



## ANNEXURE 5

# Reflections on Higher Education Transformation

Discussion paper prepared for the second national  
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Universities South Africa

### 1 Introduction – the ‘system’

At the time of transition to democratic rule in 1994, South Africa’s centuries long, oppressive and divisive colonial and apartheid history left a higher education system deeply marked by its discriminatory and authoritarian legacies. This included, inter alia, a system structured along highly stratified racial, gender, class, cultural and spatial lines; skewed in its structural development; unequally financed; disarticulated from the most pressing economic and social needs of the majority; and internationally isolated and focused on the industrialised north with very few linkages with the developing world and the wider African continent. In short, the core logics of this system were almost diametrically opposed to the central tenets of the new Constitution (1997) that sought to create a non-racial, non-sexist, more equal and socially just social and economic order for South Africa.

Today, 21 years after the demise of the apartheid system, higher education has shifted, in its structural characteristics, from a fragmented and structurally racialised system of 36 public and more than 300 private institutions in 1994 to a relatively (at least formally) more integrated system of 26 public universities (traditional, comprehensive and universities of technology) and 95 private higher education institutions in 2015 (see Blom, 2015). 990 000 students are enrolled in the public higher education sector, and 120 000 in private institutions in the same sector, according to the 2013 statistics (DHET, 2013). The entire post-school education and training (PSET) sector is made up of more than 4 000 institutions: public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); public and private Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges; public and private Adult Education and Training (AET) Centres; and workplace-based education and training facilitated by Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). More than two million students and learners were enrolled in PSET institutions by 2013. The FET/TVET sector comprised almost 680 public FET/TVET and private FET Colleges in 2013, 50 of which

were public and 627 private. The AET sector comprised over 3 200 public and private AET Centres in 2013 (DHET, 2013).

Taken as a whole, and compared with post-secondary education systems in comparable developing countries, the South African system resembles what is often referred to as an ‘inverted pyramid’ – dominated in size, funding and status by universities, with a badly neglected, fractured and historically underfunded system of public and private sector colleges (Blom, 2015). This has only recently been fully recognised by policy-makers, as expressed in the Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training of 2013, which makes it clear that the long-term transformational requirements of the South African post-school education and training system requires fundamental reconstitution, integration and systematic development to address the socio-economic development needs of South Africa.

This new PSET system is still in its early stage of development, with much work required in its planning, funding and institution building. Clearly, universities should play a key role in catalysing and enabling the successful emergence of the ‘college’ components of the PSET sector via capacity building, collaboration, mutual exchanges of knowledge, and articulated pathways for students. Moreover, transformation goals also require a reconstruction of the articulations between universities and colleges if we are to foster an integrated system. In this context, it will become necessary for us to think of ‘university transformation’ not in terms of the internal dynamics and requirements of the university system but crucially, also in relation to its role, functions and purposes within this wider post-school education and training system, as well as more widely within society and the economy. In a sense, universities have to achieve a double-transformation: internally, to better reflect the transformational goals set by higher education policy and reflected in South Africa’s constitution, and externally, in reframing their role and contributions with the wider PSET and society.

## 2 Defining higher education transformation

In South African debates on higher education, the term ‘transformation’ is generally held to refer to a comprehensive, deep-rooted and ongoing social process seeking to achieve a fundamental reconstitution and development of our universities to reflect and promote the vision of a democratic society. This entails a simultaneous process of eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and creating a higher education sector that gives full expression to the talents of all South Africans, particularly the marginalised and poor. The transformation of higher education therefore refers to the active removal of any institutional, social, material and intellectual barriers in the way of creating a more equal, inclusive and socially just higher education system. As such, our understanding of the concept is one of designating a range of social, economic, cultural and political conditions and their institutionalised settings that should be reconstituted if higher education is to fulfil its democratic mandates.

The strategically most significant ‘objects’ of HE transformation in South Africa, at the core, entail crucial aspects, such as governance, management and leadership, student environment (access, success), staff environment (equity), institutional cultures, teaching and learning, research and knowledge systems, institutional equity, and the political economy of higher education funding.

On the strength of the above, it is clear that one-dimensional or narrow conceptions of the remit and nature of higher education transformation cannot suffice in our context. This was the case, for example, in the Equity Index Report (2013), co-authored by Makgoba and Govinder, which provided what turned out to be a highly flawed and much discredited assessment of academic staff and staff equity, correlating this with research productivity, and projecting this as a measure of the state of transformation of universities (see

Moultrie and Dorrington, Dunne, 2014). Whilst racial staff equity is indispensable for transformation, it has to be linked to, and facilitate the simultaneous transformation of other dimensions of the system including gender, disability, and class, and the structures through which these relations are mediated. These include: curricula and epistemological frameworks; teaching; learning; research and engagement; student access and success; governance and management; ethics of leadership; and the wider role of the university in society.

A more complete framing of higher education transformation should perforce recognise the interconnectivity and simultaneity of race, class, gender, disability and other markers of social difference, and how such differences are constructed and reproduced in determinate relations of power and inequality in society and the economy. We must reject reductionist, essentialist and one-dimensional conceptions of transformation. After all, we talk about the higher education ‘system’, suggestive of a more or less integrated, but contradictory ecosystem comprising different social relations, practices, traditions, cultures, and so forth.

Finally, the critique of the nature and pace of the critical aspects of higher education transformation, such as student access and success, staffing, infrastructure, curriculum choices, and so forth, can hardly be sustained without also simultaneously asking hard questions about the role of the State and Capital in shaping the terrain of higher education, as well as the impact of social dynamics in civil society on universities:

- the extent to which *public funding regimes* governing NSFAS, subsidy and infrastructure development are able to support equity goals across the system coherently, systematically and successfully – particularly in the context of slowdowns in state expenditure levels and economic contraction;
- the extent to which the *private sector* actors promote views which confer lesser value on the social sciences and humanities studies and how this impacts on student choices; the role of professional councils in emphasising technical, career-focused content over holistic skills development, and narrow ‘instrumentalisation’ of higher education; and
- the impact of civil society dynamics on universities, including violent protests recently reported at some university campuses.

