

Policy targeting as a strategy to increase access to Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

In an era of reconstruction of the educational landscape, South African higher education's contribution to social and economic development has been concretised through policy targeting and reforms in four cardinal planks and mission. These include Teaching, as this contributes to the development of human capital, Learning which invigorates the order for human capital to develop through knowledge, Research which builds the foundation for the development of sound knowledge bases and Social Responsiveness which becomes the cornerstone for the dissemination and application of knowledge across the educational and social platform. The article proposes that South Africa must address the quagmires experienced by the poor and the marginalised. The political re-draw of intentions that is emerging under the new administration presents the country with an opportunity to issues pertaining to higher education as a people-centred activity rather than a market-centred commodity. The article further contends that as a necessary pre-condition for policy targeting to become a channel for deliberative discourse, it is apparent that higher education authorities must have the requisite capacity for these strategic policy initiatives in a synchronised policy-targeted manner.

INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on the last eighteen years of democratic gains in South Africa, a critical question that remains is whether the country has succeeded or is on track towards successfully creating opportunities for greater participation in higher education. Over the course of this decade-and-a-half, a number of policies that deal with access has been developed and are being implemented in an incremental and systemic way across the higher education landscape. Some of the common features that run through almost all of these policies include the realisation of a single, co-ordinated higher education system that is built on the principles of redress, representivity and equity to be achieved through the levers of planning, quality assurance and funding.

The principle of equity (incorporating notions of redress and representivity) requires higher education institutions to ensure fair opportunities to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. Cele and Menon (2006, 402) assert the immense social and economic risks when institutions fail to balance equity of access with equity of success. The consequences of this failure perpetuate the exclusion of historically marginalised groups from participating in and enjoying the benefits of broader economic and social spheres of life.

THE POST 1994 POLICY CONTEXT FOR ACCESS

National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) (1996)

The NCHE Report recommends the establishment of a single, co-ordinated higher education system as a first priority. This addresses the fragmented policies and practices of Apartheid where universities were planned according to race. The Report makes the case for increased participation, also known as massification, and presents this strategy as a means through which the tension between equity and development could be negotiated. According to the Report, projections for participation in higher education of the relevant age group (18 – 24 year-olds) should have been 30% by 2005. The actual participation rate in higher education in 2006 was 16%. Between 1995, when the participation rate was 14%, and 2006, there has been an insignificant 2% increase in enrolments in higher education.

Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997)

The White Paper acknowledges the NCHE Report's recommendation for increased and broadened participation. This principle of massification was later replaced with a pragmatic and new public management approach of planned enrolment. The White Paper places emphasis on the need for the historically steered pattern of fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency to be addressed through effective policy implementation. Policy has to be guided by principles of increased access for designated groups (Black, women, disabled and mature students), and generate new curricula and flexible models of learning and teaching, including modes of delivery, to accommodate a larger and more diverse student population.

National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (2001)

The NPHE ended a four-year vacuum of the incremental approach to policy execution. It identifies the danger of some higher education institutions, particularly the historically advantaged and private provider institutions seizing market opportunities in distance and franchised education to the detriment of the historically Black universities. A major proposal emanating from the NPHE is a rejection of the NCHE's method of differentiation through institutional types. It instead proposes a differentiation platform based on institutional mission and programme mix, which was subsequently introduced through instruments such as the



Programme and Qualification Mix, Student Enrolment Planning and, Institutional Operational Plans. The NPHE signals the link between participation and graduation and sets goals for the participation ratio between broad fields of study: Humanities and the Social Sciences; Business, Commerce and Economic Sciences and; Science, Engineering and Technology at a ratio of 40:30:30 (for performance in meeting these goals, see *A Vision for Access* below).

