

## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Orientation

This study investigates possible key factors in the management, and by implication, the provision of strategically relevant student development and support services (SDSS) in higher education in South Africa. Strategically relevant SDSS would be a service linked to institutional and national goals and priorities and with a proven impact on success rates of students.

The study is done in the context of the higher education landscape in South Africa that has undergone several deep-rooted changes (Genis, 2002). Change in the country has manifested in many forms and through various initiatives. The transformation and restructuring in higher education have however been government-driven (Department of Education, 2003a), with strong influencing by labour-driven priorities (Jansen & Christie, 1999). The deep impact of changing curricula, revised funding mechanisms and student needs, has made it imperative for student affairs practitioners, education managers and higher education practitioners and strategists to critically assess academic activity within higher education. It is not only academic activity in general but specifically practices and the scope (approach and actual services with regard to academic and personal development of students) of SDS offered to students in higher education that has to be evaluated. The South African Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) states in a report, entitled *The restructuring and transformation in higher education*, that the legacy of apartheid in South Africa continues to burden the higher education system (Centre for Higher Education Transformation, 2002) despite the changes that have been implemented. Such an assertion stems from what is perceived to be the inability of the education system to meet the challenges of reconstruction and development (Centre for Higher Education Transformation, 2002). Statements to the effect by the Council have elicited widespread and critical debate on the management and provision of teaching, learning and support

services in higher education in South Africa. The problem regarding the management and provision of student development and support services in higher education is an internationally debated phenomenon and is not unique to Africa or South Africa.

In the international arena, numerous countries are embarking on skills development and other strategies to align higher education with national goals and priorities and to improve its relevancy, impact and sustainability. For example, in 1997 the Department of Education and Employment in the United Kingdom commissioned a study that resulted in a comprehensive strategy called "*the Learning Age -- a renaissance for a new Britain*" (Fryer, 1997). The aim of the study was to focus on the skills development needs of the United Kingdom for the next century. Similar studies were done in Australia (Perrone & Vickers, 2003), Asia (Cheng, Ng & Mok, 2002) and countries in the European Union (European Commission, 2002). In South Africa, the National Skills Development Plan of the Department of Labour (Department of Labour South Africa, 2001) serves as the foundation for skills development initiatives.

Student development and support practitioners, educators and managers in education have become increasingly aware of the changing needs of students at all levels of higher education (Beekman, 2001; Peelo & Wareham, 2002; Trainor, 2002).

The Department of Education use indicators such as the high attrition rates and low throughput rates (terminology used by the Department of Education that indicates successful completion of academic programmes) to measure the success of higher education. Attrition and throughput are the two critical factors for higher education to address, even though the phenomena are multifaceted and require reflection from a variety of different academic perspectives.

The approaches and motives for assessment of student performance trends may differ, but analysis indicates that the main factors in both local and international review of student performance, and by inference the performance of higher education, are mostly associated with the following four areas:

- The changing profile of students (specifically in terms of the developmental and sociological challenges in modern-day society as well as general environmental factors).
- The changing academic requirements (transformation to outcomes-based education models, progress towards student-centred learning and facilitating learning).
- The changing requirements of industry and the employment sector (referring to the advanced skills requirements in the employment and entrepreneurial markets).
- The changing paradigms in education. This is especially applicable to South Africa, where a rapid change was to be made from a very rigid and content-driven curriculum system with an emphasis on teaching, to an outcomes-based system, with the change in emphasis to facilitating learning in varied forms and implied flexibility.

The attention that national and international forums have afforded this matter could be an indication of the urgency with which it should be addressed. The literature indicates that higher education is internationally seen to be at a crossroads in terms of its sustainability (Arjen & Jickling, 2002) and capacity to address national skills needs effectively. Most of the public higher education institutions in South Africa offer student development and support services or at least address some student development and support needs. There is, however, no formal coordination or framework available regarding the comprehensive provision and coordinated management of student development and support services in higher education. Such frameworks and/or coordination strategies do exist in some developed countries, for example, in the Canadian Department of Education, Employment and Training (2002).

Legislated and coordinated guidelines for the provision and management of student development and support services at higher education institutions in South Africa are very limited.

There are the indicators or outcomes inferred by the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education South Africa, 2001a):

- Outcome 2: Increased graduate outputs
  - Subsection 2.3.2: Academic development
- Outcome 3: Broadened social base of students
- Outcome 5: Changed enrolments by field of study
- Outcome 6: Enhanced cognitive skills of graduates
  - Subsection 3.1.2: Race equity: students
  - Subsection 3.1.3: Gender equity: students
  - Subsection 3.1.5: Equity and disabled students
- Outcome 7: Increased equity in access and success rates
- Outcome 15: Programme and infrastructural collaboration.

The rationale for my study is the need experienced for the effective research and analysis of the management and provision strategies of SDS services. This need is identified through my own experiences as a practitioner and manager and confirmed by the related discourses in the higher education environment.

## **1.2 Concept clarification**

Within education, higher education, management, student development and support and related area specific terminologies and concepts are used. Many of these concepts and terminologies will be used frequently in this thesis. It is deemed important that they be defined within the context of the study.

### **1.2.1 Higher education and higher education institution**

In adherence to the generally understood and used concept the study refers to **higher education** as formal post secondary education at an accredited or officially recognised **institution of higher education** within the country as was

confirmed by national legislation. In South Africa the relevant legislation would be Act 27 of 1995 (Department of Education South Africa, 1995) and the Act constituting the South African Qualifications Authority (Department of Education South Africa, 1995) also the most recent the merger-related legislation, for example the establishment of a University of Technology (Department of Education South Africa, 1997).

