

A DECADE REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The evaluation of higher education at the cluster of a decade of democracy should clearly note the starting point of governmental policy in all sectors of society. It is imperative to take note of the fact that the decade spanning 1994 to 2004 does not represent a stagnant stage in policy development in South Africa. The year 1994 signifies a radical departure from the past regarding all policies, financing systems, organisational structures, human resource utilisation and democratically based representivity and public accountability.

INTRODUCTION

Developments in higher education are discussed within the frameworks provided in the white Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, National Plan for Higher Education (2000), other policy documents and research reports relevant to the subject. The basic arguments are forwarded in accordance with the assumption that higher education is accepted as a primary requirement for development of the South African society and that its contribution should be acknowledged in the public and private sectors.

JUSTIFICATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Through the relevant policy documents approved by Government since 1994 it has been stated clearly that higher education is required to obtain and sustain higher levels of economic growth; improve the living standards of the masses; initiate socio-economic change and development; enable good citizenship by empowering citizens to participate in a meaningful manner in the democratic processes; develop new bases of knowledge and contribute to opening avenues to allow citizens to utilise opportunities created in the economy; and to allow South Africans to compete internationally in the quest for excellence.

Higher education should not be viewed as a separate or isolated sector. It is an integral part of the comprehensive services sector in which Government plays a major role. It can never be static and has to adapt its policies and practices continuously to meet the ever-changing needs of society, technology and of the global village of which South Africa is now part. Furthermore, education has to accept as a fait accompli that the world operates on a knowledge-driven economy.

INHERITANCE OF THE PAST

With the advent of democratic government in 1994, higher education experienced a lack of confidence from the majority of the South African society. This was due to inter alia the perception that higher education was caught in the trap of an apartheid-based past; that it lacked concern with real output; that serious deficiencies existed in governance and that duplication was rife (e.g. 14 different institutions formulating policies on education); and there existed a serious lack of trust in the quality of higher education which was mainly due to the racially based policies and lack of overall public accountability.

The new democratic South Africa, which very soon became part of the global village, realised that Government requires the development of an honest, effective, efficient and innovative public service. In



this regard higher education would be required to play a major role in generating high and medium level capacities and skills. Policy development, policy implementation, planning, managerial and administrative competencies and financial skills were considered prerequisites for the development and maintenance of an effective higher education system.

HIGHER EDUCATION SINCE 1994

Bearing in mind the inheritance of the apartheid past, higher education was faced with a number of challenges, which required an extensive transformation of policies, financing practices, human resources, organisational restructuring and transparency through effective accountability. These challenges are discussed under appropriate headings.

Legal and policy challenges

The key developments since 1994 include, inter alia:

- The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was established in 1996 and produced a report that provided three pillars for higher education viz the need for a policy on increased participation; a policy on greater responsiveness to ensure that social challenges are met and a policy to provide for increased co-operation and partnerships.
- The white Paper entitled: Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997) accepted that participation of South Africans in higher education through massification would produce the desired results regarding the transformation of the system of higher education. (This proposal was not accepted).
- The National Plan for Higher Education (1997) endeavoured to eliminate the vacuum created by the incremental approach to the execution of policies and addresses the absence of regulatory instruments. It also identified the danger of some higher educational institutions seizing market opportunities, leaving the historically black universities in the lurch. One of its main proposals concerned the rejection of the NCHE's proposed differentiation through distinct institutional types and proposing instead differentiation through mission and programme mix. The Plan furthermore made provision for an increase in the participation rate and the graduation rate; shifting the ratio between the humanities, business and commerce, and science, engineering and technology from 49:26:25 to 40:30:30; and the introduction of institutional mission and programme differentiation.
- The Higher Education Act, 1997 formalised policy incentives and regulated higher educational matters, other policy developments include a new language policy, an institutional redress policy; and the development and implementation of the National Higher Education Information and Application Service.

As a result of the respective policy incentives, the situation in 2004 included a new higher education funding framework; a restructured higher education system; a national framework and criteria for quality promotion and quality assurance; a single co-ordinated higher education system; and the identification of the need for the improvement of the quality of leadership and management in public higher education institutions.