### 3 Systemic transformation challenges

The Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, in his May 2015 budget speech in parliament, promised an uncompromising push for higher education transformation in the wake of various student-initiated movements, such as the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ campaign at the University of Cape Town (UCT); the ‘Open Stellenbosch’ movement at Stellenbosch University (SUN); and transformation battles at North West University (NWU) and many other university campuses across the country. As Dr Nzimande stated, ‘Despite the significance of symbols, such as names and statues, we must not conflate these with more fundamental matters of transformation. There remains an urgent need to radically change the demographics of our professoriate; transform the curriculum and research agendas; cultivate greater awareness of Africa; eliminate racism, sexism and all other forms of unjust discrimination; improve academic success rates; and expand student support’.

Such criticisms clearly resonate strongly with the experiences of many black students and staff members at historically white universities, but they are by no means limited to these institutions. Any careful analysis of the data and experiences of stakeholders will reveal that all our institutions, historically white and black, face the multiple, both varied and common challenges of transformation. There are, to be sure, many good

practices, pioneering experiments and in some cases, noteworthy breaks in the proverbial ‘glass ceilings’ to be found all across the sector, often led by groups of academics, innovative managers, student organisations and leaders. However, there are also many other instances of reactionary and unacceptable practices coexisting in the same ‘system’.

If we accept that ‘transformation’ is a process, and not an absolute datum or historical point, we must also insist this assertion is not used as an excuse for shifting its imperatives to an indeterminate timeless future. Even changes that cannot be produced in a short time span have to begin somewhere, and that time is now.

Taken as a whole, the ‘state’ of change in the sector is highly uneven, contradictory and complex. Thus, a better understanding of this landscape of change (or otherwise), requires us to disaggregate the most important areas in which we think a critical assessment should be made of higher education’s transformation ‘balance sheet’. We believe that the most important areas include: the teaching and learning environment; research and intellectual cultures; universities and their roles in society; the student environment; the staff environment; institutional cultures; governance, management and leadership; and funding and infrastructure.

Recent demands for ‘transformation’ have come from a wide range of quarters including students, academic staff, administrative and the wider public, and have been articulated in diverse terms. At times they echo common themes and at other times raise institution-specific issues, often reflecting differing views or points of emphases. We believe that these emerging voices, together with other critical voices in the sector, mark an important historic moment in the history of our democracy, some 21 years since South Africa’s first democratic elections; a moment in which universities, perhaps for the first time, are being pressed by progressive voices to gain greater courage, vision and commitment to both internally transform themselves to better reflect the promise of our Constitution; to become advocates for a more socially-just and equal social and economic order. In a sense, it could be contended that the current ‘legitimation crisis’ of universities is also a legitimacy crisis of the existing social order.

If one reflects on the history of ‘transformation struggles’ in South African higher education, themselves marked by moments of ‘punctuated crises’, it can be seen that there are important historical continuities between current demands for transformation and previous generations of critical voices for change in the sector; most notably, the militant voices on university campuses of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and even earlier periods, such as the Black Consciousness period of late 1960s and 1970s when progressive voices (students, academic and administrative staff) vigorously campaigned for key social demands touching on the nature, purposes and role of our universities. Many of these demands were eventually captured in the vision, mission and policy goals set out by the first democratically-elected Government after 1994.

Their most eloquent expression is to be found in the White Paper on Higher Education Transformation of 1997, and reflected, in some measure, in the Higher Education Act of 1997. In the years thereafter, subsequent policy interventions dealt with issues that were not clearly spelt out in the first generation policies; notably, the National Plan for Higher Education (2001); a New Institutional Landscape for Higher Education (2002); the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (2008); the Declaration of the Higher Education Summit (2010); the National Development Plan (2012); the terms of reference of the Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in South African Public Universities (2013); and more recently, the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (2014)<sup>3</sup>.

The cornerstone higher education policy document that clearly states the transformation imperatives facing the sector, inherited from colonialism and apartheid, has been the White Paper on HE Transformation (WPHET) of 1997. The WPHET calls for a new system of higher education based on:

- equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities;
- meeting, through well-planned and co-ordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs, including the high-skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment;
- supporting a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights by educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, non-racist and non-sexist social order; and
- contributing to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and in particular addressing the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, southern African and African contexts, and upholding rigorous standards of academic quality.

The WPHET was followed, some 16 years later, by the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013) (WPPSET) that provided an integrated policy framework for an expanded, differentiated and internally articulated post-school education and training system in which universities are located. The WPPSET asserts the following:

“It is close to twenty years since South Africa discarded the apartheid regime and replaced it with a democratically elected government. Much has been achieved since then, but much remains to be done to rid our country of the injustices of its colonial and apartheid past. Deep-seated inequalities are rooted in our past; it is not by accident that the remaining disparities of wealth, educational access and attainment, health status and access to opportunities are still largely based on race and gender. A growing black middle class has been empowered by the new conditions created by the arrival of democracy, and its members have managed to transform their lives in many ways. However, the majority of South Africans have still to attain a decent standard of living. Most black people are still poor; they are still served by lower-quality public services and institutions (including public educational institutions) than the well-off. Patriarchy, also a legacy of our past, ensures that women and girls continue to experience a subordinate position in many areas of life, including in much of the education and training system”.

It further contends that ‘other inequities also exist irrespective of race or gender, although often aggravated by them: differences based on socio-economic status, ability/disability, or health status (especially HIV/AIDS status). People born and living in poor rural areas have fewer opportunities than urban residents, and those in townships and informal settlements do not fare as well as their suburban counterparts. The main victims of the growth in unemployment are the youth, the particular focus of the DHET’s attention. Historical disadvantages need to be redressed if we are to move towards a more just and stable society”.

The above clearly sets out a range of formidable challenges to our universities. And some 21 years after the fall of the apartheid system, it is appropriate for us to take a sober, balanced and self-critical look at how far we have come in taking up the challenges set by South Africa’s Constitution and policies on higher education.