### **1.2.2 Student development and support services (SDSS)**

The concept **student development and support services** is investigated in greater depth in Chapter 2. Literature provides a multitude of definitions based on specific practices in counselling, student development, academic development and all other related services (Beekman, 2001; Engelbrecht, 2002; UNESCO, 2002). Because of the varied interpretations of this function within higher education institutions in both Africa and South Africa, I select to go with the broad and very inclusive definition where the term refers to all services related to the development or enhancement of skills and the support of students in an aligned and integrated manner. SDSS would then include career counselling, study counselling, language development programmes, information literacy, personal skills and social skills development and supportive services to students with disability (TUT, 2005). SDSS is therefore used as an inclusive term referring to all developmental and supportive services that forms an integral part of the programme curricula offered by an institution.

### **1.2.3 Management of student development and support services**

The **management of student development and support services** refers to the line functions, positioning within the institution, unit-management structure and specific approach or strategy in providing the student development and support function within the institution of higher education.

### **1.2.4 Academic policy (Teaching and Learning Policy)**

For the purpose of this study **academic policy** refers to the specifically formulated academic regulations on the conduct of academic business within

the institution of higher education. These policies are also referred to as Policies on Teaching and Learning. Academic policies (or Teaching and Learning policies) would stipulate the range and scope of academic activity; the focus areas; academic delivery; funding, academic research and all related matters. It is general practice for institutions of higher education to have such policies. The effective implementation of a quality assurance practice within an institution of higher education is monitored by the Council on Higher Education, through the Higher Education Quality Committee (Council on Higher Education, 2004).

### **1.2.5 National education policies and strategies**

**1.2.5.1 National education strategies:** National education strategies are those strategies generated by national bodies (often by task teams and mandated by the Minister), that provide conceptual frameworks and the philosophy of specific aspects within the education context. A well known example of such a national strategy is the White paper on Higher Education commissioned by Prof Kader Asmal during his term as Minister of Education. A strategy document leads to the formulation of policy to facilitate the implementation of the strategy. In the case of the National Plan for Higher Education it leads to an Act of Parliament to ensure the implementation of the directives and specific strategy as was formulated in the plan.

**1.2.5.2 National education policies:** National education policies are those policies by national bodies that enforce strategy. Such policies are meant to ensure the implementation of strategies as is illustrated with the National Plan for Higher Education becoming a legal imperative with the promulgation of the Act of Parliament (Department of Education South Africa, 2001a).

National policies impacting directly on higher education are mostly from national government agencies, e.g. Department of Education and the National South African Qualification Authority but may also be policies within the Labour sector that may be relevant to all in

South Africa. An example of such a policy from the Labour sector would be the Skills Development Act (Department of Labour South Africa, 1998).

The policies are enforced by these agencies via the various systems in place to determine programmes, accreditation, auditing, quality assurance and others (Department of Labour South Africa, 1998).

### **1.2.6 Institutional policies and strategies relevant to the academic contexts**

Institutional policies and strategies, as opposed to national policies and strategies, are those policies and strategies that are generated by and relevant to a specific institution of higher education. This study focuses on those policies and strategies directly relevant to the SDSS. Within all institutions of higher education there are policies regulating admissions, finances, academic offering, assessment practices and staff development. These policies impact directly on the SDSS.

### **1.2.7 Programme and qualification mix (PQM)**

Programme and qualification mix (PQM) is a relatively new term though not an entirely new concept within the South African higher education environment. The concept refers to the specific blend of qualifications and training programmes an institution is allowed to and accredited to offer. The specific PQM of an institution is determined via application by the National Department of Education. The PQM is publicly announced by the institution of higher education as an institutional prospectus (calendars and yearbooks). The programme and qualification mix may include training via various modes of delivery, various qualification and exit levels and specific training niche areas relevant to the institution. There are formal application procedures and official guidelines. The strict regulation and application strategy for new programmes as is imposed by the Department of Education suggests limited institutional autonomy on the extension or expansion of training options.

### 1.2.8 Outcomes-based education

Spady (2004) offers an interpretation on what OBE is with emphasis on the fact that OBE requires systemic change and not merely curriculum change.

Spady (2004) identifies four pillars for OBE that give clarity on the very nature of OBE.

The four pillars of OBE are:

- Clarity of focus on learning outcomes: Students ultimately need to demonstrate achievement of specific learning.
- The design down/ build back approach to developing a curriculum.
- High expectations: The expectation that learners are able to achieve the outcomes and therefore a system that facilitates flexible learning.
- Expanded opportunity: To go beyond strictly defined blocks of time and organisation as is typical of institutions of higher education.

Outcomes-based education is then a philosophy of education that requires a specific strategy for implementation. In South Africa the education authorities has fundamentally refocused the primary and secondary schooling systems towards an outcomes-based approach with gradual implementation. The first cohort of learners who was exposed to an OBE system from Grade 1 through to Grade 12 will be accessing higher education in 2009. Higher education in turn is challenged with the same pressures for change towards OBE in order to align learning programmes to the national qualifications framework. The sector is finding it a complex education approach to deal with in career orientated and higher education in the framework of outcomes. There seems to be a perceived conflict between an outcomes-based and a discipline-based approach and therefore the resistance from the higher education sector to change from a discipline-based approach to an integrated outcomes-approach (Cloete et al, 2002; Jansen & Christie, 1999 and Dekker & van Schalkwyk,



1989). Higher education systems have traditionally been qualification oriented but structured into clearly defined disciplines while OBE requires an interdisciplinary approach to acquire integrated learning outcomes that may lead to a qualification (TUT, 2006).

