AND LEARNING**

As many of the staff at VUT are also postgraduate students themselves, their understanding of their adult learners has been enhanced. This is reflected in the support they provide, and in their incorporation of their students' prior knowledge into the curriculum and pedagogical processes. On the whole, adult students at VUT seem satisfied with the programmes they are undertaking.

#### **6.1.4. POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN A TRANSFORMATIVE CONTEXT**

Until the late 1980s, VUT was an institution with a history of attracting adult learners (albeit white Afrikaner males). Despite changing its age profile considerably during the 1990s, as it became more representative of all racial groups, it has retained high numbers of +23 learners, even though it does not have explicit policies and practices to attract them. Therefore, in cases where adults have been

targeted (for example, in Engineering), it has been in an uncoordinated and seemingly ‘unconscious’ or unreflective way. For example, in the context of VUT’s Transformation Agenda and an RPL policy with an equity and redress focus, the beneficiaries of RPL in Engineering are white males with artisan/technical qualifications, a group who enjoyed educational privileged in the past.

#### **6.1.5. FUNDING AND EMPLOYER SUPPORT**

Although there is some evidence of employer support (financial and otherwise) to VUT adult students, it appears to be limited. How employers conceptualize their support is critical: For example, in the nursing programme a learner asserted that her employer focuses on funding basic training, and registered nurses struggle to get both financial support and time off for post-basic degrees. Even in the engineering sector, it appears that there is far more employer support for undergraduate programmes, if the investment that companies make in cooperative education and workplace integrated learning is considered. This raises questions about how industry sees the role and value of higher degrees; the role of skills development funding for financing study at postgraduate levels, and how employers distinguish between education and training.

#### **6.2. UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE**

The University of the Western Cape (UWC), like several other higher education institutions, aspires in its mission to ‘encourage and provide opportunities of lifelong learning’. Unlike several other HEIs, though, it has tried to systematically implement the mission since 1996.

UWC is an urban university based in Cape Town. It is an historically black university, established in 1960 to serve people then classified as “coloured”. It moved from an identity as a “bush college” in the 1970s to one that prided itself on its identification with the mass democratic movement. In the 1980s, it began to admit black African students in defiance of government policy. From early on, UWC accommodated adult learners through evening classes, which were set up to provide professional development services to teachers and other civil servants.

UWC’s accredited part-time studies provision is about 37 years old and is the largest part-time university provision in the Western Cape. Part-time studies followed a pattern similar to that at other historically black institutions, which provided education to upgrade teachers, nurses, and other civil servants for the apartheid government. The programmes are run through faculties.

In 1997, a University Mission Initiative on Lifelong Learning (UMILL) was established within the Vice-Chancellor’s office and scarce resources were made available to support it. This eventually led to the establishment of a new organizational structure, the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL), which works across faculties to support the implementation of the lifelong learning mission and provides an institutional home for the development of RPL.

It is important to locate the decision taken in 1997 in the context of the time. Student numbers had been falling consistently and there were predictions of a headcount of only 6000 students in 1999. Over 40 academics were retrenched in June of that year and the trade union, NEHAWU, was on strike to resist the laying off of their members. There were crisis meetings of Senate and a proposed vote of no confidence in the Rector was narrowly averted. There were major changes within the executive leadership with several temporary appointees. It is fair to say that the institution was in crisis.

The spread of part-time students across faculties in 2004 is: Economic and Management Sciences (32.2%), Education (31.9%), Arts (10.1%), Law (8.8%), Community and Health Sciences (7.9%), Dentistry (6.6%) and Science (2.5%). The growth in Education and Dentistry has been the most dramatic particularly through the introduction of one-year professional development programmes. There is, however, no specific institution-wide monitoring of what programmes or courses are presented, or in what mode. This does not help students in their planning, particularly when they wish to access courses across faculties.

Three programmes were analysed in order to obtain data on issues of access, equity and success. These are: School of Public Health, Department of Management, and the Department of English which offers both regular English degree courses and English for Educational Development (EED) across the campus.

From this case study, there are several key considerations when confronting questions of access, equity and success of adult learners:

### **6.2.1. SUPPORT OF HOME, WORK AND INSTITUTION**

Most part-time students<sup>25</sup> at UWC are employed and embody the linkage between tertiary education and the world of work. To help students succeed, relationships with workplaces need to be nurtured, so that workplaces can support adult learners, even indirectly (Joe's example of computer access at work is a case in point). The timing of payment of fees in relation to other financial responsibilities is an institutional example.

### **6.2.2. PEDAGOGICAL FLEXIBILITY**

A growing number of programmes at UWC are using "mixed modes" for delivery and this should be encouraged, as adult students require flexible ways to access learning opportunities. The rigid distinction being made at national level between distance and residential modes of delivery is causing some concern in the institution and requires clarification.

### **6.2.3. STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT**

Very few part-time students have used the counselling services (7%) or the Writing Centre (24%). There seems to be a need for different kinds of support relating to, for example, financial planning advice, and to skills in negotiating with family and work for time and support. While certain services do need to be made available after hours, there is need for further research to ascertain more

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<sup>25</sup> A survey among part-time students conducted in June/July 2003 found that more than 90% were employed.

precisely what is needed, and when. It cannot be assumed that part-time, older learners have the same needs as younger, full-time students.

#### **6.2.4. STUDENT RETENTION**

Institutional factors in relation to services, relevant curricula, appropriate pedagogical practices, and a sense of a learning community, all make important contributions to retention of adult learners. With regard to success, internal research has been conducted on RPL students. A comparative study to see how the different modes of access compare, found that RPL students perform as well as the students with Matriculation Exemption. The first intake of RPL students also scored on average 5% above the class average, and these were the top achievers in some modules.

#### **6.2.5. ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND LEADERSHIP**

In order to ensure that the institution is able to adapt to provide quality services to adult learners, there does need to be recognition from leadership that changes must be made in administration, teaching and learning, and service provision. There is a danger of adult learners being courted only in times of diminishing numbers. For this not to happen, requires concerted commitment from leadership, as the UWC case demonstrates. The institutional changes need to be addressed deliberately and the role of a central, catalytic organizational structure, in the form of the DLL, has been essential in this process.

### **6.3. UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND**

In the late 1990s, under the combined pressures of national transformation, institutional restructuring, and a leadership imbroglio, registrations of full-time students declined at Wits. At the same time, the composition of the student body was changing, as increasing numbers of black students entered the institution. Throughout the 1990s, the university gave attention to the development of bridging and foundation courses at undergraduate level for (mainly) black students who spoke English as a second language, and who had been educated in disadvantaged schools. These developments were consistent with Wits's reputation as an "open" university with a liberal ethos, ready to meet new national challenges.

Until the 1990s, it was the University's custom to select full-time students from the available pool of young, mainly white Matriculants/school leavers who had graduated from respected high schools throughout the country. Wits's strategy was to recruit widely at undergraduate level, then gradually eliminate students until there was a smaller pool of capable postgraduate students who needed very little academic support. A change of strategy was indicated in the Wits Strategic Plan, *Shaping the Future 2002-2005* (University of the Witwatersrand, 2002), which announced the University's intention of becoming a more student-centred, flexible institution, which 'broadens access to Wits qualifications where appropriate'. Yet, despite the government's appeal to broaden access to higher education for adult learners and workers, and Wits's stated intention to do so, at least four factors militated against a change of institutional policy: Wits's identity and

renewed designation as a ‘research university’ (DoE, 2001b); changes to the government’s funding formula for degrees and diplomas; the labour-intensive nature of mounting programmes responsive to the needs and interests of adult learners; and government emphasis on student retention and throughput rather than access.

There is an interesting, if fragmented, history of recruiting mature adult learners as students at Wits. Veterans of World War Two were granted access to degree and diploma programmes at the University free of charge from 1946. Their experience was recognized as a proxy for academic admissions requirements, anticipating RPL by four or five decades. Throughout the 1980s, the Faculty of Commerce ran a successful programme of after-hours, part-time studies, which allowed working adults to accumulate credits towards a B.Com degree. The administration of this programme became burdensome, and it was discontinued in the early 1990s. The Centre for Continuing Education offered public lectures and short courses on a wide variety of topics in winter and summer schools throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Certificate courses in Youth Development, Leadership, Rural Education, English, Science and Adult Education were offered. Many of these adult learner focused programmes ground to a halt in the early 1990s, when corporate and foreign funding agents shifted their support from NGO, community and HE projects to government-sponsored programmes. There was also a perception that the university campus, located on the fringe of the decaying inner city, had become unsafe at night. Competition from private colleges, especially in the fields of commerce, management and human resources development, siphoned off many potential adult students.

Throughout the 1990s, there was no particular innovation with respect to the recruitment of mature adult learners at the university, nor flexibility as far as access routes at undergraduate level was concerned. As is the case in many other South African institutions, there is tension between those staff members who are bent on preserving the institution’s academic standards and traditional ways of operating, and those who wish to widen access to new groups of students and develop new approaches to teaching and learning.

Two programmes, demonstrating innovation with respect to adult learners at Wits University, formed part of the case study. These programmes are located in the Centre for Part-Time Studies (WitsPlus), and Journalism and Media Studies, a unit in the Graduate School of the Faculty of Humanities.

A number of issues emerge from the Wits case study:

### **6.3.1. ADULT LEARNERS**

Working adult learners are recruited to both Wits Plus and Journalism and Media Studies. In the main, adult learners are motivated to upgrade and re-skill in their current professions. They are employed on a fulltime basis, and, in many cases, qualify for financial assistance from their employer provided they study in a field relevant to their work.

The academic staff of the two programmes recognizes that adult learners have roles and responsibilities outside the academic programmes in which they are registered. These roles and responsibilities are often seen as a nuisance and a distraction from learners' devotion to academic pursuits. Learners are generally perceived as having work experience which is an asset in terms of their ability to pay fees, and which provides useful contacts in the world of work. Adult learners are perceived to be more mature, motivated and committed to study than younger learners in the mainstream. However, their work-based knowledge and experience is not always positively or consistently recognized in the curriculum, particularly in WitsPlus.

Generally, adult learners in both programmes accepted the need to develop their academic skills, and found support to do this in structures such as the Writing Centre and academic development workshops, as well as from individual lecturers, tutors and course coordinators. The expectation is that students will become proficient in academic discourse in a short period of time in order to survive and succeed in academic study.

The study shows that white-collar workers and professionals gain access to Wits. Other potential students, for example, unemployed and blue-collar workers, or workers in the informal economy, do not access academic programmes at Wits. They are excluded because of the lack of bursaries for part-time students at Wits, and because they are seen as under-qualified academically.

### **6.3.2. FACILITIES AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES**

Facilities and support structures are available for adult learners, but, like all services at the University, these are geared to full-time students who are on campus from 8h00 to 16h00. Some services, such as foundation courses, are vulnerable to budget cuts and altered priorities in the institution and the national Department of Education.

Both Journalism and Media Studies and WitsPlus provide dedicated student registration and counselling services, as well as facilities and WebCT support to adult learners, bypassing mainstream structures. This assisted students to feel affiliated to their programme. The inclusion of adult learners in niche or specialized programmes, and the way they are accommodated administratively and pedagogically, makes it possible for students to enter and flourish in such programmes. At the same time, the students become invisible, and the programmes look inward rather than outward. Both students and programmes become marginal (and dispensable) in the wider university.