Institutional challenge

As already alluded to, the system of higher education was highly fragmented from a political, administrative and operational perspective. The 36 higher education institutions (universities and technikons) under the political direction of eight different political structures were not conducive to co-ordinated development. Since 1994 Government succeeded in instituting a process that radically changed the higher education system by e.g. the creation of an integrated system of higher education, the eradication of rigid boundaries between institutional types; the eradication of boundaries created by legacies of the past; and changes in programmes and qualification offerings in the curriculums and terms of higher education provision.

The NCHE's report entitled: Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21st Century (2000) inter alia provided for three sets of higher education institutions viz bedrock institutions which would focus on quality undergraduate programmes and limited postgraduate programmes up to masters level. A second set would focus on undergraduate and comprehensive postgraduate taught and research programmes including the doctoral level and extensive research. A third set would focus on quality undergraduate and selective postgraduate taught and research programmes up to the doctoral level and select areas of research. Distance education will be dealt with separately.

In an effort to rationalise higher education institutions, provision was made for specific mergers under the guidance of a Merger Unit. Funds were also provided for the mandatory restructuring. Furthermore colleges were incorporated into the higher education system (e.g. colleges of education, colleges of nursing and colleges of agriculture). Private higher education was reorganised and the Higher Education Quality Committee accredited 14 providers of this type and conditionally granted accreditation for a further 30.

In 2004, the new institutional landscape of higher education consisted of 22 public institutions i.e. 11 universities, five universities of technology and six comprehensive institutions. These merged institutions increased the number of students in most cases quite dramatically e.g. UNISA (formerly University of South Africa/Technikon South Africa and VUDEC (formerly part of Vista), as distance education institution now boasts 210 275 students, Tshwane University of Technology (formerly Technikon Pretoria/Technikon Northern Gauteng and Technikon North-West) now accommodates 53 373 enrolments and the University of Pretoria (formerly University of Pretoria and Mamelodi Campus of Vista) now has 44 643 enrolments. These three universities now accommodate 47% of the total number of enrolments in higher education.

Obtaining equity

In promoting equity Government endeavours to ensure that education enrolments reflect society's social composition; that it reflects the equitable distribution of opportunities and outcomes; that staffing reflects society's social composition; that higher education's research outputs reflect equitable participation, opportunity and outcomes; that resources are made available to historically disadvantaged social groups as well as to formerly disadvantaged higher education institutions; and that capacity is increased with respect to quality to obtain fair opportunities for historically disadvantaged educational institutions.

The need for a focus on obtaining equity is borne out by inter alia the fact that in the period 1990-1994 (i.e. before the transformation of South Africa) enrolments grew by an overall figure of 130 000. However, the participation rates were skewed by race with 9% growth for Africans, 13% for coloureds, 40% for Indians and 70% for whites.

As far as staff at higher education institutions is concerned, of a total of 45 000 staff members in the higher education sector, 80% were white, 12% African, 4% coloured and 4% Indian. Therefore, it was imperative to address these inequities in a fully democratic state striving towards representivity in all sectors of the South African economy. Since 1994 Government engaged in various policy initiatives to address the unequal representation in student and staff numbers.

The white Paper referred to earlier, proposed massification as a basis for policy development. However, this approach was unacceptable to Government. This was mainly due to the cost involved in expanding the higher education system and labour market indicators. Instead Government accepted the proposals contained in the National Plan (also already referred to). This inter alia required an increase in the participation rate from 15% to 20% by 2010-2015 in the economy by increasing the number of graduates with skills and



competencies to meet the human resource needs; by increasing graduates on undergraduate programmes by 25% and masters programme graduates by 33%.

Staff equity had to be addressed not only to accommodate a new higher education system requiring representivity, but also to meet new labour legislation introduced since 1994 e.g. the Employment Equity Act, 1998. The goal set in the National Plan to increase participation in student numbers was partly successful. Student numbers increased from 473 000 in 1993 to 605 000 in 1998, but declined to 586 000 in 1999. This was probably due to the lack of sustainability of some historically disadvantaged universities. Taken overall, enrolment by race in the period 1993 to 2002 indicates a steady increase of black enrolments from 191 000 to 404 000; coloureds from 28 000 to 39 000; Indians from 30 000 to 49 000; and a decline in white enrolments from 223 000 to 182 000 in the same period. The gender profile did not change dramatically i.e. men from 271 000 in 1993 to 312 000 in 2002; women from 202 000 to 363 000 in the same period.