### **1.2.9 Education funding framework**

The Department of Education determines and executes national strategy and policy on funding and determines the annual funding allocation to institutions of higher education, through a formulated framework. This framework stipulates the allocation of subsidy and other funding streams (teaching grants) to higher education institutions (Mouton, 2000). The framework also provides institutions with a financial planning guideline as it is possible to calculate certain levels of income from input subsidy (first allocations based on registrations) in advance.

The Minister may adjust or adapt the funding framework in response to shifts in the national education and general political priorities. Institutions submit budget statements that are verified by data on the Higher Education Management Information System-data (HEMIS-data). Allocations based on input and output factors then culminate in a calculated academic subsidy as prescribed by the funding framework. Funding is always a topic for debate within the higher education community. It is at present done in a highly structured and categorised framework of prescriptive guidelines to institutions to regulate the proportionate division of funding between various primary areas, i.e.. academic, administration and staffing components. Further factor loadings are determined by priority areas identified by the Department of Education. Targeted areas are natural sciences, engineering and technology, business and commerce and education. Funding ratios for these areas are differentiated to promote levels of student intake and qualification. The framework is published in advance and made available to all stakeholders to facilitate institutional-budget planning (Department of Education South Africa, 2001b).

### **1.2.10 Mergers in higher education**

Mergers was introduced to ensure and fast track transformation of the South African higher education landscape and was predisposed by the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education South Africa, 2001a). The merger of two or more institutions into more comprehensive and consolidated education institutions, lead to the establishment of four types of higher education institutions, namely technikons, universities of technology (former technikons), comprehensive universities (combinations of technikons and universities) and universities.

Jansen (2002) describes mergers in higher education as "*inter-institutional combinations in transitional contexts*". Jansen and other commentators (Soobrayan, Sehoole, Bandi, Lethoko, Chalufu, Melck as cited in Jansen, 2002) argue the complex processes and unique dynamic of every merger event.

### **1.2.11 Developing country**

The term "developing country" is an economic category indicating that the country is in a phase in development towards full democracy and economic independence.

## **1.3 Defining the topic**

The concept student development and support services is broadly understood as all those services included in the academic programme curricula or offered in a co-curricular mode (parallel to the mainstream curriculum but not necessarily credit bearing) activities that directly support and enhance the academic activities of learning and facilitating learning within the higher education institution. This is an inclusive definition, covering both the developmental inputs (skills programmes) and the supportive (counselling type) inputs. The topic of the study therefore includes both primary modalities of development (learning, teaching, skills development and facilitating learning) as well as supportive services (counselling and guidance).

The developmental and pro-active approach is in contrast to the traditional purely reactive and supportive approach. The approach is more holistic and directed at the student as a person with specific developmental, supportive and interrelated needs. Service aspects included are all forms of supportive and developmental counselling (personal, career and study counselling); academic, social and personal skills development; remedial interventions (e.g. language proficiency development) and specialised support to students with disability.

The complexity and range of student development and support as a function within higher education, as well as the financial, political and socio-economic impact of such services, serve as motivation to systematically determine and investigate those factors that may be considered as critical and essential in the management and provision of student development and support services in higher education -- with specific reference to the South African context (as a developing country) and in comparison with current global/international trends.

### **1.3.1 Problem statement**

The provision and management of student development and support services in higher education in South Africa has become an important factor in addressing some of the critical issues in higher education. Parallel to this there is a perceived lack of strategy and clarity on the purpose, focus and expected impact of the efforts to address such issues. This, coupled with my personal experience, serves to motivate me to attempt to answer the following question:

**How can student development and support be provided for and managed to have strategic value for higher education in a developing country?**

The focus area has the potential for several wide-ranging problems to be investigated. Aspects such as content, value (improved student success and graduation rates), the accommodation of student developmental and supportive needs in academic programmes and other factors also require investigation.

For the purpose of this study, however, I focus specifically on the provision and management of student development and support in the higher education environment and strategies and decision-making on various levels (refer figure 1.1) that will enable student development and support to have an impact on the higher education outcome and success rate. I further attempt to answer the above question in the context of the specific needs within a developing country.

Figure 1.1 depicts the various levels of policy, strategy and decision-making that impact on SDSS in higher education within the context of a developing country. The various items listed are unpacked and evaluated in Chapter 2.



**Micro-level impact: Intra-institutional policy, strategy and approaches**

- Student development and support strategy of the institution
- Strategic thinking and management of units
- Unit structures and line functions
- Unit budget administration
- Service portfolio in SDSS

**Figure 1.1: Levels of strategy and policy with impact on student development and support in higher education**

### **1.3.2 Research aim**

The aim of the study is to develop an increased understanding of the factors regarding management and provision of student development and support within the higher education context. Screening the findings on factors regarding management and provision against national strategies and international trends may uncover a new insight into the current state versus the ideal state of student development and support in higher education.

The process of discovery further enhances the value of the study, since I as the researcher have to:

- identify existing strategies and policies relevant to SDSS (refer figure 1.1);
- review existing practices for the provision and management of student support in higher education and compare practices at local institutions with international trends and benchmarks in SDSS,
- identify critical factors regarding the approach, structure and policy within institutions, with regard to student development and support;
- identify possible local benchmarks in SDSS,

- determine possible critical factors based on the experience and perspectives of practitioners involved in student development and support in higher education,
- determine possible critical factors based on the experience and perspectives of senior management in higher education and support services,
- determine possible critical factors based on the experience and perspectives of decision and policy-making partners in higher education in the Government.