Minimum Admission Requirements for Entry into a Higher Certificate, Diploma or Bachelor Degree Studies with the National Senior Certificate (2005)

The National Senior Certificate (NSC), is the culmination of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), an outcomes-based approach to education adopted by the government in the 1990s. The modality adopted for implementing the NCS was premised on a staggered approach for the different school grades (for example grades 1 and 4, 2 and 5) with the NSC replacing the Senior Certificate (more commonly known as the Matric Certificate) in 2007. The policy sets the threshold qualifying requirements to holders of the NSC to enrol for an academic programme of study at a higher education institution. These requirements are absolute minima with a proviso in the policy that institutional criteria for admission is the final arbiter in determining eligibility for registration which is aligned to Section 37 of the *Higher Education Act, 1997* and reads:

37. (1) Subject to this Act, the council of a public higher education institution, after consulting the senate of the public higher education institution, determines the admission policy of the public higher education institution.

Higher Education Qualifications Framework (2007)

The HEQF is a sub-framework that is vested in the National Qualifications Framework and guides the standards for qualifications that are offered in the higher education band (levels five to ten). The framework determines the level and level descriptors of qualifications, the types and naming of qualifications, qualification descriptors, admission to higher education as well as progression or articulation within the framework.

Minimum Admission Requirements for Entry into a Higher Certificate, Diploma or Bachelor Degree Studies with the National Certificate Vocation at Level 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (2009) The intention was that NATED qualifications (N1 – N6) in the FET College sector would be replaced by a new qualification, the National Certificate Vocation (NCV). The first NCV was offered in 2007 at NQF Level 2. The rationale for this change in qualification type is to facilitate policy alignment in the FET sector (college and schooling). The NCV at NQF level 4 is an exit qualification in the FET Band of the NQF. As an exit qualification at one level, it is imperative that entry requirements to the next level be clear and without ambiguity in order to facilitate seamless articulation and progression within the NQF. By doing so, opportunities for those who desire to enter higher education are broadened.

The sheer volume of access-related policies has led to a number of unintended or unanticipated consequences. The most significant consequence relates to the fact that the South African state failed to considerably increase the participation rates in higher education.

STATE AS INTERVENTIONIST

Universities have a critical role in contributing to the development of the state. The Council on Higher Education (2000) argued that “the overall well-being of nations is vitally dependent on the contributions of higher education to the social, cultural, political and economic development of its citizens”.

There are many interpretations and contestations as to what a developmental state is. There are also various models of developmental states, the most known ones being East Asian nation states such as Singapore and Malaysia. More recent examples include Brazil and Venezuela. In spite of the differences in understanding and interpretation, literature largely reveals broad agreement that the common feature across all types of developmental states is that the state is in essence interventionist. Government assumes the lead in bringing about the desired socio-economic conditions for its citizens through the modality of social partnership with business, labour, and civil formations. In imagining what form state intervention could assume, it might be helpful to consider the phenomenon in terms of a continuum. On one end of the continuum, intervention occurs in a minimalist way by bringing about incremental changes whilst on the other end it would be radical or revolutionary with variants between the two extremes.

The interventionist strategy of the state is in turn strengthened by two pillars which Woo-Cumings (1999) identified and argued were central components of successful developmental states, i.e. co-ordination and institution building. The co-ordination component is characterised by an intra-departmental as well as an inter-departmental approach informed by working horizontally across constituencies rather than the traditional top-down approach. In building institutions, integration is imperative and is informed or infused by principles of consistency, coherence and, structural connectedness. Institution building is furthermore strengthened by a vigorous programme of human resource capacity development.

Students entering higher education “gain the ability to participate in prestigious and powerful knowledge communities” giving them “intellectual” and “social power” that can have a significant impact on the future of a country (Northedge 2003 22). The state, as guardian of the public interest, must ensure that higher education is made accessible to all, by every appropriate means as declared by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28.1.c).

VISION FOR ACCESS

Shortly after 1994, access into higher education has been managed in a way largely characterised by neo-liberal considerations, as informed through global policy dialogues such as the Washington Consensus. The term, Washington Consensus, was coined by John Williamson in 1989 and included an approach to policy based on principles such as trade liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation (Williamson 2002). An approach such as that advocated by the Washington Consensus is an a-historical and de-contextualised view and neglects to take into account the disparities between the developed nations and developing nations.