### **6.3.3. THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS IN THE ACCESS AND RETENTION OF ADULT LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Employers have a key role to play in the access and retention of adult students in higher education. Policy documents and other literature on adult learners tend to emphasize the role

of the receiving institution, its ethos, its inclination to pedagogical reform and support mechanisms as significant variables in student performance. By way of contrast, the Journalism and Media Studies programme suggests that the employers have an equally significant role to play in the success and retention of adult learners in higher education. Part of the employers' role is the financial support they offer, which allows their employees to access and complete higher education qualifications. A related area is the technical support that the work environment provides in the form of the availability of computers, Internet and e-mail services. It appears that these services allow adult learners to access web-based course materials on the job, allowing them to save time – a rare commodity in the lives of adult learners.

#### **6.3.4. CHALLENGES WITH RESPECT TO ADULT LEARNERS**

Dedicated programmes for adult learners were established in response to particular contextual circumstances: the decline in student registrations in 1999-2001 and in response to policy calls for widening access to higher education (in the NPHE). These two factors made it possible for adult learner-focused programmes to be established. Once they were established, other factors made it difficult for them to flourish. The absence of a coherent institutional strategy for adult learners; changes in the government's funding formula in higher education; the labour-intensive nature of mounting programmes, which are responsive to adult learners' needs and interests; and the new emphasis in government and institutional policy on student retention and throughput rather than on access, all impede the equity, access and success of adult learners in higher education.

### **7. ISSUES EMERGING ACROSS THE CASE STUDIES AND HEMIS DATA**

All three case study institutions show uneven treatment of adult learners, with pockets of good practice. They cannot be seen as uniform in their approaches to adult learners. Each institution has a distinct history, identity, mission and relationship with its surrounding communities, shaped by its position within the South African and provincial higher education landscapes. Despite these differences, attracting adult learners is not a strategic imperative of any of the three institutions, although UWC has the strongest and most effective commitment to lifelong learning.

#### **7.1. UNDERSTANDING ADULT PARTICIPATION RATES AND THE 'ADULT LEARNER'**

As the research findings show, the percentage of learners over the age of 23 in South African public HEIs is greater than 50% – a significant number – and a rate similar to that of Europe and North America. McGivney (2004: 34) points out, in relation to student numbers in the UK, that about half of all learners in higher education are over 25.

In terms of understanding some of the characteristics of adult learners, the case study data begins to paint a picture of adult learners in South Africa as coming from lower middle-class socio-economic backgrounds, mainly black and first generation university students. Most are in their twenties and thirties and are married or have family responsibilities. Most are in full-time



employment, although there are significant numbers of unemployed adult learners at VUT, which also has a relatively high proportion of +23 learners from rural areas.

The dominant motivation of the adult learners interviewed in all three institutions was career progression and job security. In addition, learners in all three institutions felt that the tide, which had previously prevented them from entering higher education, had turned, and their time to study had come. This research suggests that those adult learners who access HE are employed, either in technical and commercial fields, or in professional fields, such as teaching and nursing. While adult learners are accessing higher education, they are not necessarily “workers”.

## **7.2. UNDERSTANDING ACCESS AND BARRIERS**

At programme and service levels, adult student satisfaction was high in most of the programmes studied. Students felt that they were acknowledged and accommodated as adult learners by lecturers and administrators, particularly in those programmes especially designed for them. However, they also noted that the institutions, on the whole, made few concessions to them.

With regard to the conceptual categories relating to access, as presented in the literature review, this research has identified mainly situational barriers to access (Cross, 1981) for adult learners, especially lack of finance, study leave and transport. In particular, the participation patterns suggest that there is a strong economic motivation influencing adult learner participation in higher education, yet adult learners interviewed indicated that finance was a huge issue affecting their participation.

Understanding situational barriers and solutions to these issues cannot be reduced to only the personal circumstances of individual learners. Financial support, for example, needs to be examined in a broader context. At the level of State financial support, it would appear that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is not being utilized for adult learners studying part-time, especially those who are working, as they are not likely to meet the NSFAS means test. However, given the recent debate on first year pass rates and costs to the State, some review of national aid to adult learners (whose graduation rates appear to be better than their younger counterparts in this study) is recommended.

Another aspect of the financial barrier/support issue relates to workplace support, and the need for effective relationships between workplaces and higher education. This study showed that most of the students interviewed across the three institutions are employed, and for many, their field of study is related to their work. Yet the financial support they receive from their workplaces is quite varied. The VUT case, for example, revealed that nurses currently struggle to get financial support from their employers, whereas in the past financial support for continuing nursing education was institutionalized.

The issue of employer funding raises the related issue of funding available through the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). The WitsPlus programme coordinator suggested that funding for workplace skills is being used for training, rather than education. Short courses show high

recruitment levels compared to degree or diploma programmes, and there is a growing emphasis on short duration certificate courses (which are often funded by employers and/or through SETA levy funds).

At institutional level, many HEIs do not recognize the relationship of continuing education (often manifested as short course provision) to formal degrees and qualifications through, for example, giving credit for prior learning. Institutions are still cautious about RPL and only implement it within certain professional development and/or postgraduate programmes. While UWC has a record of broad-based RPL practices, both VUT and Wits use RPL selectively and not at the undergraduate levels. It has not been used for equity and redress purposes. The idea of institutionalizing RPL as a way of reducing the cost of programmes for adult learners is not an issue that has been taken up by institutions.

In this study, issues of epistemological access, as defined by Morrow (1993/4), did not appear to emerge as a barrier for adult learners, except, perhaps, for adult learners doing the B.Com option at WitsPlus. In that programme, epistemological access related to the access requirements of Foundational Mathematics, and the inclusion of a core course on Computational Mathematics in the curriculum.

However, if epistemological access is included in those practices relating to teaching and learning by staff and institutions, then this research raises important issues about the relationship between departmental/school practices and student success. For example, none of the case studies show evidence of employing staff skilled in adult education theory and practice, and nor is there a relationship between those departments where there are large numbers of adult learners, and departments of adult education (where, it may be assumed, an expertise in developing and running courses for adult learners is located). Issues relating to staff development do not feature, and this in turn, raises questions about the quality of programmes being offered to adults (and not just at the case study institutions), in pedagogical and curriculum terms.

Finally, (female) students doing VUT's Higher Diploma in Clinical Nursing (HDCN) point to the issue of affiliation needs (Belenky, *et al.*, 1986; Hayes & Flannery 2000) in that these nurses pointed to the importance of having lecturers with whom they could form personal mentoring relationships.

### **7.3. UNDERSTANDING SUCCESS**

Consonant with the international research literature, the adult learners in this study are juggling family, work and community responsibilities alongside their study commitments. The findings show that adult learners are highly motivated, and adept at juggling these various and competing responsibilities. All three case studies and the selected programmes generally demonstrate both high retention rates and higher graduation rates when compared to younger cohorts of students.

#### 7.4. INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS AND RESPONSIVENESS TO ADULT LEARNERS

The research raises issues relating to the notion of differentiation. As with the UK experience, South African public higher education institutions are differentiated according to (perceived and actual) levels of status. For example, the University of the Witwatersrand has traditionally been seen as one of South Africa's elite institutions, while the former technikons and former apartheid-designated institutions have been relegated to a lower status. VUT, as a former designated 'white' institution, would also have a relatively higher status within the former technikon hierarchy. While the restructuring of the higher education system has seen many shifts in perceived status, some of this history still influences individual institutional responses to issues like admissions, widening access, and institutional change at the level of curriculum and pedagogy.

The case studies show a range of institutional approaches that enable adult learners to participate in higher education. At UWC, there is an integrated institutional response from the top, which strives to facilitate access and to enhance the quality of part-time programmes. In the UWC approach, adult learners are integrated across the institution and its programmes, and a unit has been established to oversee aspects of that integration and to provide for the monitoring and tracking of adult learners. This approach would be consistent with UWC's history and vision of itself as an institution 'for the people'.

At WitsPlus, innovations with regard to the access, equity and success of adult learners are ironic in that they nurture adult learners and demonstrate good practice while at the same time they appear to go against the grain of mainstream institutional practices. Their differentiation of themselves from mainstream practice militates against their voices being heard, and their practices being further institutionalized in the university<sup>26</sup> – this scenario is not unlike the picture painted by Usher *et al.* (1997), who attempted to explain the relative marginalisation of adult education within university contexts. However, Wits's approach to admitting adult learners, albeit only on the periphery, is perhaps consistent with its vision of being a research led, elite institution. This argument can be supported through a review of the spread of adult learners, across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Another aspect of Wits' marginal treatment of the adult learners in WitsPlus relates to the programme rules that stipulate that unless a certain level of grade is achieved, WitsPlus students cannot 'transfer' within the institution to the equivalent full-time programme, despite the fact that the programmes are supposed to be equivalent.

At VUT, initiatives to attract adult learners are largely driven at faculty or departmental level, and are more apparent at the post-basic level. It seems that the high percentage of adult learners in undergraduate programmes is unrecognized in the institution. While VUT has significantly widened access to formerly disadvantaged groups, it is at this institution that the anomalies of age and the definition of adult learner are most sharply delineated.

<sup>26</sup> In contrast to WitsPlus, the Wits Business and Medical Schools are similarly distanced from the mainstream, but protected by their high-income generation.

<sup>27</sup> The large numbers of adult learners in South African public HEIs are also true of those institutions that seem to perceive themselves as targeting the 'cream' of traditional age school-leavers and/or those as being research-led (and which may therefore see themselves as more prestigious).

In general, the data shows that a lack of institutionalization and institutional commitment seems to result in the vulnerability of the programmes serving adult learners. It can therefore be argued that this points to the need for constant vigilance and advocacy in order to protect both the programmes and the place of adult learners within higher education.

## **8. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS**

This study on equity, access and success of adult learners in higher education demonstrates the far-reaching implications of accepting adult learners as a serious constituency within institutions. In a context in which there are many competing priorities, and resources are limited, yet where adult learners appear in significant numbers in all public HEIs,<sup>27</sup> it is decision-making specifically in relation to funding and subsidy allocations, there is clearly a need for a centralised database that can also adequately support systems-level research and the tracking and monitoring of broader trends relating to adult learners.

### **8.1. FUNDING ADULT PROGRAMMES**

As a strategy for encouraging social inclusion and widening access, the question arises as to whether access for adult learners only be granted by certain institutions, institutional types or programmes. The answer is probably not. In the UK, funding grants are provided for increasing access to institutions with relevant programmes. These grants are then used to ensure that the institutions provide appropriate services for adult learners, and to improve the quality of programmes. Given that the *White Paper 3* (DoE, 1997) makes provision for changes in the funding formula for earmarked funds for developmental work, this may be one strategy for ensuring equitable access and quality for adult learners across the HE landscape (although this has not happened in nine years). In this way, those pockets of good practice (some of which have been illustrated by this research) will be encouraged to flourish, while protecting programmes and initiatives from the vagaries of ‘convenient’ policy changes when institutions are under threat, financially or otherwise.