The research outcomes could therefore contribute to the body of knowledge by:

- providing a **broad framework** of critical areas that could influence decision-making for the positioning, structuring and funding of student development and support in higher education in the South African context.
- creating a starting point for **benchmarking** specific quality assurance standards for the management of student development and support in higher education; and
- creating a starting point for determining further **practical guidelines** and criteria for student development and support services in higher education
- facilitating better understanding of the purpose, role and focus and, by implication the outcomes, of student development and support in higher education, as well as the specific role of the student development practitioner.

In order to answer to the above a number of secondary research questions are posed.

### 1.3.3 Secondary research questions

The study attempts to identify critical factors in the management of student development and support services in higher education. The research problem

may be resolved by addressing a number of secondary research questions and therefore has a number of research objectives:

**Table 1.1 Secondary research questions and research objectives**

<b>Secondary question</b>	<b>Research objective</b>
i. Tracing the existing range and the scope of student development and support services in higher education.	To be able to define the full range and scope of student development and support activity in higher education.
ii. Determining how national policy and legislation have effect on the provision and management of student development and support services in higher education.	To be able to Identify the specific national and institutional strategies and policies that impact directly on SDSS.
iii. Investigating how institutional policies and strategic plans have effect on SDSS in higher education.	
iv. Exploring existing national and international benchmarks and frameworks to indicate good practice for student development and support in higher education.	To be able to indicate specific benchmarks that indicate good practice for SDSS
v. Identifying some of the critical provision and management factors for an effective SDSS.	To be able to identify and list critical management and provision factors for effective SDSS.

#### **1.4 The research design**

The study required a multi-method research design for it to produce a credible outcome that may lead to better understanding of the SDSS phenomenon and the critical factors impacting on the management and provision thereof.

To achieve the stated purpose I had a pragmatic approach and included multi - methods of data collection.

The various methods used are the following:

- The study included **qualitative techniques** (Bogden & Biklen, 1992) to obtain an understanding of this complex and evolving phenomenon of student development and support services and more specifically the critical factors in the management and provision of SDSS. The factors impacting on the management and provision of SDSS had to be interrogated not only in terms of the measurable items, but also in terms of the meanings, interpretations, insights and experiences of practitioners and managers.
- Due to the size of the higher education sector in South Africa and the scope of the study a **sampling** of various institutions were selected.
- The **pre-interview questionnaire** introduced an element of quantitative data collection and analysis. It provided a supplementary means of construction and verification of data collected during field work. The questionnaire required of participants to indicate the importance of a list of suggested factors. For the purpose of this study, the items used in the questionnaires and responses provided a basis for further exploration during interviews and focus groups with the teams of practitioners. This also allowed triangulation and final verification of factors identified through qualitative processes.
- In addition to the above an elementary **policy review** (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) had to be done as a major part of the impacting and decision making factors stem from institutional and national policy. These techniques were especially helpful in studying the interaction between various policies and strategies.

**Table 1.2: Substantiating a multi-method approach for the study**

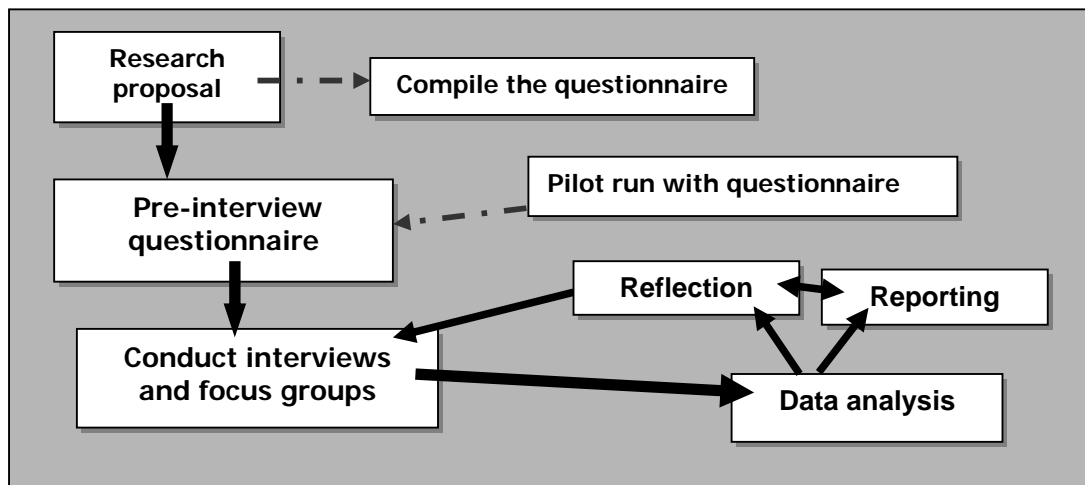
Multi-method type	Motivation
Complementary	The qualitative interviews in combination with questionnaires and policy analysis were done to mutually enhance the data collection. Multi-methods



	allows triangulation option and thorough verification of data and analysis.
Expansion	The multi-method strategy for data collection expanded the range of results as data saturation could not be achieved by only one of the strategies. The range of information resources, i.e. policy documents institutional managers, government officials, practitioners, research literature are so wide that various modes of data collection are essential in a study of this nature.