Though the policy agenda at the dawn of democracy in 1994 set the tone for enhanced participation, what eventually transpired in practice was more often a divergence from the intentions of policy. An example of this was the proliferation of MBA offerings at the expense of growing the critical expertise needed in the area of developmental studies and specifically



development economics. In order to review some of the damage, it is imperative to return to the origins of higher education policy development and to identify and re-claim elements of policy for the purpose of targeted intervention.

The African National Congress (ANC), prior to assuming political power in 1994, released its Policy Framework on Education and Training (January, 1994). The Framework was the party's stated vision for and commitment to higher education. Elements of the vision included defining the scope of higher education (all organised learning activities which take place in colleges (institutions offering vocational, technical and professional diplomas and certificates in teacher education, nursing, agriculture, technical, police and military sciences), technikons and universities or under their academic supervision) as well as outlining specific issues. Features of these pressing issues include:

- Higher Education institutions ought to be representative of the South African population. This means that Black students ought to enter and succeed in higher education in proportion to their strength in the population. Students, academic and administrative staff should reflect the country's racial, gender, class, and rural-urban balance. In 1994, about half the relevant age-group (18 – 24 year olds) of White youth entered higher education, while for Africans the corresponding figure was less than one in ten. Academic and administrative staff in 1994 was predominantly white men. The future of higher education at the time was conceived of as standing or falling by how the country would manage the pent-up demand for access and equity.
- The gross deficit in Black higher education enrolments in 1994 was particularly acute in institutions and across disciplines (such as the natural sciences) and was ascribed to the deficiencies of Black schools and the effect of other apartheid policies which functioned to exclude Blacks.
- Historically Black institutions were developed to service the apartheid social order and hence have been disadvantaged financially, in the range of disciplines offered, and by the underdevelopment of graduate studies and research capacity.
- The higher education system must be transformed to enable it to contribute to the reconstruction of society through a close linkage with a development policy aimed at economic growth, the enhancement of a democratic political system, and promotion of the cultural and intellectual life of society.

It follows that higher education was to be planned and integrated to the point where students and staff were increasingly representative of South African society. The envisaged system was to be linked to national human resource development and the production of scientific and other knowledge to service the economic, political, cultural and intellectual development of the different communities and nation. Amongst the principles informing the 1994 vision was the pursuit of democratic values such as representivity, accountability, transparency, freedom of association, and academic freedom to underpin the higher education system.

The ANC proposal encompassed a policy target that allowed for flexible access into and among universities, technikons and colleges and facilitated by a single national qualifications framework managed through the South African Qualifications Authority. The intention was that the national qualifications framework would be a catalyst for increased access to higher education by facilitating horizontal and vertical mobility between the different institutional sectors (colleges, technikons and universities). In expanding or growing the system, specific

priority was to be given to balancing the mix of outputs among the different levels and programmes in higher education. Insofar as development policies required it, priority was to be given to expanding the college and technikon sectors and programmes in science, technology and economics, thereby offsetting existing imbalances in enrolments.

A VISION DE-RAILED

Despite the governing party’s policy vision, execution of the policy agenda has been compromised by amongst others the adoption of free market principles to drive higher education as well as the state apparatus not having the requisite capacity for policy action. The evidence pointing to this is the fact that enrolments in higher education has only grown by 2% in 11 years. The performance in higher education in the last number of years may also point to the state’s inability to fully comprehend that social inequalities are embedded in history, culture and economic structure that influences an individual’s ability to compete. Certain population groups are adversely affected by geographic location and the unequal distribution of wealth and resources.

An OECD Report (2008:345), in reviewing the national policies for education in South Africa, concluded that some of the reasons why enrolment figures (participation) were still lagging behind the targets set in the NPHE included: declining numbers of school leavers meeting the required entry requirements for university study; high drop-out rates from university associated with financial and/or academic exclusion; higher education has become very expensive and may have impacted on the ability of students from lower and middle income backgrounds to gain entry into higher education and; shifts in the value of higher education programmes (increase in enrolments in economic sciences and decline in humanities) together with perceptions of falling standards in public higher education.

The table below highlights the incremental increase in participation rates between 1993 and 2005 and measure progress against the NPHE targets of 2001.