As far as graduate outputs by universities and technikons (i.e. before the mergers) are concerned, an increase from 81 764 in 1995 to 101 679 in 2002 is worth mentioning. The concern of Government regarding the output by field of study, however, did not change significantly as far as the three broad fields of study are concerned (i.e. science, engineering and technology; business, commerce and management; and humanities and social sciences). In 1995 the ratio at universities and technikons was 24%, 16%, 59% and in 2002 it was 26%, 25% and 49%. (Note: figures differ between the annual reports of SAPSE, HEM and CHE.)

The graduate output by qualification level showed no significant change between 1995 and 2002. However, as far as graduates by race are concerned, African graduates increased from 39% to 53%, coloureds remained at 5%, Indians at 7% and whites decreased from 50% to 35%. There is some concern regarding the decline in university graduation rates between 1995 and 2002, especially in the fields of Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) and Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS). The Business, Commerce and Management Sciences (BCMS) however, achieved a slight increase. Some concern is raised regarding the sustainability of particular higher educational programmes as a result of the ageing of the academic workforce. Current analyses indicate that the workforce is not being replenished and those academics in the age groups above 45 are on the increase in the staff complements.

After the merging of higher education institutions, the equity principle is clearly discernible. Currently African students form 59% of enrolments at merged universities and white students 22% whereas before the merger the percentages were 42% and 45% respectively. Although equity has changed positively in the composition of students, the academic staff component is still dominated by whites. Overall Africans constitute only 20% of the academic personnel corps, whites constitute 69%, coloureds 4% and Indians 7%. Even after the merger policy had been implemented the proportions still remain relatively the same. In the executive/management complement in higher education institutions, viewed overall, the white staff still dominate.

Teaching and learning

The academic practices prevalent at universities in 1994 were either Western in nature or dominated by principles and practices supposedly focused on Africa. However, in fact the practices were often antagonistic to African culture. The technikons were mostly vocationally oriented and were not synchronised. Since 1994 Government introduced a number of new policies that changed the teaching and learning approaches and practices e.g. the white Paper on Education and Training, the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) Act, 1995 and other policies already alluded to.

The emphasis on teaching and learning shifted to steer South Africa along a high skills, high growth path of economic development; to bring academic and vocational education into closer alignment with one

another; to modularise curriculums to facilitate the acquisition of skills within flexible time frames; to erode disciplinary boundaries in favour of interdisciplinarity; and to follow an outcomes-based approach to allow cross-field outcomes.

The need to change the traditional approach to teaching and learning in a democratic, internationally acceptable state is characterised by three important considerations viz the expected increase in the number of entrants into higher education institutions; the approach to change institutional arrangements to obtain flexible teaching teams; and the entrance into the global village, which would require a shift in knowledge production from discipline based to interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary team based research by university researchers as well as outside researchers.

It is important to note that the transformation of the higher education curriculums requires an appropriate balance between the rigid norms of traditional disciplines and the more open knowledge systems demanded by the environmental factors influenced by higher education. In this regard Government initiated the SAQA policy and regulations which provide for flexibility in learning through key concepts for higher education; through a new academic policy (NAP) to provide a framework to support the National Plan; through the NQF consultative document to facilitate flexibility in learning and teaching; and through the Higher Education Quality Committee's (HEQC) framework and policies putting teaching and learning at the centre stage of quality assurance by connecting it to national and regional contexts, goals and targets.

Curriculum changes have been effected since 1994. However, issues that still require attention are inter alia whether the changed curriculum addresses the real needs of South Africa; whether the programme motivations have really been effected by the various higher education institutions; and whether all institutions actually eradicated disciplinary boundaries and developed integrated programmes.

The current situation (2004) indicates that an accelerated change in higher education can occur only if a new academic policy is in place. The issue of teaching and learning delivery models is critically influenced by the electronic media as these affect the clear conventional distinction between contact institutions and distance education, making the distinction to some extent superfluous.

The implementation of information and communication technology (ICT) should be done circumspectly. ICT could be used to widen access to higher education. However, it should be considered that not all students from historically disadvantaged communities, even at this stage, have access to the electronic media. The mergers and incorporations of higher education institutions also have an effect on the issue under discussion as the ability to use ICT may be different in the historically disadvantaged institutions and the historically advantaged institutions. The integration of programmes of the merged institutions should carefully note the knowledge base of all students as well as the accessibility of ICT at the various campuses.