### **8.2. JOINED-UP THINKING**

This study suggests the need for ‘joined-up thinking’, which refers to the cycle of life and the interconnectedness of each stage of living and learning. It matters what the relationships are between the different parts of the educational system and the relationships between different systems, so horizontal and vertical linkages between HEIs and schools and FET colleges, and between HEIs and workplaces or communities, are important. Mechanisms to encourage these are necessary in an environment where different parts of the system operate in isolation. Adult learners require flexibility and mobility to move in and out of work and study. This requires, in some instances, that the criteria of success need to be rethought – for example, not to penalize institutions if a learner “stops out” of study for a period of time.

### **8.3. INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL SHIFTS**

This research has made it clear that if institutions are to take adult learners more seriously as a constituency, they need to undertake improvements to their monitoring systems, central administration

and aspects of provisioning (although these improvements will facilitate an understanding of and flexibility for all categories of student). The difficulties with not only systemic data (HEMIS), but also individual institutions' MIS indicate that investing in improved IT systems and more powerful databases is necessary to track and monitor students generally as well as specific categories, in particular, among other things.

Whatever the 'model' of providing access for adult learners, institutions need to ensure that institutional support and commitment is provided to those students, programmes and staff. Potentially unfair or discriminatory practices need to be identified and dealt with. This, in turn, highlights the need for institutionally supported research into the practices of the institution and the experiences and perceptions of its (various categories of) students and staff.

#### **8.4. THE NEED FOR MORE RESEARCH**

One of the significant outcomes of this research is the poor state of quantitative data from which to draw inferences and conclusions. The quality and reliability of the HEMIS data is cause for concern. While the research set out to provide a macro picture of adult learners in HE, it soon became clear that this was not possible. This pushed the researchers to develop the case studies, with both merits and limits.

One outcome of this research is the need for regular, reliable data on the age and working lives of students. Some ideas for further research include studies to:

- establish the age profiles and study patterns of students in a range of HEIs across different +23 age groups, as this data needs far more disaggregation. Such research should inform debates and policy about the (re)definition of the current categories of 'mature age exemption';
- understand the relationship between work and study and the barriers or incentives to enabling working students to study successfully;
- understand the adult learner or prospective learner, identifying social characteristics of participants and non-participants, investigating the factors associated with the decision to participate or not, and analysing the experiences, expectations and perceptions of the learners;
- clarify what it is that propels people across ages successfully through higher education, and what inhibits this progress;
- analyse the meaning of being a 'part-time' student and to question the value of the definition of 'part-time' for funding and other purposes;
- understand how HIV/AIDS is impacting women and men at different ages, in different regions and to project the implications of this for access to HE for adult learners;
- research and develop teaching/learning innovations;
- research and develop supportive institutional cultures for adult learners;
- understand who is being excluded and unable to gain access to HE; and
- understand why there is seemingly so little interest, on the part of HEIs, in 'non-traditional' students when the policy states otherwise.

## 8.5. CONCLUSION

In a context where there are multiple, competing priorities and scarce resources, adult learners are seemingly not a priority. However, the education of adults in a society, such as South Africa is a political, moral, historical and economic issue – and it is not merely one of these, but all of them. Adults have a critical role to play in the development of South Africa because of their accumulated knowledge and experience, which can be mediated by educational processes to strengthen it and make it socially useful. Bringing adult learning into the domain of higher education is consistent with the purposes of higher education as spelled out in the *White Paper 3* (DoE, 1997).

This study helps to move adult learners from the margins by making them visible in higher education in a situation where over 50% of students (80% being at undergraduate levels) are over 23 years of age. In a context where the increase in the efficiency of the HE system is paramount, taking the learning needs of adult learners seriously is compelling. In a situation where the national human resources development strategy has identified the professional development of large cohorts of working people as a necessity, the need for HEIs to learn to do this well is essential.

However, access to higher education in the large numbers demonstrated is not sufficient, as adult learners also raise pedagogical challenges that need to be confronted more fully by HEIs. This is also an important issue for society, because it speaks to the question of whose and what knowledge is privileged in society, and how accumulated experience is used as part of collective social knowledge. Collective social knowledge is important to social development, and should therefore be developed and advanced in ways that strengthen its self-critical nature, its ability to add to social knowledge more generally, and to ‘contest with’ other knowledge – a role that could be played, in part, by higher education.

This study suggests that to attain access, equity and success for adult learners in higher education deep transformation is required from the micro teaching/learning relationships, to the meso-institutional cultures, to the macro provincial and national environments. Rather than the leadership of the institutions and the system being overwhelmed by the extent of the changes needed within a resource-constrained environment, it may well be advisable to identify and to provide incentives for institutions and programmes that can spin networks of good practice which can infuse and inspire the system over time, thereby contributing to both social and economic development goals.

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# TRACING AND EXPLAINING CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE SOUTH AFRICAN CASE

Jonathan Jansen with Chaya Herman, Tshepiso Matentjie, Rachel Morake,  
Venitha Pillay, Chika Sehoole and Everard Weber

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In South Africa's brief century of higher education, nothing matches the wide-ranging changes encountered by post-secondary institutions since the middle 1990s.<sup>1</sup> These changes range from the fundamental reorganization of the distribution and character of higher education institutions (Jansen, 2002), the comprehensive redesign of higher education curricula governed by a national qualifications authority (Ensor, 2002), and the profound reconstitution of the academic workplace (Webster & Mosoetsa, 2001). Despite such far-reaching changes in the higher education landscape, there remain disconcerting continuities, including the racially skewed profile of especially senior academic appointments, racial and gender inequalities in research productivity, and the stable "institutional cultures" of universities that still bear their distinctive racial birthmarks expressed in dominant traditions, symbols and patterns of behaviour (Department of Education 2001; Mouton 2003; Thaver, 2005). Yet, except for bold and official pronouncements of change, it is not clear exactly what the reach and impact of these changes have been on higher education practice; nor is it clear what these changes mean to higher education practitioners; and it certainly is not clear how these changes in one national context relate to, or derive from, global changes in higher education.

Against this backdrop, this chapter has three objectives. The first is to briefly survey the major changes and continuities in South African higher education over the past decade. The second is to examine and evaluate these surveyed changes more deeply through the medium of two illustrative case studies: the case of private higher education and the case of the national qualifications framework. And the third is to explain these changes in the context of higher education reform across the globe; that is, rather than treat South Africa as peculiar or exceptional, this chapter attempts to explain the national response to changes facing higher education systems throughout the world. The findings and arguments presented in this chapter draw on a more extensive research report on higher education change in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> And these findings are conceptualized within the growing theoretical work on educational change, as briefly described in the next section.

### 1.1. THE STUDY OF CHANGE IN (HIGHER) EDUCATION

In recent years, the study of educational change has established itself as a respectable field of inquiry. Since the landmark study by Michael Fullan (1982) on *The Meaning of Educational Change*, a growing community of scholars has assembled under the banner of educational

1 South Africa's first fully-fledged university, the University of Cape Town, was only established in 1918, although it had existed as the South African College since 1829.

2 The methodology for this study was based on extensive analyses of higher education reports and analyses, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, practitioners and thinkers in higher education, and a critical synthesis and application of the major theories of change in the more recent higher education literature.

change to develop and test new concepts, theories and methods for investigating the problem of change. This renewed impetus for the study of change led, for example, to the magisterial two-volume collection on studies of educational change by some of the leading change theorists in the world (Hargreaves *et al.*, 1998) and the production of the first-ever journal dedicated to this subject, *The Journal of Educational Change*. As Ann Lieberman (1998:19) concluded in her review of the subject, 'the field of educational change has put down roots and grown in knowledge and influence'. This research on change in higher education works with and revisits (in the last section of this chapter) some of the key and more recent concepts and conceptual frameworks for understanding the problems, politics and possibilities of change. At the same time, this chapter self-consciously moves the explanations for change beyond the earlier and established theories which described higher education change in terms of metaphors – physical, universities as loosely coupled organizations (Weick, 1976); biological, universities as adaptive organisms (Goedegebuure, 1992); and cultural, university members or disciplines as tribes (Becher, 1989). As will be demonstrated, the metaphorical approach underestimates complexity, context and contingency as explanations for how universities change in a globalized world (see Meister-Scheytt & Scheytt, 2005).

But how does the study of change in higher education express itself in the South African literature? Put differently, what are the kinds of approaches and claims made in the local literature on higher education change? The character and limitations of the knowledge base on higher education in South Africa are examined in order to answer these questions.

## 2. THE KNOWLEDGE BASE ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In comparative terms, South Africa as a small, medium-income country has an impressive infrastructure for higher education research evidenced in the generally high level of research outputs and the quality of published research. The scale and diversity of studies are remarkable by any standard, and completely outstrips the available research on schools in quality and depth. The South African research on higher education can be divided into six broad classes or categories of research on higher education; these categories are not mutually exclusive, but presented in this way, draw attention to the kinds of studies available by approach, method and focus of inquiry.

**Statistical surveys** – broad surveys of system monitoring and performance in relation to standard indicators, such as equity, efficiency and effectiveness, for example, headcount and enrolment studies (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001); system-wide monitoring studies (Cloete & Bunting, 2000); annual reports on policy initiatives and achievements (CHE, 2004); national planning accounts and strategies (Department of Education, 2001); and research performance trends (Mouton, 2003). The most common equity indicators used in most of these studies relate to race and gender participation and performance.

**Case studies** – site-specific and in-depth studies of typically single institutions, faculties, departments or programmes (Ensor, 2001; Anderson, 2002; Jansen, 2002) where the subject matter could range from institutional mergers to deracialization to curriculum restructuring. These studies tend to offer fascinating accounts of one or more institutional sites but, with few exceptions, lack a broader theorization, which enables these single cases to hold meaning beyond a specific locale.

**Historical inquiry** – intensive studies of higher education policy or social movements concerned with higher education, for example, policy evolution (Sehoole, 2005); and student politics (Nkomo, 1984; Badat, 2001). These studies tend to foreground the role of politics and political movements in shaping and constraining policy options in higher education; their value lies in the thorough documentation of historical processes and events that continue to shape higher education.

**Critical events research** – special study of an emergent, significant national phenomenon that is of contemporary and critical importance to higher education, for example, private higher education (Kruss, 2004); black academic migration (Potgieter, 2002); new forms of knowledge production (Kraak, 2000); institutional culture studies (Thaver, 2005); and higher education as international trade (Sehoole, 2005). These studies generate high concentration value for limited periods of time and tend to locate South African higher education within international thinking and trends on the issue under analysis.

**Policy analysis** – focused review and criticism of an emergent or established higher education policy or policies, with an assessment of the nature, origins and consequences of such policies (Muller, 2003; Hall, Symes & Luescher, 2004; Jansen, 2004; SAUVCA, 2003). This category of study ranges from thoughtful theoretical or public position papers on a topic to more conventional policy analyses targeting a particular higher education policy or plan.