Table 1: Incremental increase in participation rates

Field of Study	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2002	2005	NPHE Target
Humanities & Social Sciences	269 000 57	329 000 58	320 000 54	277 000 44	287 000 44	298 197 44	311 894 42.3	40
Business, Commerce & Economic Sciences	113 000 24	126 000 22	139 000 23	146 000 26	200 000 30	204 728 30	214 509 29.1	30
Science, Engineering & Technology	90 000 19	111 000 20	138 000 23	140 000 49	167 000 26	172 203 26	211 069 28.6	30
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

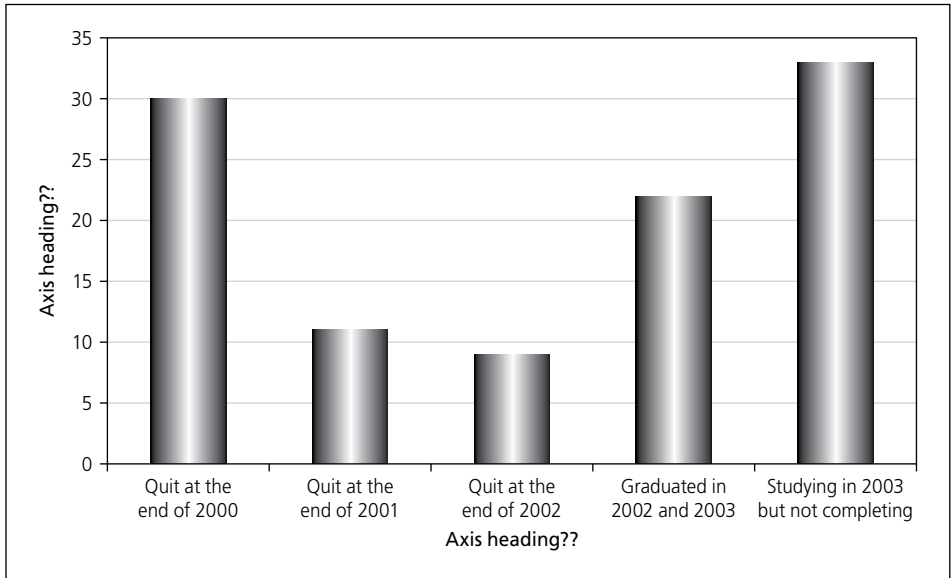
Source: Council on Higher Education (2004), *South African Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy*, The Council on Higher Education (CHE), Pretoria; 2005 figures from the Department of Education.

Though there has been some positive developments towards meeting the goals of the NPHE, a major deficiency in the system has been, and continues to be the ability of students to complete



their studies. This is an additional indicator of how deeply rooted social inequality is in South African society. Data from the Department of Education puts into perspective the relationship between access and success. A total of 50% of students enrolled for a qualification do not complete that qualification. A recent CHE study (2007) suggests that some of the reasons for this consequence may well be outside of higher education’s control, such as the quality and challenges of the grade 12 examinations, number of students writing and succeeding in mathematics and science, availability and quality of learning resources. Whilst others are in control of higher education such as institutional culture and the teaching and learning processes of HEIs.

Figure 1: The first year tertiary class of 2000, universities and universities of technology



Source Student Enrolment Planning in Public Higher Education (SEPHE) Report, 2005, Department of Education

Recent developments in the South African polity have opened up space for South African society to re-imagine a higher education sector that is mindful of the building blocks of a solid post-secondary education system. The South African economy is the biggest economy on the African continent and contributes 25% to the total GDP on the continent. Research from UNESCO indicates that the wealth of nations and universities play a determining role in the quality and centrality of a university or academic system (UNESCO 2009:4). A dilemma for South Africa as a developing country is finding the balance between expanded enrolments and the need to support research intensive universities as it is generally acknowledged that the production of knowledge is a key driver for development.

CHALLENGES OF ACCESS

Globally, evidence points to the fact that despite shifts towards greater inclusion in higher education, privileged classes have retained a relative advantage in entering higher education

(UNESCO 2009:5). The ability of a person to compete for a place in higher education is influenced by the history, culture and economic structure of society as social inequalities would normally reside in these. Participation of marginalised groups would tend to be below the national average for those living in rural areas, the disabled, indigenous people and women. This is further exacerbated in South Africa where social inequality has been legalised in racial terms (where the population was legally compelled to be classified according to race). The consequences of this racial inequality is reflected in a higher education participation rate of 12% for Africans, 13% for Coloureds, 51% for Indians and 60% for Whites (CHE 2007:10).