Research

Research is probably one of the most critical responsibilities of higher education institutions. Research on the one hand creates new knowledge that could be transferred to students and/or utilised by governmental bodies, commerce and industry. On the other hand, research is conducted to verify existing knowledge and to record such knowledge for posterity.

Before considering the current policies and approaches to research in higher education institutions, a brief reference to the role players in research is required. It should be emphasised that research is neither the sole domain of higher education institutions nor of researchers at such institutions. The business sector and civil society should become stakeholders not only in funding research, but also in knowledge provision. Such an



approach facilitates multidisciplinary research, institutional networking and contributes to the sustainability of long term research programmes. The South African Department of Science and Technology as a case in point developed a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) framework for the scientific professions which resulted in the Scientific Professions Act, 2003.

In 1993 a Science and Technology Initiative (STI) was launched by the ANC to address issues related to the political transformation that lay ahead. After 1994 the STI reports informed the national research policy developments. The reports identified a number of deficiencies in science and technology (S&T) policies e.g. that public participation was not transparent, that the S&T system mainly served the white minority; that S&T institutions were fragmented; that a leadership vacuum existed; and that the enrolments and graduate output of natural scientists, engineers, technologists and technicians was declining.

Considering research in isolation is inadvisable. Research and development (R&D) should be viewed as two sides of a coin. Research without the concomitant development is of no use to society and South Africa in general. In South Africa, R&D activities are undertaken by higher education institutions and government and industry in relatively equal shares. Higher education institutions receive about 40% of state expenditure on R&D and totals about 0,8% of the GDP between 1989 and 1994. The business sector contributes about 10% to the R&D of higher education institutions.

One factor that requires Government's attention is the division of R&D among the different research fields. The national sciences, technology and engineering as a research field represents 67,6% of expenditure by higher education institutions. The social sciences and humanities represent the remaining 32,4% of the expenditure. If the socio-economic objective is taken for classification of R&D expenditure of higher education institutions, defence represents 0,2%; economic development 35,8%; society 35,6%; the environment 10,1%; and for the advancement of knowledge 18,2%. The headcount of researchers also seems to indicate that the majority of researchers is located in higher education (48,5%), with business second at 25,5%. The science councils are third with 18,1%; government only accommodates 6,6% of the researchers and the non-profit organisations represent 1,3% of the researchers.

It is significant that in the higher education sector five of the universities conduct 60% of the higher education R&D. If the combined institutions are assessed, eight universities and technikons are responsible for 90% of the higher education R&D. This indicates that even after the mergers, the majority of higher education institutions fail to undertake any significant R&D. This view is underscored by the fact that as far as research and innovation are concerned, South Africa has a rather low score. In 2002 it ranked 107 out of 173 countries in the human development index; and 22 out of 39 countries in the technology achievement index. These facts indicate that South Africa could lose its small edge over other middle developing economies if research and development/innovation are not urgently addressed.

A number of improvements occurred in the area of research since 1994 e.g. THRIP (Technology and Human Resources of Industry Programme) funding for HEIs increased from R16 460 000 in 1995 to R256 926 000 in 2001, thus an increase of 1 461% in funding to facilitate research. Contract income also serves as a measure to indicate the responsiveness of higher education to the research needs of Government, commerce and industry. A note of caution should be sounded in this regard and that is that HEIs should beware that contract research does not edge out basic research. This may happen as a result of the potential income derived from contract research.

The article output of universities as representative of research output has dropped marginally in the period 1995-2001 by 2%. The output of technikons increased by 149% for the same period, but started from a low base (62 to 153 publications). The new university sector (i.e. after the mergers) still dominates the scientific output

scene, but the new universities of technology still lag behind with only 2,3% of the total higher education scientific output. The average output per academic staff member is 0,55 in the newly structured education sector with the new universities of technology contributing 0,05 publications per academic staff member.