If we can periodise the last 21 years of higher education development, we can possibly distinguish between two overlapping phases. The first phase, roughly from 1994 to 2007, tended to take as its main and understandable focus, the setting up of the new system - macro-structural, planning, governance, and regulatory and funding norms for the post-apartheid higher education system. This took an enormous amount of time, resources and struggles, taking on many of the 'first generation' transformation questions that faced higher education in the period immediately after the demise of the apartheid system, of integrating the racially-segregated universities into a single system of higher education; de-racialising the policy system on the basis of which that system previously functioned; imposing common funding, planning and steering norms to guide the development of the new system; setting up the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the Council for Higher Education (CHE), and so forth.

Although some legacy issues (e.g. some post-merged institutional dynamics, structural under-funding of the new system) of this first phase still remain unsolved to date, the major elements of this period of institution-building are now largely in place, functioning in a relatively more integrated, national and regulated environment than in the apartheid milieu.

In the second phase, from around 2008 to date, policy attention shifted to within-system issues, such as the effectiveness (impact) and efficiency (costs) of higher education; institutional culture; language policy and practices; equity of access and success; the production of new generations of academics; and diversifying the equity profile of staff, and so forth. The new focus on these issues, in large measure, is the result of growing pressures from within higher education itself – radical student voices, unions, institutional forums, academics and leaderships across the sector – and from outside the gates of universities (political parties, social movements, etc.). The logical thrust of many of the critiques being offered by this new generation of voices appear to point towards not only the limits of present institutional, social and funding arrangements within higher education, but also its root causes in the nature of the post-apartheid political and economic 'settlements'; a critique of not only higher education, but of the nature of the economic and political system.

#### **4 How have we done and what has to be done?**

If we examine the higher education transformation 'balance sheet' of the past 21 years since democracy in dispassionate, self-critical and balanced terms, it would surely reveal a mixed picture characterised by advances in specific areas, often in sharp contrast with substantive parts of the higher education landscape, which has hardly changed in 21 years. In the section below, an attempt is made to provide a critical, but summary assessment of eight (8) of the most critical areas of higher education transformation, touching on: the challenges of governance, management and leadership; the student environment (access and success); the staff environment (equity); institutional cultures; the teaching and learning environment; research and intellectual cultures; the role of universities in society; institutional equity; and the political economy of higher education funding.

In assessing the gains, failures and challenges of each of these aspects of the higher education environment, it seems necessary for us to view them as inter-connected with one another, and as integral to a relatively integrated, but contradictory system of higher education, in which institutional transformation trajectories are simultaneously shaped by the intersection of State policies on: funding and steering; institutional strategies; social forces within and beyond universities; and crucially, the economic system. The stresses and pressures for change from within universities, we believe, cannot be properly understood in isolation from the wider socio-economic and political order in which higher education is embedded.

Universities are microcosms of society, and their nature, role and functions cannot be adequately understood outside of their problematic intersection with state, markets and civil society. A failure to grasp the impact of these forces, particularly State policy and Markets, on universities, and therefore their conditioning effects, will result in an over-estimation of the ‘agency of possibility’ of universities, the exoneration of state policy and capitalist markets in crucial aspects of the reproductive logics of universities, and a reliance on ‘voluntaristic’ notions of political change. Can we truly achieve a fully transformed higher education system in the context of the failure of state policy to adequately support public higher education and an economic order that distorts its purposes?

Whilst a critique of the effects of state policy and market forces on the state of our universities, by no means should exonerate institutions from having to face up to their role in framing institutional responses to these pressures and expectations, we also believe that the critique of university transformation must, *per force*, entail a critique of the dominant social and economic order in which universities in South Africa are expected to promote distinctly ‘public good’ purposes in the context of declining levels of State funding and inequalities in the economy and labour markets generating distortionary effects on universities.

#### 4.1 Governance, management and leadership

If we compare the present governance arrangements at most universities to that which existed in the period immediately after the transition of apartheid, there can be little dispute that we have seen major shifts away from racially-based, authoritarian, discriminatory, exclusionary and elitist regimes of the apartheid era. This was largely due to sweeping new changes in governance requirements made possible by the introduction of the Higher Education Act of 1997. The Act enabled a new policy and regulatory dispensation, which reconstituted the internal governance arrangements of universities and its oversight by Government and Parliament. It provided for a new set of principles, such as cooperative governance, transparency, democracy and inclusivity, and the creation of broadly more representative Councils, Senates and other committees, as well as new structures, such as Institutional Forums.

The new policy framework was both prompted by, and itself facilitated, intense political pressures from students and staff in the 1990s, to bring about wide-ranging changes: more diverse Councils; a new generation of black Vice-Chancellors and senior leaders; new union and stakeholder voices; and a revisioning of the public mandates of universities to support the national development objectives of the country. However, these disruptive changes were by no means uniform across the sector, with some more conservative university Councils remaining largely intact and with this, dominant sub-cultures and networks. Public attention, at the time, seems to have been largely focused on historically black universities and former technikons that were rocked by instability and leadership crises.

Taken as a whole, although the post-1994 period saw many ‘top-level’ changes in Council and senior university leaderships, it did not necessarily see transformation ‘trickle down’ to the ‘lower’ levels, especially in Senates, Faculties and university administrations – what many consider to be the sources of ‘deep power’ within universities.

Similarly, and perhaps because of this, many of the dominant ‘*cultures of governance and leadership*’ simply morphed into the new era, with its essential features, symbols and practices left more or less unbroken. The politics of governance was the subject of intense policy debates in the early 1990’s, and the push by progressive voices led to the principles of cooperative governance, transparency and consultation inscribed into the statutes of most universities. However, by the end of the decade, there appears to have been a shift away from ‘cooperative’ to ‘corporate’ governance norms, especially with

the introduction of King 3 reporting and DHET reporting standards; the former, with its origins in the democratic struggles of the 1990s, with the latter transposed from the private sector in the 2000s. There appears to be various points of tension in university governance, often tied up with how different interests groups are able to gain access to, or are marginalised from, key decision-making structures rooted in these different traditions of governance.