Why would learners want to enter higher education? From a HSRC study (2004:69), it seems that factors influencing a decision to proceed to higher education include enhancing employability, an intrinsic interest in a field of study, perceptions that higher education will lead to higher incomes, being spurred on by family to undertake higher education study, being offered a bursary and/or a scholarship, qualifying to finance study through NSFAS, or being able to finance study through a bank loan.

The OECD (2008:21) identified a number of critical elements that would have a direct impact on the equity agenda in terms of participation in higher education. Amongst these are the need for career information and guidance at the pre-tertiary level; integration and harmonisation of planning between the secondary and tertiary education systems; available articulation opportunities for higher education studies from any track (that is at exit or senior levels) in the Further Education and Training sector; diversifying the types of higher education to allow for varied sets of learners entering higher education; positive discrimination policies for particular groups whose prior educational disadvantage is well identified; making available incentives for Higher Education Institutions to broaden participation through the provision of extra support for students emanating from disadvantaged backgrounds; the affordability of higher education and; institutional admission management processes.

Career Information and Guidance

Forms of career guidance may include a list of post-school opportunities, information on study programmes offered by post-school institutions such as FET colleges and universities, school visits to post-school institutions and places of work, visits from companies and organisations to the school, visiting career expos, one-on-one discussions with a career guidance expert from outside the school. An HSRC study (2002:134) showed that more learners who have received some form of career guidance as opposed to not having received such guidance intended entering higher education (79% compared to 60%). It follows that making available information on different careers and offering career guidance has a positive effect on the intention to enter higher education. Whilst many of the advantaged (suburban) schools have the benefit of a career counselling service, this still remains an elusive service to many schools where no such tradition was established. It becomes therefore a policy imperative that the state has an obligation to increase support for career counselling initiatives, particularly targeting those learners who are either unable or not in a position to discuss their future plans with parents or guardians. The majority of learners entering university in South Africa are first-generation students. They would be the first in their family to go to university with



pressure placed on these students to succeed. There is strong consensus in the literature that the relationship between post-secondary participation and family educational background is indeed positive and sizeable.

The rationale for the government to actively pursue the issue of career counselling, through policy is contained in a government report that investigated the viability for a National Higher Education Application and Information Service. This matter should be reopened in view of the changing political and social dynamics. To quote from the Report (2003:9),

But potential applicants are especially disadvantaged by inadequate access to good information. In communities where there is little or no career guidance and little experience of higher education, potential applicants are least able to explore all the opportunities open to them. Those who do apply to study further may simply focus attention on the nearest accessible institution and make an application listing a range of different programmes within the same institution. As a consequence, they can end up accepting a place on a programme that does not correspond to their real interests or lead in their chosen career direction. This may well be a contributing factor to high dropout rates.

The Minister of Higher Education and Training has, in 2010, established a flagship ministerial project, the Career Advisory Services, through SAQA. The focus of the project to date has been on creating a helpline, walk-in career counselling service, intermediary service working closely with FET colleges and schools, as well as an outreach service and utilising media such as radio. The extent to which this intervention has made an impact is still being debated.

Even though the composition of the national student body has changed remarkably over the last number of years, it is significant that opportunities for Black students to access science, engineering and postgraduate programmes are limited. These are also the areas associated with high status and high skills.