Adapted from McMillan and Schumacher (2001)

Figure 1.2 is a diagrammatic construction of the research design and demonstrates the flow of activity from the initial research proposal to final reporting and depicts the cyclical nature of the research process applied. A continuous cycle was followed with data collection, reflection on data and reporting on findings to the point of data saturation.



**Figure 1.2: An overview of the cyclical research process**

The multi-method design required careful planning of ethical aspects in research and reporting phases of the study.

## **1.5 Ethical and credibility considerations for the study**

A critical aspect for consideration in the study was the ethics involved in fieldwork. If participants were to give a reflection of their true and honest opinions, thoughts and judgments on matters of student development and support, they had to be assured of absolute anonymity and confidentiality. In addition the relevance and value of the study depends on a trustworthy and credible methodology. The internal validity of the multi-method design for this study is enhanced by the application of both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

## **1.6 Personal motivation**

In South Africa the profession of SDSS practitioner is still only an emerging profession, as opposed to the United States, where the discipline is well-established and a recognised field of management (Beekman, 2001).

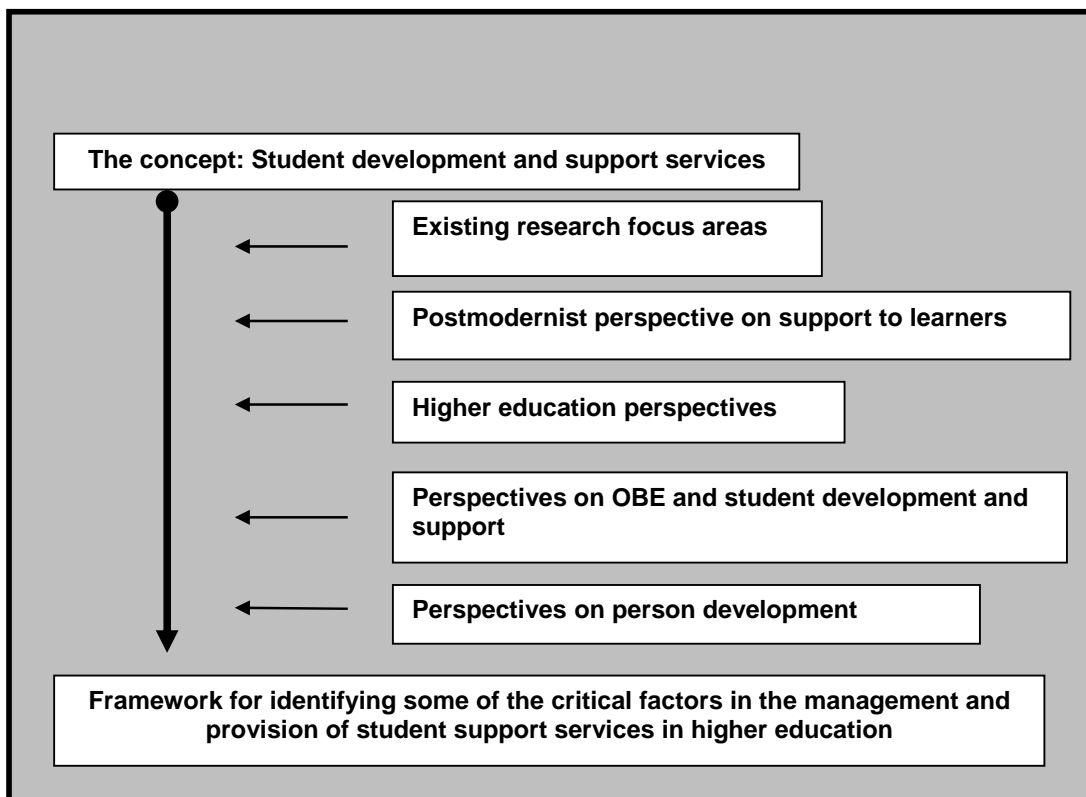
Since starting a career as a student counsellor/student development and support specialist more than 16 years ago, I have progressed to being a member of the senior management of a prominent higher education institution in South Africa. During this time I have also been actively involved in the establishment of an extensive student development and support unit. Discourse with peers, on both national and international levels, has led to an interest in benchmarking effective and functional student development and support that will impact positively on student success and institutional throughput rates. I have become aware of the strong emphasis on enhancing student learning and addressing student throughput and of the lack of formal and coordinated approaches in national strategy or institutional strategies regarding SDSS.

The finding(s) of this research could contribute to a better understanding of the critical factors involved in the provision and management of student development and support. The outcome of the study could, furthermore, facilitate better understanding of the purpose, role and focus and, by implication the outcomes, of student development and support in higher education, as well

as the specific role of the student development practitioner. It could possibly stimulate further debate and research on aspects relating to the provision and management of student development and support services in higher education.

## 1.7 Conceptual background and theoretical framework

An overview of existing research on student support services serves as a point of departure for this study.



**Figure 1.3: Strategy for literature review and establishing the background to the current study**

### 1.7.1 Overview on existing research on student development and support services

The scope of student support services is identified and defined by the United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Committee (UNESCO) research team-report, titled *The role of student affairs and services in higher education - a*

*practical manual for developing, implementing and assessing student affairs programmes and services* (UNESCO, 2002).

This UNESCO-report was based on an extensive international survey, and identified the following services as relevant to student support services in higher education:

- Individual support (e.g. personal counselling, career counselling and study counselling; child support, disability services).
- Group orientation and social support (e.g. residence life, international support; college preparatory programmes; food services; student organisations; student activities; chaplaincy; bookstore services; minority student services; sport activities, new student orientation programmes and health services).
- Administrative support services (e.g. financial aid; accommodation; registrations).