**Single-issue studies** – coverage of a wide spectrum of issues or concerns in higher education that are often confined to a particular institution, based on a specific interest of an individual academic researcher, and using a wide range of methodologies. Such studies typically appear as a single article in a higher education journal or as an entry into a general education or social science journal. A single issue of the *South African Journal of Higher Education* would, for example, cover topics as disparate as performance management in higher education, environmental education research, building research capacity, indigenous knowledge systems, language policy in higher education, postgraduate supervision, and industry-university partnerships.

All these studies, while impressive in range and scope, share the following five key limitations. There are very few comparative studies in higher education. Many of these studies are descriptive and to some extent analytical, but very few can be classed as

theoretical in design and approach. Most of the published research uses European and North American higher education literature as reference points, with very few continental studies or work related to other parts of the developing world, such as Asia and Latin America. With the exception of the single-issue research, these studies are largely political in character – meaning that they tend to reflect policy-oriented research focused on higher education performance as it touches on race and gender; a more limited literature in this regard examines the power relations among actors within universities, between institutions and the State, and between local institutions and international knowledge networks or agencies. And there are no longitudinal studies of the higher education system or of institutions, except of course for routine performance data on participation and productivity; the system performance data are not, however, presented in consistent frames from one year (or period) to the next, a problem exacerbated by the restructuring and realignment of higher education through mergers and incorporations.

While this chapter cannot remedy all these limitations in the existing corpus, it does seek to theorize well-described and well-documented changes in higher education drawing on recent conceptual labour in the field of educational change. But first, what is the status of change in South African higher education?

### **3. HIGHER EDUCATION PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA: A BRIEF SURVEY WITH RESPECT TO EQUITY ACHIEVEMENTS**

There are seven major and familiar claims that should be briefly and simply restated regarding one of the fundamental goals of higher education transformation in South Africa *viz.*, the achievement of equity in the higher education system.

First, there is the claim that there has been a steady though uneven growth in student enrolments over the past decade. Secondly, there are now more women in higher education than men. Thirdly, there are now more black students (and fewer white students) in higher education. Fourthly, there are now more women in university appointments, recently reaching equal numbers in male/female permanent staff. Fifthly, while female enrolments have increased overall, women remain underrepresented in engineering and the hard sciences. Then, senior academic positions in universities are still largely white and male in character. And lastly, white men still dominate the research landscape in terms of total research outputs such as publications (see Tables 1 and 2; and Figures 1 and 2, that follow).

In short, while quantitatively the system has expanded through greater participation of black and women students and staff, there are still huge imbalances with respect to the levels of academic appointment, the distribution of black and female staff across all disciplines, and the racially skewed production of scientific output.

**Table 1: Output by gender by year (1990-1998)**

Gender	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Total
F	244	264	311	397	490	455	537	414	335	3 447
F%	15%	17%	18%	16%	17%	17%	19%	16%	17%	17%
M	1 359	1 273	1 429	2 141	2 397	2 284	2 303	2 150	1 693	17 029
M%	85%	83%	82%	84%	83%	83%	81%	84%	83%	83%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 603</b>	<b>1 537</b>	<b>1 740</b>	<b>2 538</b>	<b>2 887</b>	<b>2 739</b>	<b>2 840</b>	<b>2 564</b>	<b>2 028</b>	<b>20 476</b>

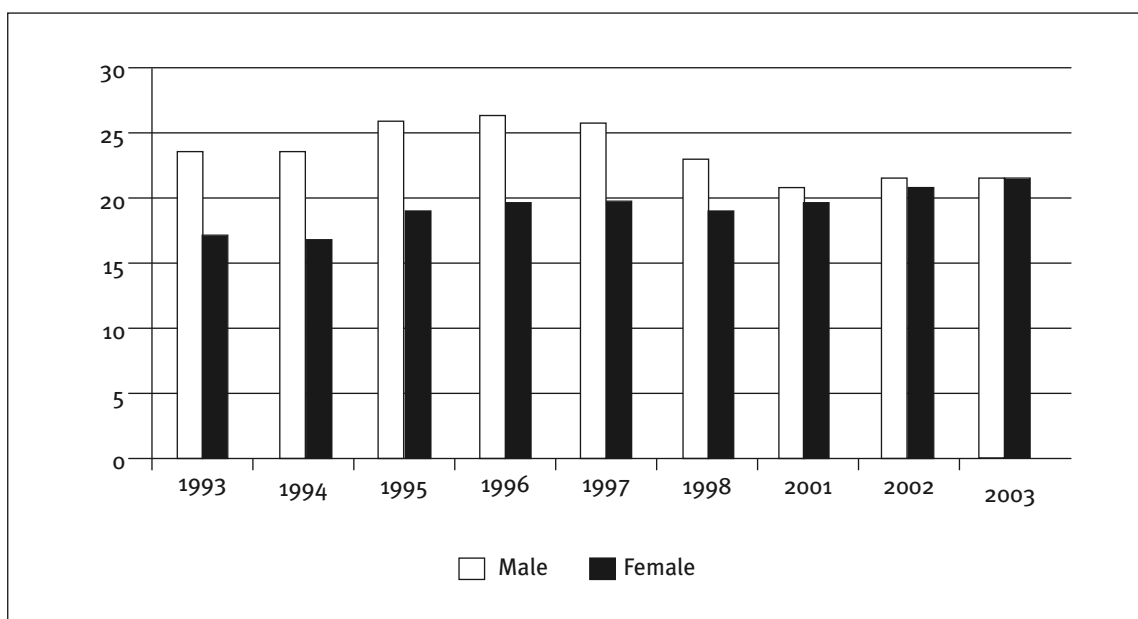
Source: Mouton 2003:23

**Table 2: Output by Race by year (1990-1998)**

Race	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Total
B	60	74	96	125	170	185	174	180	151	1215
B%	3.5%	5%	6%	5.4%	6.4%	7.4%	6.6%	7.6%	8%	6.4%
W	1 466	1 410	1 561	2 192	2 470	2 310	2 462	2 188	1 695	17 754
W%	96.5%	95%	94%	94.6%	93.6%	92.6%	93.4%	92.4%	92%	95.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 526</b>	<b>1 484</b>	<b>1 657</b>	<b>2 317</b>	<b>2 640</b>	<b>2 495</b>	<b>2 636</b>	<b>2 368</b>	<b>1 846</b>	<b>18 969</b>

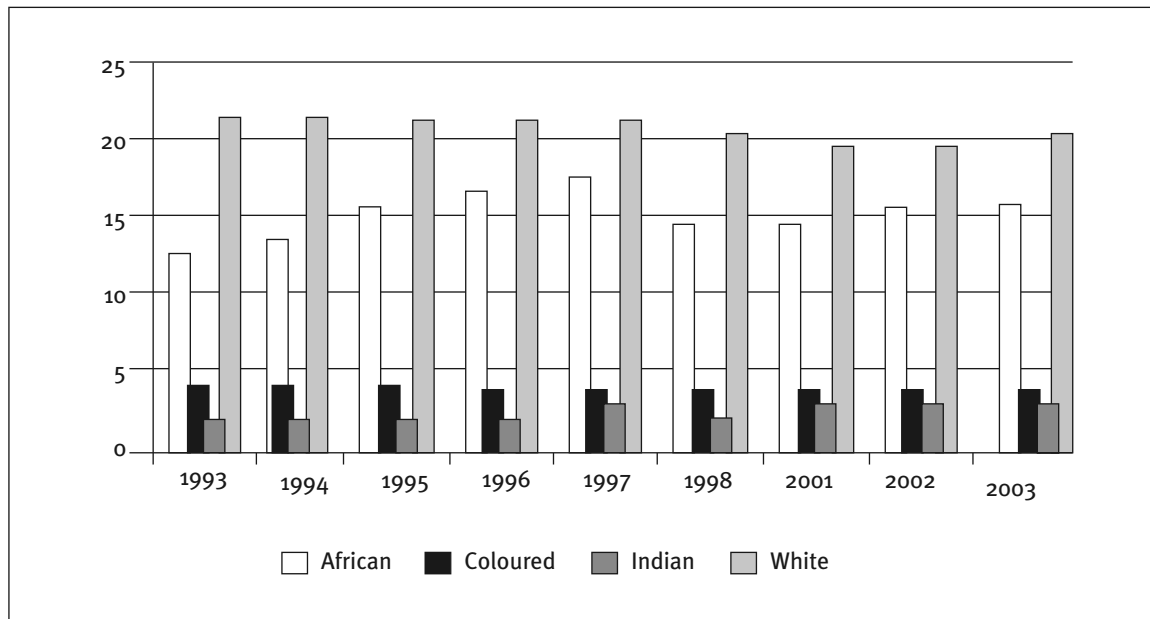
Source: Adapted from Mouton 2003:24

**Figure 1: National Total Headcount of Permanent Staff according to Gender (Thousands)**



Source: Department of Education, HEMIS data for State subsidized universities and technikons, April 2004

**Figure 2: National Total Headcount of Permanent Staff according to Race (Thousands)**



Source: Department of Education, HEMIS data for State subsidized universities and technikons, April 2004

Since the confirmation of the major trends in this statistical snapshot of higher education performance in various reports (such as Department of Education, 2001; CHE, 2004), the debates have largely shifted from how much has been achieved in the first ten years of democracy to the scale, consequences and sustainability of such achievement for the post-secondary school system.

**3.1. THE SCALE OF CHANGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION, 1994-2004**

The scale of changes are briefly recaptured here to lay the foundation for a set of broader theoretical attempts to explain how and why these changes came about, and their long-term consequences of change for higher education, democracy and society.

The single most important change in the higher education landscape has been the overall restructuring of the higher education system. A programme of government-mandated mergers reduced the number of institutions from 36 universities (21) and technikons (15) to 22 new institutions consisting of universities (11), universities of technology (5) and comprehensive institutions (6). More than 100 teacher-training colleges were closed and a limited number “incorporated” into universities or technikons. In short, 306 separate institutions for post-school education were radically reduced to at best 72 remaining institutions – not counting the restructuring of nursing and agricultural colleges.



The second major change in the higher education system was the spectacular growth in private higher education, which has challenged, if not undermined, the public higher education system just as it was emerging from its apartheid legacy. This unforeseen expansion of private higher education has created political, policy, and legal dilemmas about the appropriate nature and degree of governmental action in response to what has become a powerful, transnational phenomenon in the post-Cold war period.

The third major change has been the emergence of new models of delivery in higher education. It is no longer possible to clearly distinguish contact and distance education institutions in South Africa, as the former increasingly blurred the distinction in practice between these two forms of education delivery.

The fourth major change has been the changing value of higher education programmes (the rise of the economic sciences and the decline of the humanities). In South Africa, as elsewhere, the last decade witnessed a serious decline in humanities enrolments – leading several universities to retrench humanities academics, to restructure humanities faculties and to terminate certain humanities programmes – such as foreign languages, music, art and drama (see Ensor, 2002:287).

The fifth major change has been the changing nature of the academic workplace. In a short period of time, the collegial model that characterized the academic workplace has been replaced with what is often referred to as *the new managerialism* characterized by some of the following: a growing emphasis on performance, measurement and accountability; the increasing ethos of competition; a changing language that recasts students as clients and departments as cost centres; the growing vulnerability of academic and administrative positions as “outsourcing” and “efficiencies” dominate the institutional strategy (Webster & Mosoetsa, 2001).