Although the quality and stability of university governance at a number of universities (e.g. Zululand, Walter Sisulu, TUT) has recently been under media and public scrutiny, it is by no means a recent issue. Indeed, much of the first decade after the transition to democracy was consumed by major upheavals and crises around the 'political' legitimacy of university leaderships, including Councils. In many instances, fairly successful transitions came about, with a number of universities experiencing relative stability over the years. However, instability persisted at a number of universities despite changes in leaderships, with persistent problems of maladministration, instances of corruption, weak systems, and lapses of proper oversight and risk management.

Between 1994 and 2012, the Ministry of Higher Education and Training appointed no fewer than 14 assessors and administrators to deal with various crises at specific higher education institutions, ranging from governance breakdown, maladministration and the near collapse of institutions. Although this is often directed AT HDIs, there have been leadership problems across the sector. The fact that universities face such problems from time to time is not the key problem, which is rather how they deal with them. After all, corporate and public institutions also face these challenges in their life histories. If, however, such problems become endemic, ingrained and self-perpetuating, thus undermining the normal functioning and integrity of an institution, they require more fundamental interventions.

It is also important to note that all complex institutions are internally differentiated, largely for functional purposes, such as the distribution of various teaching, research, engagement and administrative functions, usually organised along the lines of faculties, departments, schools, centres, institutes, and intellectually, 'schools of thought', disciplinary networks, etc. This feature often tends to lead to the evolution of particularistic networks, relationships and forms of identity. When such associations, however, tend to crystallise along racial, class, gender, sexual orientation lines or other discriminatory courses, it directly undermines the principle of inclusive diversity, especially if dominant sub-cultures act as 'political power blocs' conserving arcane and reactionary interests in blatant opposition to progressive transformation goals.

Some writers have pointed to the role that alumni, 'ethnic', academic, intellectual and political 'cabals' play as 'shadow governments' on some campuses, by promoting 'race' and 'ethnic' (and one might add, gendered) networks and career advancement (see Law, Phillips and Turney, 2004). Such networks are often based on various regimes of patronage and the accumulation of power, influence and resources that do not have the principle of equal opportunity as their inherent basis. Whilst sub-cultures and networks forming to promote and facilitate various kinds of administrative, functional and intellectual activities is an inescapable feature of university life, when such networks mutate into exclusionary associations or 'fraternities', circulating and monopolising opportunities and resources in research and exchange experiences, they undermine the very idea of the university as 'an open society'. This forms part of the much talked about institutional culture at universities.

Going forward, a number of *interventions* may be necessary to deepen the quality of transformation in governance, management and leadership:

- the possible establishment of a *Higher Education Leadership Academy* could be considered: this could assist all institutions to develop the requisite expertise in academic and administrative leadership and at management and governance levels; and
- efforts to reach consensus amongst higher education institutions on the principles underpinning their ‘cultures of governance’, including the right balance between ‘cooperative’ and ‘corporate’ principles and modes of governance, need to be undertaken.

## 4.2 The student environment: equity of access and success

Gross enrolment data since 1995 show a dramatic expansion of South Africa’s higher education system, marked by almost consistent increases in overall and particularly, black enrolment patterns, in sharp contrast to the period before the onset of democratic rule. Between 1995 and 2014, the sector grew from 480 000 to 980 000. From 2007 to 2012, black African and coloured student headcount numbers increased from 476 768 to 662 123 and from 49 069 to 58 692 respectively; whilst Indian and white student headcount numbers fell from 52 596 to 52 296 and from 180 463 to 172 654 respectively, for the same period (CHE, Vital Stats, 2012). Headcount enrolment by gender for the same period shows male enrolments growing from 338 549 to 398 368, whereas female enrolments grew from 422 535 to 554 840. The racial profile of HE headcount enrolments compared to the general racial population spread of black Africans (80%), coloureds (9%), Indians (5%) and whites (9%) in 2012 shows that black African students comprised 69%, coloureds, 6%, Indians, 5%, and whites, 18%, of the overall student population (ibid).

The massive increase in gross enrolments, and the changing social composition of the student population since 1994 had a dramatic impact on the demographic profiles of student populations in historically white universities, although its ‘spread rates’ were not uniform across the sector, with some institutional data showing slower rates of intake of black students. Enrolments at historically white institutions show “a lower proportion of black representation than their demographic representation, and white students remain concentrated at the historically white institutions. Conversely, the historically black institutions remain almost exclusively black. Social class is a factor at play here: if access, opportunity and outcomes were previously shaped by ‘race’, they are now also (perhaps largely) conditioned by social class” (HESA, 2014).

Whilst we have seen major changes in gross enrolment rates and the social composition of our student population, South Africa’s gross participation rates (the measure of higher education enrolment relative to schooling population) if compared to other middle-income countries, is still significantly low. At the time of transition to democracy, the gross national HE participation rate was 17%, but the rate of participation for black African, coloured and Indian students stood at 9%, 13% and 40% respectively, in contrast to 70% for whites (HESA, 2011). By 2012, the participation rates of black African and coloured students were 16% and 14% respectively, if compared to 47% for Indian and 55% for white students for the same year; and with a gross national participation rate of 19% (CHE, Vital Stats, 2012). With a real growth of only 2% between 1994 and 2011, South Africa still lags considerably behind OECD participation rates in most OECD countries, and is some way behind the projected target of 25% set by the National Development Plan (NDP) for 2020.

At the same time, increased enrolments for much of the same period have not been mirrored by comparable rates of student academic success, particularly among black students, if measured by throughput, success, graduation and drop-out rates. The data shows, for example, black African, coloured and Indian students achieving 74%, 77% and 78% in average course success rates respectively, with

white students achieving a national average of 84%; and 74% for male and 78% for female students respectively. Graduation data for 2011 show a national average of only 15%, compared to international norms of 25% for three-year degree programmes. In 2010, the black African graduation rate stood 16%, and that for white students, at 22%, with an average of 17% (CHE, 2012:9). In so far as throughput and drop-out rates for a three-year degree at contact institutions are concerned, 16% of African students that began study in 2005 graduated in the minimum three years, 41% graduated after six years, and 59% had dropped out. In the case of white students the comparative figures were 44% of students graduated in the minimum three years, 65% graduated after six years, and 35% had dropped out (CHE, 2012:51). The figures for three-year diplomas at contact institutions were worse: after six years 63% of African students had dropped out and 45% of white students (CHE, 2012:50). A recent CHE study notes that “only about one in four students in contact institutions...graduate in regulation time”; only 35% of the total intake, and 48% of contact students, graduate within five years”, and that “it is estimated that some 55% of the intake will never graduate” (CHE, 2013:15 ).