The categories in the UNESCO report are based on the function of each activity within the organisational structure. Gallagher (1992) posed another classification that is more student-need-centred. In his classification system, he clusters student support services into:

- learning services (e.g. study skills advice, student union education);
- survival services (e.g. counselling, disabilities, loans, health and student employment);
- advisory services (e.g. career guidance, equity programmes, welfare, accommodation, international student programmes);
- recreational services (fitness centres, campus sport); and
- general services (union shops, bookshops, transportation).

The core services in the field of student support services in higher education can be identified from the above classifications. The range of student support

services that are relevant to South African institutions of higher education will serve as a point of departure.

Research on student support services in higher education in South Africa is limited. The focus has been mainly on the nature and content of services required to fit student profiles and facilitate student needs (Beekman, 2001; Van Heerden & Kriel, 1998). Much evidence is available on the range of student needs, the design of academic development programmes and the implementation of such support programmes (Engelbrecht, 2002). However, very little attention has been given to the management, proper structuring and organisational positioning, the added value factor and funding factors.

It is my position that all of these factors that have been researched, i.e. programme outcomes and focus areas, student needs and profiles and programme design could possibly have a critical impact on the success of student development and support services. This study attempts to identify those critical management related factors, i.e.. factors related to funding, structure, positioning, strategic decision-making, that would constitute the critical factors for the successful implementation of student development and support activity in higher education.

### **1.7.2 An overview of local and international scenarios regarding student development and support in higher education**

The general under-preparedness of large numbers of new students entering higher education in South Africa has become a concern with which most higher education institutions battle (Beekman, 2001). Political pressure to increase accessibility to the system and accommodate students within the higher education system had to be combined with the strategies to increase graduation rates at the Grade 12 or Senior Certificate levels (Department of Education South Africa, 2003a). A situation has developed in which vast numbers of students enter higher education programmes, while they are not adequately prepared to cope with the social, academic and personal demands of higher education. This general under-preparedness has resulted in higher

education institutions experiencing a severe decrease in success rates (high attrition and low throughput).

### **a) Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework in South Africa**

The implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) model in South African education has had a major impact on the higher education system. Accommodating the Life Orientation learning area is listed as a critical component in both the basic education band or the primary schooling grades and the further education band or secondary schooling grades (Department of Education South Africa, 2002).

A number of higher education institutions have made progress in establishing high-level student development and support services. However, the reality is that these services in higher education are at present uncoordinated, fragmented, and, in the majority of institutions decision making on SDSS is informed by short-term needs. The uncoordinated nature and fragmentation of these efforts could possibly be interpreted as yet another weakness in the provision and management of student support services in higher education (Kraak, 1999).

When surveying international literature on student development and support it was possible to identify three significant areas in which research had been undertaken:

- Research within highly structured and research-based education systems (Australia and the United Kingdom).
- Isolated research efforts such as the study undertaken in a small country like Cyprus.
- Positioning statements of universities in developing countries (African countries) were also studied and compared to the other scenarios reported.

The following sections elucidate on research evidence that relates to SDSS that was found in the study of international literature.

## **b) The Australian experience**

Promnitz and Germain (1996), in a commissioned report by the Department of Employment, Education and Training in Australia, indicate:

...since the inclusion of student support services as a focal point for the Review Team from the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 1994, universities have taken a renewed interest in the performance of support services. In addition, as recruitment of students becomes a more competitive exercise, the quality and availability of various support services within a university form an element in defining an institution's quality and competitiveness (p.93).

The high priority placed on SDSS in the Australian education system is further emphasised by the projects initiated by the Department of Education and Training in Australia.

Specific examples of Australian studies on the provision of student support services are:

- A commissioned study in 1990 that culminated in a report: "A fair chance for all: National and institutional planning for equity in higher education".
- The 1993 project team report on student support services: management, delivery and effectiveness.
- A second commissioned report on student support services and academic outcomes ensued from the 1993 report, viz. "Achieving positive outcomes" (Promnitz & Germain, 1996).

One of the preliminary findings of the 1996 study mentioned above was that student attrition represents a major concern to tertiary/higher education institutions for a number of reasons. Among the important factors listed are the limitations caused by a lack of financial resources. Another reason is that, in terms of human capital, the loss of every individual student may also represent the loss of an important source of knowledge and talent, and, ultimately, the loss of a potential member of a skilled workforce. This has relevance for SDSS as it may be positioned as expert source to address the loss of human capital with both pro-active and reactive services.

### **c) The South African scenario**

A comparison of the South African and Australian scenarios indicates that the attrition rate for Australian universities could be as high as 22,5%, with the average attrition rate (including cancellations, failures and drop-outs) in the first year being as high as 29% (West, Hore, Bennie, Browne, & Kermond, 1987). According to the Department of Education South Africa (2003b) the average drop-out rate for institutions after the first academic year is as high as 28%. This percentage for South African higher education represents only the number of students who did not return after an academic year to pursue their studies, and excludes formal cancellations. The actual attrition rate for South African higher education institutions is estimated at close to 50% (Kriel, 2003) by local researchers. A comparison of South African and Australian statistics on student success highlights the fact that in South Africa the matter deserves to be prioritised for urgent redress. It stands to reason that if in a highly developed country such as Australia high failure rates in higher education is identified for urgent redress that the impact of even higher failure rates in South Africa it would require creative and open-minded strategies. Strategies should address both a) the causative factors involved and b) the impact of such high attrition on the institution and the economy. **Student support services have a potentially critical role to play, specifically in addressing the factors leading to such high attrition.**



Beekman (2001:2) states:

Student support services are integral to the academic venture of an institution of higher learning. Higher education institutions can no longer ignore the unique role and competencies and the contributions they (student affairs professionals) make to improve the efficiency of the institution in addressing and achieving expected outcomes of the National Plan for Higher Education.