### **3.2. THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The most important consequence of the changes in higher education – both those initiated by government (such as mergers) and those forced upon government (such as the growth of private higher education) – has been the changing role of the State and in particular expanding State intervention in higher education. The interventionist role of the State caught the higher education sector by surprise; after all, the *raison d'être* of the anti-apartheid struggle in universities was to circumscribe government regulation and control of higher education. A new discourse surfaced, one that pitted historical struggles for *autonomy* against the new language of *accountability*. Under the banner of autonomy, universities argued that the right to decide on academic policy matters was sacred; under accountability, the State argued that it had a vested interest in how the heavily funded public universities used public funds. More than the physical alterations or programmatic reforms that changed higher education, the most far-reaching changes in universities have been the gradual erosion of institutional autonomy and the corresponding growth of accountability regimes in the higher education system. These “soft

changes” have altered the way in which institutions understand themselves, their missions and their degrees of freedom – thereby fundamentally altering the value and significance of ‘the academic estate’ (Altbach, 2000).

There were legitimate grounds for concern on the part of the institutions. Government had invoked legislation that could replace university vice-chancellors with ministerial appointed administrators. Government had passed legislation that empowered it to close down, merge or incorporate whole institutions over the objections of a particular university, technikon or college – an unprecedented action. Government had signalled the need for a national student applications office, fuelling concerns of greater State control over admissions. Government had changed the traditional funding formula for higher education, placing greater control over the management and manipulation of the formula in the hands of the Minister of Education. Government had introduced the idea of ‘capping’ student numbers in higher education institutions – an act rationally described as ‘enrolment planning’ – thereby changing the once dominant policy discourse of participation to a planning discourse of adequacy. Finally, government had also indicated the need for “monitoring” the final arbiter of governance in institutions – the university council; the concern in this regard was that council’s were either aloof from or deeply involved in the management of institutions, without clarity about what their responsibilities of governance entailed.

The specific merits of each of these acts or signals of governmental intervention are not of concern in this chapter; rather, what is crucial to recognize is the fact that together these events have permanently altered the relationship between the State and universities in South Africa, with long term implications for the governance, management and administration of higher education institutions.

It is impossible to account for such changes – such as the relationship between State and universities – outside the global context of higher education developments. As international commentators have warned, it is too easy for South Africans to claim uniqueness when in fact much of what is happening locally has its roots in what is taking place globally. The spread of new managerialism is a reflection and outcome of a broader neo-liberal discourse that has transformed relationships between the State, civil society and universities in major ways throughout the world (Webster & Mosoetsa, 2001). The emergence of international private higher education is part of a global sweep of trade in a borderless education environment (Knight, 2002; Scherrer, 2002). The changing meanings of accountability and autonomy are as contested in Europe and North America at the present time, as they might be in Africa and Latin America (Altbach, 2000). The restructuring of higher education through mergers and other forms of realignment is by no means a South African or even an education phenomenon (Harman & Meek, 2002), even though its local manifestation might invoke apartheid’s illogical development as the stimulus for such radical changes.

It is however difficult to assess the full impact and consequences of these changes in higher education without exploring systemic shifts within specific instances of change. For this purpose, two case studies were deemed as powerful and illustrative of changes in higher education and which allow for deeper and more penetrating analyses of what such changes mean in global contexts.

#### **4. A CASE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION CHANGE: THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK**

With the exception of the mergers, the most important structural intervention in higher education was sought through the reorganization of the qualifications system and, through this medium, the enhancement of access and the improvement of teaching and learning in institutions. The instrument for achieving these goals of access and quality was the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), its implementation to be overseen by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Yet two questions remain amidst the growing number of largely speculative and advocacy writings on qualifications' reform in South Africa. First, what was the actual impact of the NQF on increasing access to higher education? In particular how and to what extent did the policy objective described as the recognition of prior learning (RPL) facilitate access into higher education? Second, how did the NQF influence the processes of teaching and learning in higher education institutions?

A single case study – the University of Pretoria (UP) – was selected to gauge end user perspectives and experiences of implementing the NQF, how the NQF impacted on decisions regarding the recognition of prior learning, and on how curriculum was construed in the light of the framework. This case was selected because, at the time, the University of Pretoria was the largest (in terms of student enrolment) and most diverse (in terms of programmes on offer) residential university in South Africa, and therefore the ideal site for studying the overall impact of the NQF. The significance of this inquiry is that it works with practitioner perspectives on the implementation of the NQF; it adds empirical depth to our understanding of the relationship between higher education policy and practice in a transition society; and it places the meaning and impact of the NQF within a comparative perspective.

As a single case report, this study relies entirely on academic and administrative voices and perspectives of UP stakeholders. This report acknowledges that there may be other, more wider-ranging perspectives on how and why NQF implementation struggled with “uptake” in institutional life, for example, the epistemological (knowledge) assumptions of a labour-driven change process within traditional academic contexts. The UP case, however, reflects response and resistance within this particular institutional context.

#### **4.1. WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW ABOUT THE NQF EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL BASES FOR CURRICULUM KNOWLEDGE**

Following the requirements of the NQF, academics proceeded to identify different kinds of modules (fundamental, core, elective), again with little consideration of the curriculum implications of such physical division of disciplinary knowledge. The formatting of the qualifications appeared to be in line with the requirements of the NQF; on closer inspection, though, it was clear that any deep or sophisticated intellectual processes that typically accompany fundamental curriculum reforms were simply not done. What preoccupied institutional planners and academic departments, was the largely organizational and bureaucratic task of preparing their qualifications for purposes of interim registration with SAQA, rather than engaging in a fundamental rethinking of the purposes of teaching and learning in a democratic South Africa.

There was little intervention from the University Management, in the case of the University of Pretoria, to push for a deeper sense of curriculum change at faculty level, other than what was required to meet the formal submission requirements for the registration of qualifications. At the same time, university leaders acted through the then South African Universities Vice Chancellor's Association (SAUVCA) to ensure that academic programmes and structure of qualifications would not be fundamentally altered by arguing for 'whole qualifications' rather than unit standards favoured by powerful stakeholders within the NQF and, in particular, by the trade unions. A senior academic was adamant about this point:

The whole qualifications approach is nothing more and nothing less than the status quo, that's what we've been doing all the time...it simply meant that in terms of the submissions of our programmes for approval by SAQA it appeared as if we were conforming; in reality, it was just the outer cover, if you will, of the book that had changed, but the content, everything else, remained the same.

The 'technocrats' in universities and in SAUVCA ensured that the process of registering qualifications on the NQF would be as painless as possible.

.... So they got a few technocrats who would package this stuff in what appeared to be appropriate language but it was very, very superficial. It didn't really take down the NQF language and the NQF discourses into the redesign of higher education curricula.

But how exactly did institutions understand and interact with the policy provisions between central administration and the faculties? A senior member of the University Management, tasked with coordinating the process of registering qualifications with SAQA, recalls the process:

firstly we studied the material that came in from SAQA; then we provided that material to the Deans and the Heads of Departments. We had meetings with various faculties on an individual basis, and provided them with the format that qualifications had [to have] to prepare for registration. We gave assistance while they were busy doing this, and then eventually, in June 2000, everything was received by our [administrative] officers. The material was organized in a meaningful way per faculty, and then we delivered it to the SAQA.

The level of interrogation of the NQF policy remained focused on the technicalities involved in the formal requirements for the registration of qualifications. One respondent after another confirmed that there was no strategy on how the University would ensure that crucial concerns about access, teaching, learning and assessment would be reconfigured in accordance with the new policy. Yet another senior member of the academic staff offered insight into this essentially technical and managerial approach to the design implications of the NQF: “We compiled a program in Microsoft Access which enabled you to type in the things that were asked [for] little bit by little bit. And in the end it would give you that big involved report... in the form that they wanted and that made the process much easier.”

This highly technical, routine and fragmented response of institutional end users to the NQF in terms of curriculum change did not, however, mean that there was resistance against, or disagreement with, the broader goals that inspired the original NQF. As one academic leader recalls:

There was buy in, I think, to the broad goals. But the broad goals are so well formulated in the SAQA Act, and so incredibly universal and progressive. And nobody could really disagree with the broad goals. I mean, who would disagree with increasing access? Who would disagree with the goal of enabling people to move up and across the ladder of the NQF?

Nevertheless, the policy message carried down to Faculties and departments ensured that the implementation remained superficial with emphasis placed on the formatting of new qualifications. Here, respondents used what broad criteria and meanings were formally specified for learning outcomes, assessment criteria and so on. In short, while the University in principle agreed with the broad policy goals of the NQF, they also had reservations with implementing it ‘as is’. They accordingly adopted a position that would allow flexibility to retain ‘what worked’ in their context and exclude what they did not agree with or found difficult to implement. At the root of the institutional response to the NQF lies buried a much deeper set of concerns about academic freedom and autonomy.

But there were also straightforward concerns about implementation capacity as institutions grappled with one of the first major interventions targeting the formal curriculum of universities and (at the time) technikons. It is clear from stakeholders’ experiences that there simply was not sufficient capacity built *at the level of end-users* to make the language and meanings of the policy accessible to them. To many of the respondents in the study, this was a fundamental flaw that kept the vision of change proposed by the NQF policy locked in the minds of its developers and a few senior persons in university administration.

A senior member of staff explained how the administrative work that accompanied the implementation process seemed divorced from the initial goals of the NQF:

What I think universities got disenchanted with was when that [the NQF] came with an administrative language and a bureaucratic packaging, which made the original goals seem very, very distant from the policies of SAQA and the NQF. And that's where I think the universities just stopped engaging, however they were bound by legislation and required to submit their programmes.

Another senior staff member from a different department tasked with coordinating the overall implementation of the NQF policy at institutional level, pointed to the burden that the additional work of implementation demanded from academic staff: "But the fact that implementation of the NQF was generating a lot of paper work and a lot of administrative work made many staff negative about it."

Another barrier to implementation was the demands set by participating in the various committees responsible for ensuring the implementation of the policy; this presented a conflict of interests for academics. One of the lecturers records that participating in the many committees (such as Standards Generating Bodies) meant time away from conducting research and marking papers. For academics, research, teaching and marking of papers are core activities that define their identity as academic teachers; this was more of a priority for them than the new spate of activities required for the implementation of NQF policy. Academics did not always feel that the people constituting committees could relate to the academic environment since "stakeholders" came from industry, non-governmental organizations and other non-academic sites.

In this context, it was also unusual for university academics (as opposed to technician staff) to deliberate on curricular or pedagogical issues with people from industry who were perceived to have little in common with the academy. Therefore, while the process was recognized as democratic in that it included stakeholder participation, its relevance to higher education practice was not evident to the academic respondents in this study. The impression left with the academic delegates was that this was a process that emphasized the technical formatting of qualifications and the employability of graduates. The core issues of teaching, learning and curriculum design did not steer the discussions with these stakeholders.

This short representation of the voices and views of end users of the NQF focused on the impact of the framework on curriculum in higher education. But the ideological centrepiece of the NQF, at least as far as the trade unions were concerned, had to do with its enormous power for leveraging greater access to education and training for those previously excluded from learning. How did end users estimate the impact of the NQF as far as access to higher education was concerned?