It is widely agreed that this scenario of an expanded higher education system marked by ‘*a lack of growth, low participation, high attrition, low completion and variable quality*’ needs to be urgently and decisively turned around. Its causes are typically multi-fold and multi-dimensional. This includes, inter alia:

- significant parts of the academic systems across all universities that have not fully adapted to being more responsive to the realities of highly segmented, socially diverse and cognitively differentiated learning communities; and many institutions where student support systems are weak, under-resourced and unable to provide high-quality, holistic student life experiences;
- inadequate student financial support to ensure the costs of study (tuition, accommodation, books, transport, meals and subsistence) for particularly poor and working class students, are fully covered via an optimal, effective and well-governed NSFAS dispensation; and with this, weak national and institutional support systems that are often unable to provide the necessary infrastructure, facilities and services to underpin a better student funding model;
- unacceptably and unsustainably high student : lecturer ratios at many institutions across the system, reducing the ability of lecturers to effectively attend to student needs;
- unevenly spread high-quality teaching and learning infrastructure, including optimised teaching venues, able to provide equity of access to students, and the ability to harness complementary social technologies such as blended learning;
- curriculum structures at undergraduate degree levels, typically designed for highly compressed learning experiences favouring a smaller segment of the student population, not accommodating multiple temporal tracks, and not making sufficient provision for differentiated forms of teaching and learning support; and
- historically low perceived status of learning, and learning as scholarship and praxis, in contrast to the disproportionate importance and ideological status conferred on the ‘research’ mission of university by leaderships, media and ranking systems.

In tackling the challenges of both improving the rates of participation and enrolment to match the development needs of South Africa and drastically refining the quality and equity of academic success across the system, several *interventions* may have to be implemented in order to go forward:

- a nationally-coherent system of student academic development to cope with diverse learning communities, supported equitably across the system with high-quality teaching and learning and social support;

- a properly funded NSFAS system underpinned by competent and optimally resourced student support services and infrastructure at institutional levels, particularly accommodation, transport and social services;
- the construction of a wider and more diversified public-private funding system to drastically boost gross funding for student financial aid by engaging the Public Investment Corporation (PIC), the Development Bank of SA (DBSA), the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and commercial banks in raising the current levels of investment;
- investment in decreasing unacceptably high student: lecturer ratios within benchmarked norms across the sector via dedicated remedial interventions via the subsidy formula;
- targeted support for improvements in the scope and quality of the teaching and learning infrastructure, especially at historically disadvantaged universities and campuses;
- consideration for the CHE-mooted idea of developing a four-year undergraduate degree structure, taking into account the complexities and challenges this will bring, but which should provide for a more flexible and realistic basic undergraduate degree framework to respond better to our differentiated learning communities; and
- ensuring all universities recognise, promote and support teaching and learning as critical to the core functions of the academic system, and able to draw on the best policy, system and intellectual and technical support from within the university system.

### 4.3 The staffing environment at universities

This dimension of the social transformation of universities is perhaps the most glaring collective failure of the sector to date. Overall, university staffing demographics, and that of the academic class in particular, stand in sharp contrast to the changes we have seen in 21 years in the student enrolment patterns of our universities. “Racism and patriarchy as key features of colonialism and apartheid profoundly shaped the social composition of academic staff” (HESA, 2014). In 1994, 83% of academics at South African universities were white, and 68% male, with black academics comprising 17% in the context of black South Africans constituting 89% of the population. The under-representation of black Africans was especially severe; making up almost 80% of the population, they constituted 10% of the academic workforce.

Over the past two decades there has been some movement, but, as is well known, not adequately across the system, more especially at historically white universities. In 2012, of the full-time permanent academic staff of 17 451, 53% were white and 55% male. The distribution of academics across universities has continued to broadly follow the historical contours of ‘race’ and ethnicity (DHET, 2010); and in many cases, these patterns have been perpetuated in the recruitment strategies of universities.

Post-1994, South African universities are faced with three broad challenges in respect of academic labour. First, the system, as a whole, desperately requires the production and retention of an expanded academic labour pool with a more sustainable age and experiential profile. Significant parts of the current system, particularly at poorly resourced institutions, are struggling with unacceptably high student: lecturer ratios. The large increase in student enrolments over the past 20 years “has not been accompanied by an equivalent expansion in the number of academics” (DHET, 2013: 35). Expanding higher education enrolments and the establishment of new universities mean that a larger academic workforce is required. Given the current retirement age, varying between 60 and 65, in the coming decade over 4 000 (27%) of current academics will retire, including 50% of the most highly qualified professors and associate professors (HESA, 2014).

The second, and simultaneous challenge is changing the social composition of the academic work force through active, directly resourced and targeted equity interventions. Clear policies and instruments to enable this to take place should be put into place at all institutions, aligned to, and aided by a sustainable budget. Councils, VCs and institutional leaders should take direct responsibility for driving the targets and outcomes set for changing the social profile of the academic community at all our universities. The third challenge is to significantly raise the intellectual and academic capabilities related to teaching and learning, research and community engagement that are fundamental to the transformative role of our universities (ibid). Our task is therefore to grow (academic corps), recompose (demographic profile), and raise the transformational capabilities of all academics.

“A failure to invest in and cultivate the next generations of high quality academics will have far-reaching consequences. Social equity and redress and the scope and pace of the deracialisation and degendering of the academic workforce will be compromised. The quality of academic provision will be increasingly debilitated, with consequences for the capabilities of universities to produce high quality graduates and knowledge. The goal of transforming and developing South African universities, including enhancing their teaching and research capabilities, will be constrained. The ability of universities to contribute to development and democracy through new generations of outstanding scholars that are committed to critical and independent scholarship and social justice will be hampered” (HESA, 2014). The greater inclusion of blacks and women in knowledge production, and transforming the very forms of production of knowledge is a necessary condition for a transformed higher education system.