Community engagement

It is expected of higher education institutions to contribute to the reconstruction and development of civil society. It should find a complementary alternative to marketisation by also contributing to the good of society. This change in emphasis requires clarity regarding the interpretation and application of the concept of service to society. It should be recognised that service could be rendered through volunteerism (i.e. students engaging in activities to benefit a recipient community); internships that engage students in activities where the primary benefit is the student; co-operative education where the goal and the benefit is student learning; and service learning which is focused on the development priorities of communities through the interaction between communities on the one hand and students, academics and service providers on the other hand.

The inheritance of the previous Government included lack of mission statements by HEIs regarding community service; lack of policies to operationalise its community service component; service projects being initiated by students and academics to address specific community needs; and few projects containing the three traditional functions of HEIs i.e. teaching, research and service. Since 1994 various initiatives were introduced e.g. the Joint Education Trust Initiatives to support conceptualisation, evaluation and research of pilot service-learning initiatives and to utilise this process to inform higher education policies and practices. A second initiative was the Vice-Chancellors' Meeting in 2000 to consider a range of issues including the suggestion that community engagement should not be optional, but mandatory.

Higher education institutions developed a number of initiatives themselves, such as institutional audits on community engagement; institutional policies and strategies for community engagement; organisational and staffing structures to promote community engagement; the conceptualisation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of academic courses designed to incorporate the principles and practices of service-learning; the development of comprehensive criteria for quality assurance (in collaboration with the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and the Joint Education Trust (JET)); and research initiatives into factors that promote or prohibit the institutionalisation of service-learning.

It could be argued that 2004 was characterised by various policy initiatives regarding community engagement. Furthermore, HEIs now have at their disposal instruments to conduct audits of their community engagement initiatives, policies and practices.

Quality assurance

No national framework policy for quality in higher education sectors existed prior to 1994. Although an awareness existed for the need to provide for quality assurance in higher education, it was undertaken in an unco-ordinated and erratic manner. In 1994 the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) was established. It focused on quality in higher education. The National Commission on Higher Education covered a task team on quality assurance (QA) and endorsed quality as a key principle for transforming higher education. The QA system that was established operates within the framework of the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995.

Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) were established in terms of the Skills Development Act, 1998 to monitor education and training in the respective sectors. The SETAs are accredited by SAQA. Various



SETAs are assigned to deal with higher education programmes. Thus SETAs play a significant role in quality assurance of higher education institutions. This enables South Africa to comply with the international requirements regarding the improvement/enhancement and accountability functions concerning QA.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the need to ensure that higher education interacts with the policy-makers, industry, commerce, local communities and society in general. Some of the linkages include an exchange between higher education and the economic sector regarding academic planning and curriculum development; collaboration between business and higher education institutions; collaboration in local and/or regional economic development; knowledge transfer between the academic sector and its clients; work placements for higher education students; and the employment of higher education graduates. In the latter case it was found that in the period 1991 to 1995 at least 59% of the respondents to a questionnaire, administered by the Human Sciences Research Council, found employment immediately after obtaining a degree.

As far as R&D serves as an indicator of responsiveness, it was found that in 1993 South Africa spent only 1% of its GDP on R&D in science and technology. It was furthermore found that the linkages between universities and business were limited as research capacities were uneven among HEIs. The historically advantaged institutions did much better than the historically disadvantaged institutions.

Key developments since 1994 in obtaining greater responsiveness by higher education include inter alia the Higher Education Responsiveness National Policy and Strategy. This policy and strategy address e.g. equity of access and eradication of unfair discrimination, meeting of national development needs, support for a democratic ethos and contributions to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship.

Responsiveness was furthermore advanced through the National Plan for Higher Education (2001); the National Skills Development Strategy (2000); the Driving Competitiveness Framework (2001) promoted by the Department of Trade and Industry; the National Research Development Strategy (2002) and the review by the Human Sciences Research Council entitled Education, Employment and Skills in South Africa; as well as the research into the morality of R&D workers entitled Flight of the Flamingos.

Despite the differences between science and technological development and social progress, 2004 was characterised by the complexity of the relationship. This is mainly due to the fact that simple prediction of labour demand and supply is not the answer. The relationship, as had been found to be the case internationally, is more complex. The relationship between economic and social development on the one hand and education on the other hand is confounded by the incomplete definitions of employability. Lastly a direct correlation between responsiveness and employability cannot be accepted without reservations. The role of higher education is greater than responsiveness to the labour market, it has to respond to other societal goals of a socially committed and critical citizenry.