#### **4.2. THE IMPACT OF THE NQF ON INCREASING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) was the primary policy instrument of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) for ensuring that learners were able to achieve a qualification in whole or in part based on their prior learning, albeit formal, non-formal or informal (SAQA,

1995: 16) learning. In response, most higher education institutions, at least in formal terms, put RPL policies and procedures in place. Higher education access was to be achieved in two ways. First, RPL could be determined through a challenge test so that a pass on the test leads to exemption from particular components of a course. Second, RPL could be determined through an assessment of a portfolio of work, to ascertain whether the learner's prior experience approximated the formal learning outcomes towards a qualification; in such a case, credit or recognition is granted towards a qualification for what the learner already knows.

The University of Pretoria position, entitled 'Policy with regard to postgraduate student cases'<sup>3</sup> makes provision for admission on the basis of what is called the traditional *academic route*, and then also on the basis of what is referred to as *standard competence*. The academic route refers to cases in which a student has proven herself on the basis of academic achievement. This access route describes how access is traditionally provided into the institution for the majority of learners. The second option allows for the Recognition of Prior Learning in that access can be granted on the basis of an estimation of standard competence. Standard competence can be evaluated in three ways: by means of a written motivation by the student, which is evaluated by the head of the department; the successful completion of an oral or written entrance examination in which one or more external examiner(s) is/are involved; and a formal submission to the Senate. Although access as described here through evaluation of standard competence is regarded as akin to the Recognition of Prior Learning, it needs to be said that no mention is made in this institutional policy about RPL. In fact, the University of Pretoria does not have a written access policy formally described as RPL.

Access through the evaluation of standard competence as described in the institutional policy is limited to postgraduate admissions and is not applicable to undergraduate students; the entrance requirements for baccalaureate degrees are still matriculation exemption. What lies behind this position is a more defensive and traditional discourse with respect to access, as became clear through interviews with senior administrators; as one administrator put it: "Universities use not a special system, but an existing senate system in which the prevailing discourse was one of standards and not one of open access."

Rather than facilitate access through the provisions of the RPL policy, universities like Pretoria prefer to follow more traditional routes of entry for undergraduate students, such as the University of Pretoria Foundation Year (UPFY) programme, which provides bridging courses in the sciences for disadvantaged students. Students who pass this programme are allowed formal entry into the UP science programmes.

There is widespread suspicion that RPL, as formally described in policy, might undermine quality, a position defended by a senior administrator: "The University has rules and regulations for basic reasons...you know you can't just allow mediocrity to slip in by the door."

<sup>3</sup> Document S1791/96 [amended G 27/96].

However, RPL is being implemented at postgraduate level across numerous Faculties of the University of Pretoria. One other senior member of staff indicates how it is being implemented and some of the challenges that make it difficult to implement RPL fully in the university context.

The Senate Sub-Committee would meet and it would be a combination of deans, the registrar, the vice-rector...there would be a hell of a debate that would break out in every meeting between a dean in a particular Faculty who says: but this person is really good, this person has 30 years of experience in disability education, how can we insist on an Honours degree for doing a Master's? Another senior academic would counter and say but experience is not the same thing as theoretical and abstract training...we should not allow the University of Pretoria to reduce standards.

As a result, the implementation of RPL is very limited in the postgraduate class and justification for this includes the fact that the University is able to attract large numbers of students who meet its formal requirements without having to rely on RPL.

However, the issue of demand is not the only factor that makes RPL less appealing to University Management. The quality of prior learning that learners bring with them to higher education has also been cited as a fundamental issue that make RPL less appealing. One head of department was adamant on this point: "They really battle with the Honours [degree]...There is a big difference between a traditional university culture...and the culture of a college."

Another senior member of staff made the connection to the quality of formal education in general:

When I think of our current Master's students, I can tell you now that the Honours level qualification has an enormous range in South Africa from really poor to very good. And so the student might have met the formal admission requirements, but would struggle enormously. Now when you have that experience the last thing you want to do as a university is to take students who do not even meet the formal requirements.

What is clear from this research, however, is that even within a single institution, there is a wide range of responses among practitioners to the NQF. And this became clearer as the research moved from the views of the senior administrators and senior academics to the staff in academic departments responsible for making sense of the NQF within particular disciplinary and field contexts. Three such responses are distilled here, presented as ideal types rather than mutually exclusive departmental reactions to the NQF.

#### **4.2.1. RESPONSE AS FORMAL COMPLIANCE**

This group of respondents constituted academics located in Centres of the University and who were teaching programmes that were largely designed to respond to specific client groups. In such a context, the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning methods was designed to fit the needs of the client groups or learners directly. These Centres offer specialized postgraduate



programmes, which were often funded by an external agency as a form of service to a particular group of clients. The programmes were therefore intended to drive change within specialized markets and had to be sensitive and responsive to the demands of the target group of learners served by the Centres. The Centres adopted the language, procedures and methods aligned with the NQF – such as outcomes based education, learner-centredness, and applied competence to formulate qualifications, as a direct response to clients needs. What is crucial to recognize in these client-driven programmes, is that the targeted beneficiaries are non-traditional learners who would not normally be able to access the university postgraduate courses. Accordingly, the Centres were compelled to enrol learners into their programmes through the Recognition of Prior Learning.

The Director of a Centre (or the relevant Head of Department) would proceed to establish the standard of competence and make a submission to the University Senate. This was difficult since official RPL policy does not give clear guidelines as to what the Head of Department should look for in evaluating the standard of competence, or what Senate would look for in making its decision. Moreover, very little support was given to the Heads of Departments in implementing this process. Most of the senior academics, who followed the standard of competence route, expressed a sense of powerlessness and frustration as they sought to advance access to non-traditional students into postgraduate programmes. One Head of Department found the process to entail considerable risk:

When I found that there were students who wanted to apply who were in fact coming without Honours Degrees, I was quite shocked to find that there wasn't a process already in place. And in fact I think that the Faculty tried to catch up with policy, and likewise the University was trying to do so...meanwhile I was working with all five students assuming they would get in. And I must be frank that four of the five students that were RPL'd had turned out to be the strongest students in the programme.

What distinguished this group of academics, is that they routinely and faithfully complied with the standard RPL policy required in official documentation even though there was little guidance on the substantive process within the institutions. Their goal was to find the quickest route to facilitate admission of non-traditional students in order to satisfy the external client body that funded the programme.

#### **4.2.2. RESPONSE AS SELECTIVE ADAPTATION**

This group describes departments whose response to the NQF was to follow a selective combination of what the NQF as policy required and what their institutional environment allowed. The first response to the NQF was to restructure the programmes of the department in line with the policy signals embedded in the new policy framework. This was done on the basis of the competences required of professionals trained in a particular qualification. In this case, the NQF structure of formatting programmes and qualifications was used as the basis for restructuring the instructional offerings in the department.

What is notable, is that the connection between what the NQF was recommending in terms of formatting and structuring qualifications was taken beyond this to redefine the identity and strategic niche of the Department. This led to some programmes that were traditionally offered in the Department being discontinued, while new ones were introduced. The restructuring also forced the Department to examine their articulation with other programmes, qualifications, departments and faculties that were offering similar qualifications or, who were drawing students from other departments into their own department.

The design and level of programmes were reformulated in line with the NQF levels and learning outcomes for the qualifications. The restructuring also forced the Department to review the access streams and integration across the different disciplines. The type of change and restructuring was radical and met with some resistance, since the restructuring was perceived as infringing on the independence and autonomy of individual academics.

But the response of the academic departments in this Faculty to the NQF was also moderated by a major reorganization that was taking place at about the same time viz., the incorporation of the college of education into this Faculty, and its implications for the job security of ordinary academics.

People [from the college] thought [that] if they would “curriculate” [redesign] the program[me] in such a way that they could make space for those people, those [college] people would be employed. It wasn't influenced by the criteria. People felt very, very threatened... It was very difficult when you've got this emotional process and you have to keep to the academic criteria.

This combination of compliant logic and survival logic explains the response of this Faculty to the NQF. On the one hand, the NQF guidelines were used to reconfigure the courses on offer within the programme in line with what was expected of the new teacher or educator. On the other hand, the programmes were also designed to ensure greater employability for those threatened with job losses under the terms of the college incorporation.

#### **4.2.3. RESPONSE AS STRATEGIC AVOIDANCE**

This section describes departments that recorded very little change in enhancing access or in improving the quality of teaching and learning; what such academic units were able to accomplish is to design a set of measures that, in effect, amounted to strategic avoidance of the core requirements of the National Qualifications Framework.

Access into a department is based on the traditional entrance requirements, and the University's own initiatives that deal with the admission of under-prepared students. The reliance on traditional entrance requirements is so entrenched that even students who could be admitted through Recognition of Prior Learning are required to first meet the basic or standard entrance requirements.

This requirement created a barrier that made it difficult for RPL to be implemented. What a key respondent in Dentistry underlined, was the fact that the entrance requirements for the field was determined nationally and controlled by the Health Professions Council. Therefore, the opportunity to acquire any relevant prior learning is limited to people who at least hold some form of formal qualification in a related field to Dentistry, which is qualification as a Dental Technician. Such requirements therefore exclude any other students acquiring experience in the field of Dentistry without a minimum qualification and registration with the Health Professions Council.

The influence of the Professional Council on curriculum structure and teaching practice determines the modalities of access in this Department. The overarching influence of the Professional Council, in this case, constrains decisions with respect to who teaches, whom to teach (access), how to teach and what constitutes meaningful learning outcomes.

In response to a question about what would need to change in order for the Department to have the independence to accommodate learners through RPL, the Head of Department was direct: “Detach ourselves (Dentistry) from the Medical profession.”

The Head of Department was reflecting, of course, on a professional practice with a history of 50 years, and what the NQF was, in fact, proposing was an epistemological and political detachment from that history and a movement into something new. The regulation of these professions and the power of its traditions explain why changes in the medical and dental curricula are so difficult to attain in these departments. Such revision of the curricula is even more difficult in a field that is deeply fragmented with different specialists, such as orthodontists and periodontists, working separately from each other. Each specialist area has a training site fully equipped with all the resources housed in its own specialist building. The fragmentation in the specialist areas is also reflected in the infrastructure of the buildings where learning is meant to take place, with separate clinics for the various specialist areas.

In short, the regulation of the profession, the establishment of powerful traditions and the deep fragmentation of the curricula led to an approach whereby the academic respondents to SAQA policy gave precedence to the status quo rather than to a reconfiguration of teaching, learning and assessment – in any deep sense – to comply with these new, external requirements. In the current classification, it was a matter of strategic avoidance – finding creative ways of shielding the curriculum from external regulation beyond what was already established through professional bodies and ingrained in professional practice.