A number of *interventions* are required to be simultaneously implemented at both institutional and sector levels, including:

- rapid expansion of the Next Generation Academic Programme (nGAP), with double the amount of annual funding to achieve scale across the sector and sustained over the next two decades to systematically recruit, grow, retain and develop equity staff at all levels – and funded by an additional Treasury allocation, rather than ad hoc allocations from the National Skills Fund;
- strong, explicitly rendered institution-based policies and programmes, supported by resources and staff, to translate national imperatives into institutional advances in support of equity staff, and leaderships, up to Vice-Chancellors and Councils taking direct responsibility for ensuring its success;
- considering the establishment of a Higher Education Academy to provide dedicated and comprehensive development support for academic leadership, especially providing opportunities for equity staff development; and
- developing structured mentorship and coaching programmes at institutional levels to support aspirant academic leaders, especially those from equity backgrounds, to ensure there is the transfer of knowledge and expertise.

#### 4.4 The cultural and social environment at universities

This issue – commonly termed ‘institutional culture’ – is, apart from equity, one of the most publicly charged aspects in higher education transformation debates today. Its resurgence in higher education and media debates is largely, though not exclusively due to critical voices and pressures arising from new student movements and academics critical of the existing order. It has thus far found its most articulate and robust expression in the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ movement, and has generated fierce debates on the role of ‘culture’ in the intellectual assumptions on which most universities in South Africa have been founded, including the dominance of Eurocentric epistemology, pedagogy and curricula, and its silences, if not hostility to knowledge, culture, ideas and traditions from and about African realities, and more

specifically, black experiences.

These voices point to the *cultural* origins and production of social power via which, it is argued, dominant subcultures succeed, over time, in controlling and shaping political, social and intellectual authority at universities. Institutional culture, thus understood, refers to the cultural framework (norms, values, codes, rituals, symbols and practices) via which social and intellectual behaviour is regulated within universities, and particularly within academic systems. The social and cultural assumptions are inscribed through more or less cohesive formal, semi-formal and informal codes and prerequisites into different parts of the regulatory and decision-making systems of universities, including its symbolic orders, over time becoming 'naturalised' as 'the way things are done'. This 'default logic' is not only used as a means of seeking acceptable levels of conformity of those 'inside', but also often acts to screen out and marginalise dissident voices. Its power is reinforced by a dominant sub-culture succeeding in asserting its values and ways of thinking about the world as the 'institutional' codes of conduct, and ensuring a form of social hegemony.

There has been much written about the sense of deep alienation and marginalisation felt by many black students at former white universities, and the frustrations of black staff wishing to find their place within an established order of social relations and power; for black students, having few black role models within the academy, and not seeing their own existential experiences being sufficiently reflected in largely Eurocentric curriculum systems; and black academics, struggling with a sense of powerlessness, having to fit into an order requiring no dis-establishment. The sense of alienation has fuelled deep anger and resentment, itself acting on the back of a more general critique of the black intellectual and his/her social experiences since the transition to democratic rule: feelings of economic and social impotence, despite the transfer of political power to majority rule in 1994.

However, it must be said that no South African university is without challenges with respect to the search for institutional cultures fully embracing and promoting the principles of diversity, inclusivity, multiculturalism and equality. After all, our students and staff bring their cultural beliefs and ideas into the university, and, like all human beings, draw on them to make meaning of the new realities of the university environment. Here, they have to establish relationships with institutions already set in particular ways in which they often struggle to 'see themselves' in the symbolic orders (rituals, symbols, heritages), languages, and canons of knowledge production on which our institutions are founded. It is clear that the issue of overcoming the alienating conditions of blacks at many historically white universities require firm and clear interventions. However, 'alienation' is experienced, albeit in different forms across the sector, including historically black universities. If racism has been cited as a dominant form of alienation at many historically white universities, there have been many reports of ethnicity, tribalism, patriarchy, homophobia, sexism and xenophobia at a number of historically black universities.

It is clear that we need to overcome the categories of 'black' and 'white' institutions, even with the 'historical' prefix, as they simply perpetuate unreconstructed legacies in different forms. For this to happen, all our institutions should eradicate reactionary and arcane cultural and social practices, and fully embrace our nation's diversity. Furthermore, under-developed universities should be fully recapitalised to ensure they can provide equitable access and support to achieve success. To create a university system based on the principles of inclusivity, diversity and equity means we must, per force, promote non-racist, non-sexist, non-homophobic and anti-discriminatory institutional cultures for all students and staff – a precondition for democratic citizenship at universities.

For institutional cultures to shift, it is necessary, indeed vital, for demographic diversity to be fully

realised in our staffing structures. A multicultural and diverse staffing complement brings with it new experiences, identities and cultures on the basis of which we can build *new* institutional cultures. The inclusion of blacks and black women in particular, especially in the academic system, is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the transformation of the university; it must be accompanied by the *simultaneous* transformation of the cultural codes through which institutions derive identities and modes of 'being'.

Institutional cultures directly shape, and are shaped by, the dominant social, cultural and intellectual relations that make up the '*social structure of the academy*' - a 'system of rules and practices that condition the terms of production and dissemination of knowledge. The social structure of the academy consists of rules, institutions, and practices, and is embodied in the actions, thoughts, beliefs, and 'durable dispositions of individual human beings, and provides the networks via which roles and powers are assigned to groups and individual actors, with their distributive consequences' (Keet, 2014).