HIV/AIDS needs specific attention. Although not discussed at length it should be highlighted. Research revealed that higher education provides limited exposure to this important issue. It is obvious that this matter requires urgent attention.

Governance

Governance of higher education systems tended to be influenced by one or more models from the West. Some universities (white) in the pre-1994 era enjoyed considerable autonomy, and were funded by block grants. The universities in the "bantustans" operated under strict national control. Technikons were nationally

controlled through synchronised curriculums and had weak or non-existent traditions of academic freedom. Since 1994 two key themes in higher education governance can be discerned. Firstly, higher education governance had to be transformed in order to break the apartheid mould; and secondly, it was required to meet the challenges of social and economic transformation and globalisation. However, while in other parts of the world university governance could be deregulated, it could not be done in South Africa. Injustices of the past and imbalances had to be corrected. This required governmental involvement.

Policies since 1994 included inter alia the development of co-operative governance as founded in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. It also required the development of clear relationships among the principles of public accountability, institutional autonomy and academic freedom. This requirement provides for differences to be negotiated and the development of transparent ways to support the tenets of democracy, effectiveness and efficiency.

Substantive policy issues in 2004 include the endeavour to break the mould of apartheid in higher education through e.g. the merging of higher education institutions; the creation of comprehensive institutions to facilitate multidisciplinary and multistructural teaching and research; to utilise capacity more efficiently; and to promote public accountability in governance.

Financing

Financing of higher education comprises four components: through student fees; through the National Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS); through private income earned by higher education institutions via various channels; and through entrepreneurial activities. The inheritance in 1994 regarding financing was fragmented and consisted of inter alia formula funding of historically white universities; negotiated budgets for historically black universities and technikons; and full funding for colleges (e.g. nursing colleges). The South African Post-Secondary Education (SAPSE) funding formula was also in existence. This formula provided a complex mechanism for funding universities. The formula resulted in extreme difficulties and produced inequitable consequences in practice.

Since 1994 Government addressed the funding of higher education institutions. The white Paper of 1997 provided for the redress of past inequalities in funding historically white universities and historically black universities. However, the development of a new funding framework proceeded slowly, even though the Department of Education established a Funding Reference Group. Under the auspices of the Department a joint finance committee of the South African Universities Vice-chancellors Association (SAUVCA) and the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP) produced a comprehensive analysis and discussion document on a new funding framework in 2002. This document ultimately resulted in proposals for a reconsidered funding system for 2004/2005 to 2006/7.

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) already referred to is highly praised for its assistance to financially constrained students. The Scheme operates in partnership with 41 financial aid offices. Funding of higher education institutions is done according to a formula based e.g. on student numbers, general needs and the cost of programmes at the various institutions.

Government expenditure on education and higher education has changed little since 1995/6; it showed a small decline from 22,4% of GDP in 1995 to 19,9% in 2005/6. Higher education's share was 2,69% in 1995 and 2,6% in 2005/6. The funding through NSFAS increased from R59 m in 1994/95 to R733,4 m in 2002/3. To recap, it could be stated that in 2004 the new funding framework retained the two main components of the SAPSE framework i.e. block grants and earmarked funding. However, the model now has new policy underpinnings and the components are applied differently to meet policy objectives.



Currently government grants account for on average 50% of public higher education funding. Student fees comprise 25% and 25% is obtained through private income sources. Institutional restructuring demands 5% of the earmarked funding. Research output grants are also provided for. Teaching output grants are also made to serve as an incentive to higher education institutions. The new funding framework addresses institutional redress; institutional autonomy; growth in enrolments; financial certainty; and academic development. There are, however, tensions in the framework as a result of the mergers; the differentiated landscape within which the various institutions operate; and the argument that the framework neutralises efficiencies and incentives.

Internationalisation

Internationalisation requires attention as Government inherited an isolated higher education system in 1994. Institutions were restricted with little exposure to developments in other parts of the world. Academics were also not in regular contact with new teaching and research developments.

Since 1994 South Africa became part of the international scene e.g. a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), member of the African Union (AU); and a member of various international institutions. This exposure results inter alia in international students and staff becoming involved in South African higher education and vice versa.