The purpose of this section on the RPL as an instrument of the NQF was to describe *academic practice* that is, what academics and academic departments actually do (and

<sup>4</sup> Department of Education and Department of Labour (2003), An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System, Consultative Document, Pretoria, South Africa, p. 7. See also Paula Ensor (2003), The National Qualifications Framework and Higher Education in South Africa: some epistemological issues, *Journal of Education and Work* 16(3): 325-346.

understand themselves to be doing) in response to policy intervention in one institution. It does not seek to engage the deeper social, theoretical and epistemological reasons that might further explain the dissonance between policy and practice; or what the governmental response to the NQF Review called ‘the strained relationship between...workplace based and institution-based learning...’.<sup>4</sup> The recent Review of the NQF and the South African NQF Impact Study are both indicative of a serious attempt within and outside of SAQA to seriously assess the many conceptual, theoretical, political, and financial dilemmas facing the implementation of the Framework. What this segment of the study does, is to focus only on how academics respond in their practice to one aspect of NQF policy, that is, the recognition of prior learning.

## **5. A CASE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION CHANGE: PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1994-2004**

Although in existence since the early nineteenth century, Private Higher Education (PHE) in South Africa was largely ignored by both government and the research community for most of the twentieth century (Mabizela, 2002). This changed dramatically in the late 1990s when the rapid expansion of PHE alerted the public sector and the political world to its presence. In a matter of few years, PHE emerged from obscurity to become one of the most regulated and well-studied segments of the education enterprise (Kruss, 2002; Mapesela, 2002; Levy, 2003).

The advocates of private education base their arguments on the natural trajectory of global markets, the complementary role of the private sector, and the fundamental principles of democracy and liberty as enshrined in the Constitution<sup>5</sup> (see Smit, 1998). The opponents perceive private colleges as the iniquitous competitor of the public sector; a phenomenon which comprises institutions in such a way that ‘*vulnerable students receive mediocre programmes from private providers who take advantage of the unregulated terrain*’.<sup>6</sup> Between these two extremes there was a range of ambivalent attitudes and contradictions regarding private education, in general, and PHE, in particular. The main focus of this section is to map out and explain the South African government’s ambivalent position on PHE and the impact such a disposition has had on the sector.

### **5.1. THE PERIOD 1994–1997: HIGH EXPECTATIONS**

Following South Africa’s transformation to democracy, and the National Commission of Higher Education’s (NCHE) report (1996), there were high expectations for greater privatization of education provisions and for significant government investment in education. It was perceived that the public higher education sector by itself could not address the skills shortage and the needs of the labour market and that ‘the government is looking to the private sector for assistance. We [PHE] have the financial backing to provide an essential service to the community’.<sup>7</sup>

5 Republic of South Africa, The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996), section 29, subsection 2.

6 Moshoeshoe Monare, ‘Education needs urgent surgery’. *The Sunday Independent* 27 June 2004.

7 Cornia Pretorius, ‘Midrand to get its own university, Campus will be upgraded to meet growing demand’. *Sunday Times* 20 September 1998.

The White Paper on Higher Education (Department of Education, 1997) and the subsequent Higher Education Act of 1997 welcomed PHE into the higher education landscape, even though the White Paper assigned footnote status to some of the problems associated with the sector. The new policy context allowed for private providers to offer degrees and diplomas for the first time. This accommodation was aimed at increasing access, diversity and differentiation, based on a view of PHE as having a complementary role to the public sector in addressing the human resource needs of the new democracy. Official policies dealt mostly with the registration of the providers, as required by the Constitution. Registration at that stage was generally viewed in terms of consumer protection, though framed by a basic lack of elaboration as to how the policy would be implemented (Coombe, 2001):

The Minister recognizes that private provision plays an important role in expanding access to higher education, in particular in niche areas, through responding to labour market opportunities and student demand. The key challenge in expanding the role of private institutions is to create an environment which neither suffocate educationally sound and sustainable private institutions with State over regulation, nor allows a plethora of poor quality, unsustainable “fly by night” operators into the higher education market (Department of Education, 1997. p.10, online version)

Several reasons were forwarded to explain this *laissez-faire* attitude towards the private sector: the government’s lack of knowledge or conjecture about the private sector. The assumption was that the sector was insignificant and benign (Andrew, 1999; Coombe, 2001); the accommodative aspects of the White Paper, which was written in the spirit of access, democracy and reconciliation that pervaded negotiations in the first two years of democracy under the Government of National Unity (Thaver, 2001); the impact of globalization on the policy context, which gave support to the rhetoric of increased access, diversified providers and differentiation of academic programmes – all were perceived as necessary conditions in order for South Africa to become a recognised player in the global economy; and the expectation of massification.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the performance of higher education failed to satisfy the White Paper’s requirements for broader participation. In contrast to public higher education, however, the private sector was reported to be flourishing with student enrolments “informally” estimated at 500,000 (Cloete & Bunting, 2000). Public institutions in South Africa reacted to the trend by entering into a complex range of partnerships with both local and foreign private institutions. At the same time, negative perceptions of falling quality and standards in the public sector, fiscal constraints, student demonstrations and class stoppages led to a general mistrust of public HE. Consequently, private institutions, especially those offering overseas programmes and accreditation, became an attractive alternative.

It could be argued that the proliferation of private providers was encouraged by the promise of the NQF as envisaged in the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) Act (Act 58 of 1995), which allowed for articulation between training and education, and the accumulation of unit standards to

constitute a qualification. For private providers, this new environment comported well with their vision, that is, less stringent admission policies, the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and flexible entry and exit points.

### **5.2. THE PERIOD 1998–2000: DISILLUSION, SUSPICION AND HOSTILITY**

Following the unexpected growth of PHE, the general perception was that the unregulated terrain and the “policy vacuum” allowed a “free for all” in which PHE institutions strategically positioned themselves to ensure greater market share and diversity of income sources. Consequently, the second Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, announced in his “Call to Action” the intention to apply stricter regulations to the private sector in order to protect the interest of the public system (Department of Education, 1999).

The enabling context for the proliferation of private institutions that existed in the first few years after the dismantling of the Apartheid State changed to one that became restrictive and even suspicious of the private provision of education. PHE began to be viewed as competitor to public institutions, especially to historically black institutions or HBUs (Mapesela, 2002).

From 1999 onwards, private providers were required to register with the Department of Education and to have their programmes accredited by SAQA (the South African Qualifications Authority) until such time that the HEQC (Higher Education Quality Committee) was established. With the registration process, the Department began to realize the expansiveness of the sector and the complexity revealed in the process of registration and accreditation. There was not enough clarity on what constituted higher education, on who the providers were, and on how to obtain reliable information (SAQA, 2001).

At the same time that the Department was fumbling through the initial stages of setting up an operational registration and accreditation mechanism, the private sector continued to expand, coupled with the very visible emergence of trans-national institutions on the national landscape. The Department and SAQA received over 700 inquiries for application.<sup>8</sup> By late 1999, 323 applications were received by the Department of Education. This unforeseen development intensified the confusion and contradictions in the second period.

The registration process was complicated and was confusing to both government and providers. The private providers maintained that the Department of Education started the process with a negative approach, seeing their role as being that of ‘watchdog over PHEIs operating in South Africa’ with the aim of ‘root[ing] out poor quality, unsustainable, fly-by-night operators’ (Andrew, 1999). On the other hand, many private providers were inexperienced and could not provide either the necessary registration information to the Department of Education, or appropriate course materials for quality assurance purposes to SAQA.<sup>9</sup> Providers were also not forthcoming with data about enrolments, which only increased suspicion about their operations. The uncertainty and confusion caused a great

<sup>8</sup> Media release 10 January 2000: Registration of private higher education institutions. DoE

<sup>9</sup> Colleges left out in the cold; ‘Some grievances with the registration process’. *The Star* 26 January 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Marcus, R. (2001) Interview. [www.che/reflections/Marcus](http://www.che/reflections/Marcus)

deal of agitation, irritation, and ill feelings between SAQA, the Department and private providers; some private providers brought successful court actions against the Minister.<sup>10</sup>

The situation became even more complex with the Skills Development Act (1998) and the establishment of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and 25 new Education Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs); each of these bodies may accredit a private provider of higher education.

Once the HEQC was established, it took over the responsibility for the accreditation process from SAQA. In the CHE's view, the SAQA/NQF system, as it was structured, was neither workable nor sustainable. While SAQA adopted a developmental approach that would allow the institutions to slowly develop their capacities to conform with the requirements, the HEQC restricted accreditation to private providers offering learning programmes leading to whole qualifications, excluding private providers who offer short courses and learning programmes that lead to unit standards. The latter had to refer to the appropriate ETQA SETAs for accreditation. This caused more confusion and a feeling of victimization among some private providers.<sup>11</sup>

The policy context was significantly altered to fit in with the changed approach. In 1999, the CHE requested the Minister to place a moratorium on public-private partnerships.<sup>12</sup> The Higher Education Amendment Act of 1999 gave the Minister of Education much greater power to regulate private providers of higher education. It also prevented private or foreign higher education institutions from using the words "university", "technikon" or "higher education college".

The amendments were justified by the CHE as a necessary step to curb the proliferation of a number of small, "fly-by-night" operations and to counteract the drop in enrolments in public institutions 'even though there is no data available to link declining enrolments in public HE with the growth of private HE' (CHE, 2001).

For the private providers, the new amendments came as a shock. It was perceived by some as a short-sighted policy that would hinder the country from meeting the challenges of globalization. Others saw it as a futile attempt to bar foreign institutions from entering the country given the capacities for access through new information technology networks and the Internet.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, there was no objection to the principle of regulation and there was an acknowledgement of the problems associated with an unregulated terrain. Others argued against the protectionist nature of the changes, which allowed certain local higher education institutions to continue with weak programmes and practices instead of allowing open competition to challenge and eliminate weaknesses (Bitzer, 2002). Representatives of higher

<sup>11</sup> Notes for the record of the meeting of representative of the APPETD and the CHE. 10 December 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum to the Minister of Education: Towards a framework and strategy for reconfiguration the higher education system: recommendation and advice. CHE, December 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Dr R Marcus conducted by H Perold. [www.che/reflections/](http://www.che/reflections/)

<sup>14</sup> Emma Gordon, Open the higher education market. *Business Day* 13 March 2001.

education institutions were concerned that this clause would decrease their institutional autonomy. The amendments generated public debate. It was argued that the hostile references to private institutions were a result of pent-up resentment by sectors of the ANC government against private encroachment into areas that were mainly government-run monopolies.<sup>14</sup>

At this stage, the attention of both government and the research community turned on PHE, simultaneously researching, regulating and controlling the sector. Often regulation and control preceded research and formal studies of the sector. The first empirical research was completed in 2000 (Mabizela *et al.*, 2000), with the initial findings later updated by Subotsky (2002, 2003). These were mainly quantitative studies based on limited and sketchy data captured by the Department of Education for registration purposes.

### **5.3. THE PERIOD 2000–2004: RESEARCH, REGULATION AND CONTROL**

In 2000, the Minister of Education requested the CHE to provide him with a set of concrete proposals on ‘the shape and size’ of the higher education sector, including the private sector. The study that followed corrected some basic misconceptions on the size of the latter sector, and the racially skewed and elitist character of PHEIs. The report further identified distinctive trends within the private sector (Mabizela *et al.*, 2000). The EPU research claimed the following: that the sector was smaller than estimated; that PHE was not dominated by white students, but was a rather de-racialized system; that most of the private institutions were single-focus entities and offered programmes in one field only; that almost half (48%) of the enrolments were in business/commerce/management; and that most of the programmes were at NQF level 5. Only fourteen per cent was at NQF level 6 (first degree); six per cent was at level 7 (Master’s) and less than one per cent was at doctoral level. The researchers concluded that with only six per cent of reported enrolments in the Master’s and doctoral levels, the private sector, and the *trans-nationals* in particular, hardly posed a threat at the higher levels, except in the MBA field.