Until recently, despite periodic incidents and criticisms in the media, very little systematic work has been done at a national level to transform university institutional cultures. Usually, responses have been ad hoc, institution-specific, incident-related, and not incorporated into the wider cultural frameworks defining institutional cultures. If we are to confront and successfully tackle the challenges of institutional cultures at universities, a number of *interventions* may have to be considered, *inter alia*:

- universities initiating 'social audits', with *multi-stakeholder participation*, of all university cultural frameworks – symbols, rituals, language and communication practices and systems, associated networks – against the requirements of the Constitutional promise of an open, democratic, inclusive, diverse and affirming environment; and tabling measures with university communities for its recodification and re-development;
- adopting university-based *Institutional Culture Charters* stating explicitly each university's core principles, values, and commitments to students and staff; and ensuring that this is built into all staff induction and student orientation programmes;
- putting in place institution-wide *Institutional Culture diversity management programmes* to involve all levels of university staff and students, and creating institutional capability and resources to make this effective; and
- implementing and ensuring the responsiveness of robust anti-racist, anti-sexist and other anti-discriminatory policies and programmes to hold individuals or groups accountable for behaviour antithetical to a transformed university environment.

#### 4.5 The research and intellectual cultures at universities

In terms of *research capacity and output*, it is widely agreed that South Africa's science and knowledge production system fares well in relation to the rest of Africa. It produces the bulk of scientific research in Africa, and a virtual doubling of the number of postgraduate (postgraduate diploma/honours, master's and doctoral) students; the 138 608 students making up 15.5% of the total student body; 99 224 (71.6%) were black students and 77 957 (56%) were women students (CHE, 2012: 20). During the same year, there were some 40 124 graduates: 30 083 postgraduate diploma/honours graduates; 8 618 master's and 1 423 doctoral graduates; 25 404 (63.3%) of these graduates were black and 23 782 (59.3%) were women (ibid: 21).

However, if benchmarked in international terms, there are shortcomings and constraints. Postgraduate

student enrolments and outputs remain low in relation to the national economic and social development needs. Between 1995 and 2010 there was a marginal increase of 1.8% in the size of the postgraduate student body. There are relatively poor graduation rates for master's (19% against a benchmark graduation rate target of 33% established by the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education) and doctorates (13% against a target of 20%) (NPC, 2011).

There are also differing graduation and success rates between black and white students: in 2010, graduation rates were between 24% and 34% for black students and 37% for white students; postgraduate success rates were between 65% and 74% for black students and 80% for white students (CHE, 2012.:10;12). Whereas South African universities produced a total of 1 423 doctoral graduates in 2010, the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil alone produced 2 244 doctoral graduates. Korea and Brazil produce 187 and 48 doctoral graduates per million of population respectively, compared to South Africa's 28 doctoral graduates per million of the population.

Only 34% of academics have doctoral degrees, which is generally a prerequisite for undertaking high quality research and supervising doctoral students. The research performance of universities is highly uneven, with 10 universities producing 86% of all research and 89% of all doctoral graduates. South Africa also lacks the dense networks between universities, state and business that are found in other countries, which facilitate the movement of people, knowledge, expertise and experience between universities, the public and private sectors, and innovation. It has been suggested that "there is every indication that knowledge output (as measured in terms of article production) may have reached a plateau at around 7 500 article equivalents per year (which constitutes about 0.4% of the total world science production)"; that it is doubtful that doctoral graduations can be increased unless "a number of systemic constraints, such as the size of the pipeline from honours onwards and the limited supervisory capacity in the system" can be addressed, and that "both the volume of output and overall productivity of institutions will decline" unless the academic work force is broadened considerably to include "many more black (and to a lesser extent female) academics who publish and regenerate the workforce" (Mouton, 2010).

The 2012 Green Paper acknowledges that "the number of overall postgraduate qualifications obtained, particularly PhD graduates, is too low." (DHET, 2012: 11). One "significant constraint on the ability of many students to obtain master's and PhDs" was poverty "as poor students are under enormous pressure to leave university and get a job as soon as possible" (ibid.: 13). It is recognised that "overall postgraduate provision deserves attention and that we need to drastically increase the number and quality of both the master's and the PhD degrees obtained" (ibid.: 42). It is suggested that "improvement of undergraduate throughput rates must be a key strategy for increasing graduate outputs... and providing larger numbers of students available for postgraduate study" (ibid.: 42). The NPC proposes that "by 2030 over 25 percent of university enrolments should be at postgraduate level" (15.5% in 2010) and emphasises that "the number of science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates should increase significantly"; more specifically, by 2030 there should be "more than 5 000 doctoral graduates per year" (1 423 in 2010) and "most of these doctorates should be in science, engineering, technology and mathematics" (NPC, 2012: 319).

The target of 5 000 doctoral graduates by 2030 is ambitious. A major constraint is that funding for postgraduate study (especially full-time study) through the National Research Foundation, and the size of the awards provided is severely inadequate. If South Africa is to ensure greater opportunities for participation by indigent students in postgraduate study, significantly more investment will be needed in postgraduate and especially doctoral level study. At many South African universities the availability of research infrastructure, facilities, and equipment is a constraint on the greater enrolment and production

of postgraduates and especially doctoral graduates; this is so even at the 12 universities that produce 95% of doctoral graduates and the bulk of peer-reviewed scientific publications. The challenge of the enhancement of institutional capacities is, however, not reducible to infrastructure; it also relates to the academic teaching and supervision capacities to expand current and mount new doctoral programmes, and the institutional capacities for managing substantial expansion in postgraduate programmes.

In so far as improving the proportion of academics with doctoral qualifications is concerned, the NPC target of 75% by 2030 may be extremely ambitious, not least for the reasons noted above. It will require a dedicated national programme, supported by adequate funding. Yet it cannot be assumed that academics with doctorates will be accomplished supervisors of doctoral students; attention has to be given to equipping academics to supervise effectively through formal development programmes, mentoring and experience in co-supervising, alongside experienced supervisors. More effective supervision could contribute to improving current below benchmark postgraduate throughput and graduation rates.

Clearly, if HE is to reach the targets set by the NDP as stated above, a number of policy interventions are required:

- a nationally-funded Staff Doctoral Programme to enable all universities, particularly those with fewer ‘research-intensive’ capabilities, to grow the ratio of academic teaching staff with doctorates in line with the required projections, and support for their supervisory and research capacity development; and
- in line with the above, developing a nationally integrated Post-Graduate Development Programme aimed at boosting rates of production of post-graduates, including doctorates, aligned to NDP targets, by combining institution-based and nationally-funded initiatives more systematically.