Interface between Further Education and Training and Higher Education

The articulation and progression between the further education and training and higher education sectors are critical in addressing the socio-political (the kind of citizens being prepared) and labour market (contributing to the economic health) needs of society. A recent study indicates that approximately 2,8 million young people in the 18 to 24 age group are not in education or training or employment. Of this group, 21,3 percent would possibly qualify for higher education at NQF levels 5 and 6 (Certificate and Diploma) with another 3,5 percent qualifying for possible bachelor degree studies at NQF level 7. In addition to these, 3 percent have a grade 12 plus qualification (either Certificate, Diploma or Bachelors degree) (CHET 2009). The interface between Further Education and Training and Higher Education has been disabled in a number of ways. The standard and quality of the NSC as an exit qualification at the schooling level has been questioned. Initial results from a pilot test of the 2009 first year university under the National Benchmark Tests Project, (a project of Higher Education South Africa), showed that for the subject Mathematics (a critical gateway subject in academic programmes in Science and Engineering), a large majority of students

would need some form of academic support, with a small minority being able to cope with the subject at university. In the FET college sector, a limiting factor has been the capacity of both academic staff as well as management. This has in both instances been very low. The disabling inefficiencies between these sectors point towards the lack of harmonisation in policy between the sectors.

Affordability

Higher education qualifications represent both a public as well as a private benefit. The public benefit is manifested through responsible citizenship, enhanced democracy and a wider tax base. Private benefits would include better employment prospects with better remunerative benefits, enhanced image in the community, greater opportunities for social mobility and improved social capital. It may therefore seem reasonable and in the interest of both the state and the individual that the costs for higher education be shared. However, the reality in South Africa is that socio-economic inequities have largely been and continue to be entrenched through the lens of race. It is mostly Blacks who are prejudiced when it comes to having the financial capital needed to access higher education. The response of government has been the establishment of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, a scheme premised on the principle that students only start repayments after they have graduated and secured employment. NSFAS is aimed at creating or opening opportunities for students who have the academic capability to undertake higher education studies, but who lacks the financial capital to fund such studies. However, the eligibility of students for NSFAS funding is only determined once students are accepted and registered for an academic programme. The effectiveness and efficiency of NSFAS has been called into question and has resulted in the Minister of Higher Education and Training establishing a Task Team to review NSFAS. This inefficiency was apparent in 2007 when universities failed to disburse R50m from a R1,6b budget to finance loans to poor students. One of the reasons put forward at the time was the lack of capacity at the universities to administer the money and exacerbated by the fact that funds earmarked for specific programmes could not be diverted to other programmes which had enrolled students who qualified for the loans.

Institutional Admission Management Practices

Admissions criteria and procedures are needed to facilitate the increased access of disadvantaged or marginalised students. The 1994 Policy of the ANC relied on the goodwill of institutions to develop admissions criteria and procedures which, in addition to formal school qualifications, would recognise and assess the potential of students who were disadvantaged through race, gender, class, disability or rural-urban difference, to undertake academic study. However, what emerged was dissonance between policy, regulations and practice. Decisions for admission are made at the level of academic departments and faculties within institutions. This is a function that the state has outsourced to universities through section 37 of the *Higher Education Act, 1997*. An unintended consequence of this may have resulted in an entrenchment of elitism based on class and geographic location within some universities who subscribe to a practice of *feeder schools*. This refers to schools (normally well-resourced) who established a reputation for academic performance over the



years and who has built formalised relationships with a number of universities that it refers its students to. This practice is a barrier to social mobility and entrenches existing social structures.

Institutional Culture

In March 2008, the Minister of Education, announced the establishment of a *Ministerial Committee on Progress Towards Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions*. The Ministerial Committee was tasked to “investigate discrimination in public higher education institutions, with a particular focus on racism and to make appropriate recommendations to combat discrimination and to promote social cohesion”. The Committee in its Report (2008, 13) concluded that the “overall assessment of the state of transformation in higher education, (in regard to) discrimination, in particular with regard to racism and sexism, is pervasive in our institutions.” Even though institutional transformation-focused policies complied with the national policy agenda, particularly *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*, a pronounced gap is evident between written policies and policy action at institutions of higher learning. The intentions therefore of national policy were not being implemented at the institutional level. The burden of this policy negligence is profoundly borne by the historically marginalised groups, particularly Blacks and women.