The document produced by Beekman on behalf of the SSCSA, was developed as a discussion document by a working group comprising heads of student counselling units/sections within higher education institutions in South Africa. It was submitted to SAUVCA and to the CTP, but did not elicit sufficient moral and practical support.

#### **d) The United Kingdom experience**

Walker (2002:1) formulates a perspective based on experiences at several universities in the United Kingdom. She states that "higher education produces and reproduces particular storylines of how to live ethically and politically, and through its practices construct lecturer and student identities".

Walker further argues that, with the advent of the global economy, and a discourse of skills and economic advantage, the economic importance of education has been rediscovered as a key form of productive capital in the race for competitive advantage. This reality has led to a renewed emphasis on the skills development of students and a refocusing on the formative aspects of learning and the learning environment. She proposes that higher education should aim "not simply to instil fixed blocks of information into students but to produce autonomy, responsibility and creativity" (p.4). Higher education is mandated in particular to develop students as whole brain thinkers.

Walker and her colleagues see the development of emancipated individuals empowered to reflect and think critically as the ultimate goal of higher

education. The involvement of student support and development specialists therefore takes on a different role and dimension, as opposed to the traditional higher education paradigm in the United Kingdom. The partnership between student support professionals and lecturers is seen as an important success factor for the development of thoughtful, curious, socially responsible and civic minded graduates (Walker, 2002). The official policy document to direct transformation in higher education in Britain (Department of Education and Employment Britain, 1998), indicates that the fact is recognised that the personal development and nurturing of individual skills within the formal education systems are the very essence of establishing a culture of lifelong learning.

#### **e) The Cyprian experience**

In a critical analysis of the Cyprian education system Tsiakirrios & Pashiardis (2002) indicate the dire need for support and development strategies within the Cyprian education system. After embarking on an extensive analysis of the Cyprian education system they formulate a recommendation based on their analysis of the combined needs of institutions, the government and individuals.

The outcome and recommendation of this study, namely that the Cyprian education system should provide for student development and support strategies to be implemented as a matter of priority, underlines the strategic value of the establishment of sections within the institutions that will provide the impetus for skills development and individual growth.

#### **f) Perspectives on student development and support in an African context**

Maassen and Cloete (2002) argue that South Africa's much applauded transition in 1994 should not be seen as an isolated moment at the southern tip of Africa, but that it was also part of a political and economic transition process on planetary scale, which a large number of analysts try to capture as globalisation. They further quote the perspectives of Gumpert (in Maassen & Cloete, 2002), stating that there are basically two dominant views on the role of

higher education. The first perspective sees higher education as a "social institution" with the primary task of attaining goals related to core activities, retaining institutional legacies and carrying out functions for the wider society, such as the cultivation of citizenship, the reservation of cultural heritage and the formation of the skills and characters of students. The other perspective sees higher education as an "industry", with as its prime function the training of the workforce and fostering economic development.

Higher education institutions in Africa, specifically those in developing countries, seem partial to a view of higher education institutions being "social structures" with major social responsibilities, while at the same time forcing legitimacy by battling against the transition to become more economically driven entities. Global forces, through the World Bank; European Union Funding and UNESCO, are impacting institutions greatly and pressurising them through investment to move towards more sound economic and management principles.

Institutions have to then find a balance between social- and industrial agendas in Africa and the practical means to provide for both. The diverse paradigms on the function of higher education within a nation state impact strongly on student development and support initiatives and priorities within institutions of higher education in developing countries. In those institutions with a strong social agenda there is more direct emphasis on student development, skills programmes and similar activities, while in those institutions with a more "industrial" agenda, the emphasis is on steady throughput rates and "effective delivery" of the so-called "product".

Both approaches focus on student development and support within institutions, even though it may be for totally different reasons and cause different emphasis in the service portfolio.

The University of Sudan serves as a good example of an institution with a social structure approach. All four of the strategic goals of this university address its role to reinforce the national identity, promote the culture and

language of the region and benefit the immediate and extended community. It is interesting to note the context of this University. It is less impacted by external funding agencies and relies primarily on local government funding and other local resources.

An analysis of the mission statements of various other African universities indicates that African institutions of higher education for example: University of Botswana (UoB-homepage), University of Nairobi (UniN-homepage); University of Ghana (UG homepage), University of Namibia (UoN- homepage), aspire to address both the social and economic needs of the continent. In all the institutions referred to, social responsibility is set as a goal, with a simultaneous and equal emphasis on economic development. This may be an indication of an attempt to balance the two agendas.

The need to address both social and economic needs within the higher education context in Africa brings student development and support issues back into the debate and it remains a critical success factor for the university to manage, whether for social or economic legitimacy of the curriculum or both.

#### **g) A South African response towards a student development and support strategy**

In South Africa, the politically driven transformation of education has led to the issue of skills development being addressed in the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education South Africa, 2001a).

In Section 2 of the NP for HE a critical strategic objective for higher education is indicated as being

...to produce graduates with the skills and competencies required to participate in the modern world in the 21st century (p.16).

The challenges the above poses for higher education in terms of skills development in addition to the traditional mainstream programme learning outcomes (core curriculum) are evident.