The situation in 2004 is characterised by the globalisation of operations. Higher education is deeply involved in this process of opening up new avenues of learning, teaching and research with the assistance of international partners. One example serves to prove the point viz the effects of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). These effects inter alia underscore the complexities of higher education in an international context.

CRITICAL ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

The discussion commenced with a brief overview of the higher education landscape inherited by the democratic Government in 1994. The eleven most significant characteristics of the decade 1994-1995 were highlighted under appropriate headings. In general terms, the following division can be made :

- 1990-1994 consisting mainly of symbolic policy-making i.e. to eradicate the racially based education and irregularities of the past
- 1994-1998 consisting of framework development characterised by various policy initiatives to provide a framework for higher education
- 1999 to the present consisting mainly of the implementation of the various policy initiatives.

During the first decade of democratic, transparent and accountable government various successes were achieved, e.g. a single co-ordinated and differentiated system of higher education was established. This system operates within a national higher education plan. Secondly, private higher education institutions have become an accepted feature of the higher education scene and student enrolments have increased with black student numbers increasing from 40% in 1999 to 60% of overall enrolments in 2002. Women students also increased from 43% of enrolments in 1993 to 54% in 2002.

Challenges for the future are discernible in all the focus areas highlighted and are summarised as follows:

- **Legal and policy context:** It is required that attention be devoted to the development of early warning systems of unanticipated policy consequences. Systems level governance dynamics should be addressed through an appropriate use of centrally driven measures, while simultaneously acknowledging the need for participative self-regulation by the higher education sector.

- **Institutional landscape:** Although the restructuring of the higher education institutions appears to have been completed, various challenges remain. These include, inter alia, a recognition of institutional cultures, cost-effectiveness and outcomes in terms of equity, effectiveness and efficiency.
- **Equity:** From the discussion on equity, progress is clearly visible. However, attention should be devoted to mechanisms to sustain the progress made. Existing weak points e.g. in science, engineering and technology should receive attention. This requires a transformation of institutional and academic cultures especially to achieve staff equity.
- **Teaching and learning:** Government has to finalise a new academic policy to resolve the National Qualification Framework (NQF) review. Furthermore, attention has to be devoted to achieve student equity in throughput and guidelines have to be developed to ensure effective teaching and learning practices.
- **Research:** Research has been highlighted as one of the core functions of higher education. However, attention has to be devoted to the inclusion of higher education in policy development and implementation. Ways and means have to be found to explore the impact of new funding drivers for research. The research capacity of higher education institutions requires attention to obtain sustainable and effective research.
- **Community engagement:** The policy framework which facilitates community engagement should be finalised. The skills and knowledge of experienced higher education institutions should be tapped to assist others to build capacity. The traditional boundaries of academia should be expanded to support meaningful community engagement.
- **Quality assurance:** Operationalising links between quality assurance and planning and funding is required. In a system in flux the measuring of quality is complex, but still has to be addressed. As a result of the higher education landscape, attention should be devoted to obtaining and sustaining a balance between equity and quality. In particular, attention should be given to ensuring quality management.
- **Responsiveness:** Constructive collaboration between higher education and its clients in the public and private sector should be addressed. Furthermore, the contribution of higher education to the economic, social, cultural and intellectual requirements should be addressed. In particular, the commercialisation of higher education to the detriment of community development should be guarded against.
- **Governance:** Appropriate governance models need to be developed and the system level of governance should be re-examined to meet the democratic requirements of public accountability, responsiveness and transparency.
- **Financing:** A need exists to monitor the adequacy of public funding of higher education. Similarly the effects of the new funding framework should be monitored in relation to the impact on institutional redress, institutional autonomy, institutional behaviour and enrolment. The NSFAS should be re-examined to ensure access to higher education by poor students.
- **Internationalisation:** The effects of internationalisation should be addressed regarding its impact on higher education e.g. the effects of the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). Policies also have to be developed regarding internationalisation of core educational functions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Higher education could be viewed as one of the primary drivers for the development of new knowledge, the transfer of such knowledge and the maintenance of a well equipped labour force. It also has to remain responsive to community needs. In the brief exposition it was indicated that Government has made significant progress in transforming the higher education system. However, it has to be pointed out that this system is and should always be in flux. Therefore, the challenge remains for Government to continuously review its policies and practices and amend policies and practices as and when required by the South African society, as well as the global arena within which it operates.



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