POLICY TARGETING AS A TOOL FOR INCREASED ACCESS

Nzwei and Kuye (2007, 201) forward a compelling argument that policy analysis ought to be guided by the principle of engaging in unique situational circumstances whilst not losing sight of changes in international trends. It follows then that policy analysis becomes an important component of development, especially within the developmental state. Given the extreme levels of poverty in Africa and the growing inequity gap in South Africa in particular, Kuye (2007:5) identifies policy targeting as a route to deal with the crisis as it can be used as an implementation tool for poverty alleviation as well as contributing towards narrowing the growing inequality gap. Targeting becomes pro-poor, guiding public expenditure and service delivery.

Policy targeting is underpinned by the assumption that the policy process is rational. Smith (2003:321) puts forth the position that the making of policy encapsulates a process of various actions where a number of decisions are taken over a period of time. Thus, policy is about choices between alternatives. However, it would be erroneous to assume that this process happens in a state of absolute objectivity. In fact, the process is informed by amongst others, values in society, the availability of resources and information together with the power (political) and procedures (bureaucracy) to attain set goals.

Public administration, including the implementation of policy, is influenced by politics. The current government was elected on a popular mandate and has placed education as a central pillar to bring about a better life for its citizens. The reality however is that the term of government is limited in democratic states. In South Africa’s case, this limitation is five years.

The current public service would therefore need to identify existing policy instruments that could be tweaked to accurately reflect its policy agenda. In some instances this will require amendments to policies or the drafting and administration of new policies. All of this requires an appropriate mix of capacity for policy action that will lead to the desired outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION (IN THE CONTEXT OF ACCESS)

The higher education and training architecture requires urgent attention and policy-based solutions to address the socio-economic crisis in South Africa. Harmonisation and synergy across policy as well as positioning with regard to planning instruments such as the Human Resource Development Strategy, the National Development Plan and the Medium Term Strategic Framework require a systematic approach. The imminent issues for a targeted policy agenda that promotes access with success are listed below.

Define Higher Education

The foundation of the higher education architecture requires clarity on the terminology of higher education. Traditionally, universities in South Africa appropriated the term higher education to be equated with universities. Since 2005, three distinct forms of university has emerged as a result of policy and legislative intervention. These are university, university of technology and comprehensive university. A fourth form of “university” functions in South Africa, called private higher education institutions, but it is illegal for these institutions to call themselves *university* in South Africa.

Institutions differ according to the amount and quality of research, number of academic disciplines, study programmes, missions, styles of teaching, and training for different careers (Smith 2000:178-180). Differentiation is an asset as it opens up opportunities to develop closer relationships between higher education and the rest of the world such as a greater responsiveness to labour market needs, enhancing social and geographical access to higher education, providing high level occupational preparation in more applied and less theoretical ways as well as creating space for the growing diversity of qualifications and expectations of school leavers. Broad diversity of higher education contributes to broad access (Smith 2000).

The state has defined higher education as those qualifications at NQF level 5 and above as per the *Higher Education Act*, 101 of 1997.

“higher education” means all learning programmed (sic) leading to qualifications higher than grade 12 or its equivalent in terms of the National Qualifications Framework...”

This has been reiterated through policy instruments such as the HEQF. In practice, all institutions that offer qualifications from NQF level 5 to 10 would qualify to be higher education institutions. These include universities, universities of technology, comprehensive universities, nursing colleges, agricultural colleges, military colleges, police colleges and FET colleges, which, according to the *National Plan for FET Colleges* (2008) could in future offer qualifications at NQF levels 5 and 6. There would, therefore, be university and non-university



higher educational institutional types. This re-defined (in practice at least) notion of higher education will make it possible for students to find a type of education that is suited to their talents and needs, as well as the needs of society. A college committed to mainly teaching, is not a failed research university. Instead, it is an institution with a special character and mission and with great responsibilities for innovation and adaptation in response to social needs (Smith 2000).

The establishment of the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Minister of Higher Education and Training's Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training presents South Africa with the hope to reclaim and appropriate higher education to its proper place; not just universities.

Freeze Tuition Fees

Education White Paper 3 (1997) states:

To maximise the flexibility of institutions under the new arrangements, institutions should determine their own fees for subsidised student places as well as for student places outside the publicly funded quota. The basis on which fee levels are established must be transparent and subject to proper scrutiny within the institution, and must satisfy reasonable equity criteria. However, the Minister would expect institutions whose tuition fees were well above the nationally-determined price per subsidised student place, to explain why students should be expected to pay premium rates and to describe how poor students would be assisted to pay.