In a report to the Minister, the CHE (2000) continued to acknowledge the potential benefit of PHEIs in providing diversified education; yet it argued that the sector was inadequately monitored in terms of registration, regulation and quality assurance. The CHE therefore requested that the moratorium on private-public partnerships remain in place until the nature of these arrangements could be clarified. The report argued that a concentration by private providers on programmes with high economic returns could damage public institutions. It also differentiated between single-purpose and multi-purpose institutions. The CHE suggested that private providers, which function as multi-purpose institutions, should be required to meet the set criteria for public institutions to fulfil their social purposes, roles and goals.

In response to the CHE’s report, the Minister of Education released *The National Plan for Higher Education* (Department of Education, 2001), which made explicit the government’s



attitude toward the private sector. PHE was presented as a competitor to the public sector, especially over historically disadvantaged institutions, with obvious advantages because of its strategic positioning and its 'limited focus on the delivery of low cost, high demand programmes which are financially lucrative, such as those in business, commerce and management' (Department of Education, 2001, Section 1.3).

In order to regulate the sector, the National Plan linked the registration of private higher education to three factors: (i) the financial viability of institutions; (ii) the quality of programme offerings; and (iii) whether the provision is in the public interest (Department of Education, 2001, Section 4.6).

The Ministry is concerned that the rapid expansion of foreign institutions, especially in fields of study that are already well provided for by the public and local private institutions, may adversely impact on the public higher education system at a time when the latter is undergoing fundamental restructuring (Department of Education, 2001: Section 4.6).

In this period, the government's attitude had clearly become more interventionist and protectionist, especially against foreign institutions.

## 6. EXPLAINING CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Across the globe, higher education has changed in dramatic ways in the past three decades. Scholars are at one on *the external manifestation* of these changes: the "massification" of higher education, the explosion of private higher education, the greater role of the State in the regulation of higher education, the emergence of new organizational forms in higher education, the declining availability of government funding of institutions, the expanding managerialism in the academic workplace, the changing conditions of academic employment, and new forms and sites of knowledge production (Altbach, 2000; Gumport, 2000; Deem, 2001; Scott, 2002; Jacob & Hellstrom, 2003). How higher education institutions have responded to these changes, is captured in a host of *descriptive categories* from the entrepreneurial university (Clark, 1998) to the enterprise university (Marginson & Considine, 2000) to the hybrid university (Mouwen, 2000) to the networked university (Lewis, Marginson & Snyder, 2005). What remains relatively less well documented, are powerful explanations for the origins, nature and trajectory of change in higher education. With the exception of globalization, the focus in this section falls on new explanations beyond the familiar theories of change in higher education, such as neo-institutionalism, culturalism and adaptation theory.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, the most common explanation for these global shifts in the organization and purposes of higher education is the phenomenon of "globalization", usefully defined as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Held, 1991:9). By viewing changes in higher education through the lens of globalization, it is possible to understand the

<sup>15</sup> Kay Harman & Lynn Meek (2002), 'Introduction to Special Issue: Merger Revisited: international perspectives on mergers in higher education' (Higher Education 44(1):1-4); Peter Maasen (1996), Governmental Steering and the Academic Culture, CHEPS, Management and Policy in Higher Education; Leo Goedegebuure (1992), *Mergers in Higher Education: A comparative perspective*. Utrecht: Lemma.

inexorable logic of economic reasoning within universities, the transnational adoption of common discourses (such as managerialism) and technologies (such as quality assurance) within institutions, and the growing vulnerability of public universities to global and regional trade in higher education services.

Universities are, however, not uncritical respondents to global authority. Here, another phenomenon, described by Weiler (2005) as ‘ambivalence’, aids in understanding the behaviour of the State and universities towards globalization. This ambivalence is a function of societal and political contradictions about the role of knowledge and the purposes of universities. For Weiler, ambivalence at once describes contradictory attitudes towards a particular issue, whereby one attitude inhibits the expression of another; and at the same time conveys uncertainty as to which approach, attitude or treatment to follow. The concept of ambivalence is best demonstrated in the South African government’s attitude towards private higher education. Rhetorically, government continues to recognize and encourage the complementary role of the private sector, while at the same time limiting, constraining and even closing down private provision through regulation and control. At the root of this ambiguity is a broader set of ambivalent behaviours that lie between globalization and nationalism (or regionalism); centralization and decentralization; higher education as elitist and as a “massified” system; reliance on market forces and increasing State control; and between the rights of individuals and the rights of community.

Neither globalization nor ambivalence can, however, explain the remarkable agility of universities *as institutions* in the face of their changing external environment in the last two decades. Sociologist, Francisco Ramirez (2005), offers a powerful explanation through his thesis on the ‘rationalization’ of universities. Ramirez agrees that universities are changing in the direction of greater inclusiveness, usefulness and flexibility, but argues that such responses are not simply rational adaptations to the environment; rather, these changes are ‘propelled by general rationalizing accounts to enhance their legitimacy...[and]...further enhanced by the rationalization of universities as organizations and the corresponding decline of tradition and charisma as the legitimating sources of university identity’ (2005: 2). These processes are nevertheless transnational in character as universities everywhere embody the ideal of ‘the socially useful university’ away from the idea of ‘the university as the institutional embodiment of high culture and canonical knowledge’ (2005: 3). As universities became less elitist under the force of massification, this same logic inspired greater utility, diversity and flexibility with respect to university knowledge. This “socially embedded university” diffuses world wide, creating a dense global network that further carries the logic of mass higher education so that ‘At that point university-specific traditions or highly historicized national university profiles are undercut by the normalization of the rationalized university’ (2005: 27).

Explaining how institutions change in relation to their external environment cannot, however, explain the mechanisms internal to institutions that allow and enable such responses. In the context of runaway capitalism, Slaughter (2001) examines the changing structures of

power/knowledge inside higher education. On the one hand, the nature of capitalism is changing, resulting in discussions about the “post-industrial” or “knowledge” economy, “late capitalism,” and “new times”; on the other hand, its dominance, expansion and “globalization” is also evident. Slaughter (2001) draws attention to the ways in which the structures of political power function within institutions of higher education. Analyses of accountability and quality assurance have treated the State as homogeneous and monolithic, instead of looking at which groups and forces are pushing for what ways in which to shape higher education and why they are doing it. Little attention has been paid to the relationship between the State and scholars of higher education who through networks, actions and work influence the formulation and implementation of policies regionally and globally (Slaughter, 2001: 396-7).

The “knowledge economy thesis” shifts attention to the ways in which globalization has led to the transformation of knowledge itself (Scott, 2002). As changing modes of production transformed society from an agricultural, to an industrial and then to an information-driven economy, knowledge became more and more critical as a form of transnational exchange and a source of new wealth. In this context, research knowledge shifted from its traditional or Mode 1 form (basic, disciplinary-based, institutional research) to a distributed or Mode 2 form (applied, trans-disciplinary, extra-institutional research) (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994). Yet, an important critique of the knowledge economy thesis has been that it underestimates the organization, authority and resilience of institutions (Jansen, 2000); that is, the enthusiastic literature on the knowledge economy simply ignores the ways in which universities as knowledge brokers undermine and resist transitions from Mode 1 to Mode 2 forms of knowledge organization. In a memorable turn of phrase, Muller (2003: 103 & 102) observes that ‘the institution of science keeps its own council’ and proceeds to examine ‘the constraints placed on choice or responsiveness by [institutions’] sedimented histories, by their inherited institutional forms, which project particular dispositions for action’.

Finally, in a recent study, Jansen (2002) offers a “contingency theory” of change that links the behaviour of the State and institutions rather than the independent actions of either actor (or set of actors) in explaining the outcomes of the restructuring of higher education in South Africa. Using comparative case studies of change, this research posits that the merger of higher education institutions in the country took on such diverse forms and yielded such disparate results because the ways in which government responded to different institutions and the ways in which those different institutions responded to government, co-determined merger outcomes.

In sum, what is clear from the literature reviewed, is that institutions do not change in the same ways under conditions of globalization; and that even within single institutions there are diverse responses to the external environment, as the NQF study in South Africa has demonstrated. While there are no doubt signs of the marketization and corporatization of the university (Gould, 2003; Kirp, 2003), Meek (2005) makes the useful point that ‘Statements about the advent of a new type of university are more normative than empirical’. What is

equally clear, is that despite widespread changes in higher education, such changes are neither linear, predictable nor uniform within or across national contexts (Currie *et al.*, 2003; Henkel, 2004; Meek, 2005).

What these varied explanations for changes in higher education do, however, is to bring together the personal and the political, the State and the institutions, and trans-national agency and national government. Together, these explanatory concepts shed light on both the power and the limits of external authority and the external environment on institutions, and the processes that render institutions capable and culpable in relation to change. Once common theories of domination and dependency now find themselves displaced by new explanations of authority and interdependency in a globalized world.

## 7. CONCLUSION

What does this research on higher education reveal about the problem of change? This study on higher education change demonstrates, again, that rationalist accounts of policy reform are inadequate for understanding the origins, trajectory and effects of educational change, especially in the turbulence of transition states like South Africa. Change is not linear, uniform or predictable in educational or, for that matter, any other social settings. Reforms seeking change are not simply 'implemented'; they are interpreted by real actors in real institutions, so that even with the same planning script (the National Qualifications Framework), academic departments within the same university understand and respond differently to planned change. Institutional change is not a simple reflex reaction to official policy intentions, but a complex response to both internal (institutional) and external (environmental) stimuli. Moreover, the way in which universities respond to change is as much a product of institutional dynamics as it is an active response to governmental policy. Planned change in the public sector, the study shows, can easily be undermined and redefined in the light of unexpected changes in the external environment, such as the unprecedented explosion of private further and higher education. Change is as dependent on capacity as it is on political will, as the case of RPL demonstrates. Change in an interconnected world is as much an adoption of transnational discourses and technologies as it is an accommodation of national policy demands. Even in national terms, government policy is simply one of many change stimuli, which could include professional bodies (as in the case of the health sciences in this study), institutional standard bearers (as in the RPL case) and academic or disciplinary organization. Changing participation rates is more easily achieved than changing performance outputs – a point clearly demonstrated when comparing changes in the race and gender demographics of universities and continuities in research productivity by race and gender. The mere observation of change does not mean much, for change can be deep and meaningful or it can be superficial and temporary; yet, whether permanent or transient, planned change leaves its impact on practice. In short, institutional change bows neither to central planning nor market forces; it yields neither to global pressures or local realities; it responds neither to institutional inertia or external pressures. Rather, higher education change, whether planned or incidental, takes its pace and direction from the interaction among these variables, shaped by particular institutional contexts.

To conclude, seeking changes in universities is a highly complex endeavour to be pursued with modest claims about planning ambitions, measured accounts about institutional contexts, and moderate expectations about sustainability.

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