In practical terms, it is a challenge to define a strategic role for student development and support. Such a strategy should define the specific role to be played by student development and support practitioners in accommodating and consolidating both the career-orientated National Qualifications Framework and Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) priorities, globalisation needs social development and economic development needs.

In March 2003, the South African Minister of Education issued a press release announcing a report on the review of the financing, resourcing and costs of education in South Africa (Department of Education South Africa, 2003b). One of the ten major aspects that were highlighted for further action in the report is a need for "further investigation on what mix of inputs best supports learner performance".

It is indicated in the press release that further investigation by the review team would present an analysis of what resources are available in the education system. Specific education resourcing studies are proposed to enable the education system to optimise the provision of public resourcing. The latter directive, namely to optimise resourcing (financial and other), indicates a gentle shift towards a more strategic consideration of support systems for students. This comes in stark contrast with earlier thinking, namely that student support is a luxury or at least not part of the core business within higher education.

### **1.7.3 Impact of an outcomes-based education model on the management of student development and support services**

Kraak (as cited in Jansen & Christie, 1999:42) states that "great confusion and controversy characterise the education and training policy terrain". According to Kraak (2003), the progression from a people's education discourse (dominant in the 1980s) towards a more systemic discourse (correlating with political

change in the 1990s) has also focused heavily on high participation and high skills development imperative in education.

The required changes in strategy and the absence of any coordinated policy or strategy with regard to student development and support in higher education is the rationale for this study.

The provision and management of student support services may well manifest as an institutional problem, but could potentially require a national strategy to overcome the social differentiation and institutional fragmentation that exists in this area of education. A national strategy or coordination may be the vehicle for effectiveness and relevance in student development and support, and relates directly to the development of outcomes-based curricula for higher education. In the process of establishing an outcomes-based curriculum, the identification and definition of knowledge areas are important elements (Gultiget al., Lubisi, Parker & Wedekind, 1998). The development of a student development and support curriculum may be seen as an important component of this process. In short, in order to facilitate the generic learning outcomes for person development as is required by the legislated framework (NQF), it may be essential to attend to the planning and provision of student development and support services. It could be that the current trend, that student development and support inputs are peripheral and not part of mainstream curricula of higher education, should be revisited, and the positioning of and provisioning for the function within the core-curriculum of institutions, may have to be reconsidered.

Given the above, it is clear that it is relevant to clarify some of the matters relating to the provision and management of student development and support. Gultig et al. suggest that the formulation of critical outcomes gives direction in this regard (Gultig et al.1998). The inclusion of life-orientation and associated developmental actions as a critical cross-field outcome, also within higher education, could be seen as a positive step towards a solution. The current process in South Africa requires that all learning programmes in higher education be re-curriculated by 2006. This re-curriculation process in itself allows for the required shift in focus to also accommodate the critical cross-field

outcomes. As the final promulgation of the Act was delayed the time frame will possibly be extended but the goal remains.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is unfortunately not making the required progress through the Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) to produce the necessary unit standards to integrate into education programmes on the higher education and training level, now called the HET band (Department of Labour South Africa, 2001). The Council for Higher Education therefore established a joint committee for evaluating and clearing all new programme applications. This committee will essentially become the monitoring body to verify the implementation of the goals as set out by the national plan and more specifically monitor the incorporation of the critical cross field outcomes into programme curricula.

Spady explains (Gultig et al. 1998) that OBE means focusing and organising an education system around what is essential for all learners in that system, for them to be able to succeed at the end of their learning experiences. In the same publication, an article by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle (Gultig et al. 1998) contains a plea that education should focus much more on "learning to" rather than simply on "learning that".

The implementation of an outcomes-based education system has certainly challenged higher education to develop a specific strategy and well-formulated view on how it is going to approach the development of students as individuals. This requires a critical reassessment of the contribution and the curricular or co-curricular role/function of student support services, especially in developmental areas such as:

- career planning
- employability
- self-empowerment
- skills development for individuals
- other areas of support

## 1.8 Work plan for the study

As indicated in this introductory chapter the study, through extensive literature study, in depth interviewing supplemented by a questionnaire, endeavours to identify critical factors that impact on the provision and management of student development and support.

I consider this a very relevant study in both time and higher education context. The background provided in this chapter already indicates that it is a topic of national and international debate and concern. The study specifically addresses the sphere of student development and support within the broader higher education context. The study also looks beyond the borders of South Africa and investigates practices in Africa and lessons learned in developing countries.

The chapters elucidate on:

CHAPTER: TITLE	CONTENT
<p><b>Chapter 1</b> Introduction</p>	<p>Introductory chapter; background and planning.</p>
<p><b>Chapter 2</b> Student development and support in higher education in a developing country</p>	<p>This chapter provides an in depth study of the concepts of student development and support in higher education, the role of higher education in a developing country and paradigmatic issues. Perspectives on economic factors impacting on student development and support such as economic imperatives (including national and global economies, etc) sociological and educational imperatives (focussing on politically driven interventions in higher education) The chapter also takes a critical look at management perspectives and practices.</p>



<b>Chapter 3</b> Theoretical framework	This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework for this study. The philosophical departure, critical paradigms, assumptions and core concepts are identified.
<b>Chapter 4</b> Research	This chapter focuses on the qualitative study of perspectives identified. Perspectives of management in Higher Education, Government officials, practitioners, institutional managers were investigated. This chapter focuses on the research outcomes and identification of factors impacting on the management and provision of student development and support.
<b>Chapter 5</b> Summary and recommendations	
<b>Chapter 6</b> Critical reflection on the experience of this study	