From the policy, it follows that institutions set their own fees based on principles of transparency and equity. Where fees are extra-ordinarily high, government can intervene and solicit an explanation from institutions or the sector. There is a direct relationship between cost of higher education and participation in higher education. The composite price index for higher education is more than just tuition fees. It is a total cost of living expense and includes tuition fees, accommodation fees, meals, books, extra-mural activities and other contingent costs. High fees is a deterrent to the marginalised from lower socio-economic circumstances.

This article suggests that government puts a moratorium on tuition fees for a period of at least two years. Following the review of NSFAS and having commenced with the implementation of the NSFAS recommendations, the state must consider freezing tuition fees for students who are recipients of NSFAS grants and loans within the context of a differentiated higher education system inclusive of colleges, universities and technological institutes.

Strengthen Student Support

At the institutional level it is imperative that once admitted, students should be provided with the necessary conditions that will lead to them succeeding in obtaining a qualification. It is untenable that half of students entering bachelor degree studies do not complete their studies in the prescribed minimum period. The teaching and learning experience should be a student-centred experience. *Education White Paper 3 (1997)* enjoins institutions to establish student services councils that "provide personal, career, curriculum and educational

guidance and counselling, life skills and sports programmed (*sic*), health and financial aid services, and student housing facilities". It was envisaged that this council would perform a policy advisory role in student services, rather than a monitoring and evaluation function. Other than this, the policy landscape is largely silent on the matter of student support. For example, there is no normative indication or framework as to what constitutes the minimum (acceptable) requirements for student support (like no more than two undergraduate students sharing a room in residence, availability of and access to ICT facilities dedicated for student usage, access to tutors and undergraduates having access to professorial staff). This vague policy position may have unintentionally contributed to the poor throughput and graduation rates in higher education programmes.

Establish a central applications service

A central application agency has a number of benefits. Not the least of these would be its contribution to enhance the long-term planning capability of government in relation to higher education and labour market needs. It would also contribute to studies in trend analysis and enable the state to steer the behaviour of higher education institutions by making public information on students' choices as well as improving the availability of information about quality to prospective students. The Report completed and released in 2003 could form the basis for establishing this agency. It could simultaneously address section 74 of the *Higher Education Act, 1997* regarding the future of the Matriculation Board, by incorporating the Matriculation Board into this agency. Such an agency should furthermore provide its service to non-university types of higher education such as colleges. The agency should furthermore incorporate functions related to career advice and NSFAS.

Invest in building and strengthening monitoring and evaluation capacity

The ability of the higher education authorities to deliver on policy objectives is directly linked to the monitoring and evaluation capacity in the public service. The political-administrative interface places an obligation on public servants to implement policy that is aligned to the political mandate of the government. It is imperative upon the administration to build a cadre of public administrators who are highly competent in identifying and managing policy that will not result in diffused benefits across society, but tangible results particularly aimed at enabling social mobility for the poorer classes. This will relieve higher education authorities from becoming reliant on academic staff secondments to the government where these staff (mainly from universities) is compelled to advance sectoral interests at the expense of broader socio-economic interests. To this end, it is proposed that the state introduces a capacity building programme for middle and senior managers in the public service that focus on public administration. This programme should be a generic programme of at least six months' duration and be a precondition for being employed in the managerial levels of a public institution. The programme should not be linked to PALAMA (or its successor), but should be offered by schools or departments of Public Administration at our universities.



CONCLUSION

This article may at first glance appear to be organised diatribe, but the argument is that in a developmental state, it is inevitable that government must target specific policies and the beneficiaries of this targeted approach should be the poor. The strategy of policy targeting will lead to social change in higher education with specific impact on who gets access, for what purpose and under what conditions.

This approach redefines development standards for South Africa away from neo-liberal positions of the development programme. Whilst academic freedom and institutional autonomy are important for development, it is crucial that in a developing state, state intervention is a needed ingredient in promoting development.

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