In relation to the intellectual dimensions of the social relations of knowledge production, there is still a great deal of rethinking and transformative work ahead. The production of knowledge (research, teaching) and its dissemination via curricula and pedagogical processes are socially-mediated processes framed in complex ways by the intersections of race, class, gender, culture, historical experience, language and context.

From a historical perspective, higher education in South Africa and on the wider African continent, perhaps more than Latin America and Asian countries which were under the yoke of colonial conquest and domination, has been deeply embedded in, and developed largely along, the intellectual pathways of western epistemologies of knowledge. Like our institutional cultures, much of our scholarly systems and canons of knowledge – with their strong bases in disciplines - arose from, and largely evolved within, the discourses of western thinking. For a long time, and to a great extent today, very little indigenous knowledge has found its way into these scholarly systems; and where it has, has been either relegated in the hierarchies of worthiness, or marginalised or distorted, and largely read through the lenses of western narratives.

It is true that ‘western’ thought is not internally homogeneous, neither has it remained invariant over time, with African scholars having made major contributions to its development. Yet, it is also true that the imperial and racist assumptions of western thought were used to rationalise and impose centuries of brutal colonial and imperial rule. Moreover, many of these assumptions – despite the emergence of progressive and ‘enlightened’ traditions within western thought – have continued to shape the terms of post-colonial ‘settlement’ and ‘development’ across the African continent since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

A key challenge at the heart of higher education transformation in South Africa therefore is how to engage effectively with the historical “legacies of intellectual colonisation and racialization” and patriarchy (Du Toit, 2000: 103). Du Toit argues “that the enemy” in the forms of colonial and racial discourses “has been within the gates all the time”, and that they are significant threats to the flowering of ideas and scholarship (ibid: 103). He links these discourses to institutional culture and academic freedom: cultures characterised by colonial and racial discourses endanger “empowering intellectual discourse communities” and the “ongoing transformation of the institutional culture” is therefore a “necessary condition of academic freedom” (ibid.).

Higher education transformation entails decolonising deracialising, demasculinising and degendering South African universities, and engaging with ontological and epistemological issues in all their complexity, including their implications for research, methodology, scholarship, learning and teaching, the curriculum and pedagogy. It presents the challenge of creating institutional cultures that genuinely respect and appreciate difference and diversity – whether class, gender, national, linguistic, religious, sexual orientation, epistemological or methodological in nature – and creating spaces for the flowering of epistemologies, ontologies, theories, methodologies, objects and questions other than those that have long been hegemonic in intellectual and scholarly thought and writing. Thus, Mamdani argues that “the central question facing higher education in Africa today is what it means to teach the humanities and social sciences in the current historical context and, in particular, in the post-colonial African context” (2011). Moreover, he asks what it means to teach “in a location where the dominant intellectual paradigms are products not of Africa’s own experience but of a particular Western experience” (Mamdani, 2011: ibid).

This highlights the point that questions of social exclusion and inclusion in South African higher education extend well beyond issues of access, opportunity and success. They also include issues of institutional and academic cultures, and largely ignored epistemological and ontological issues associated with learning and teaching, curriculum development and pedagogical practice.

Going forward, it may be necessary for more systematic research, led by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS), in conjunction with key research groups at universities, to enrich curriculum innovations in issues such as:

- decolonisation, deracialisation and degendering of both the social and natural sciences, and an exploration of critical alternatives to dominant discourses, such as ‘neo-liberalism’, ‘Eurocentrism’ and histories of scientific thought;
- development of a national scale research programme, drawing on both universities and civil society-based institutional capabilities, in reclaiming and positioning the contributions of African thought, ideas, history, culture, values and existential experiences (in all their social and intellectual diversities) to the sciences and humanities; and
- innovative, discipline-based and trans-disciplinary curriculum experiments, led by scholars in the field, thus fostering critical thinking and reasoning, not only in the social sciences and humanities, but also in the natural sciences.

#### 4.6 The role of universities in society (engagement)

One of the less emphasised aspects of higher education transformation relates to the purposes and roles of universities in society, and more specifically, their *engagement in society*. Whose interests do we serve? How should we understand ‘public good’ and ‘public service’ mandates in the context of the impact of

private norms and demands on universities? Who are our articulated communities of interests? And, how best can we ensure that our scholars and staff use the knowledge and resources of our universities to work towards a more equal and socially just world?

In the years before 1994, during the apartheid and colonial periods, the dominant patterns of university engagement were shaped in direct and deliberate ways by hegemonic interests of ruling elites within the State and Capital. Indeed, university elites for long periods actively collaborated with ruling elites in government and capital to promote, justify and enable the pursuit of white minority interests; English-speaking universities (e.g. UCT, Wits, Natal, Rhodes), as is well known, supported the training of elites, particularly in mining, financial and commercial capital; and Afrikaans universities (e.g., Stellenbosch, Pretoria, UFS, Potchefstroom) aligned themselves closely to the Afrikaner nationalist project of apartheid state building, the enforcement of 'separate development', the rising influence of Afrikaner capital, etc; and controlling black universities to perpetuate ethnic balkanisation and the training of the black petty bourgeois. Although radical students and academics dissented at various stages, at times building democratic linkages with black communities, for example during the black consciousness period and the 1980s, official university doctrines were, by and large, allied to ruling interests.

In the post-apartheid period, the Mandela-led Government brought about a radical policy reorientation of the role of universities in society, aligned to supporting the democratic project; to 'contribute to the common good of society through the production, acquisition and application of knowledge, the building of human capacity, and the provision of lifelong learning opportunities', and 'to the common good of society through the production, acquisition and application of knowledge, the building of human capacity, and the provision of lifelong learning opportunities' (WPHE, 1997). Universities, in the new policy framework, are mandated to perform three inter-related missions: teaching, research and engagement. However, whilst the policy and regulatory bases of teaching and research have been relatively well supported, though as argued above not adequately developed, the same cannot be said of 'engagement'. To date, there is no policy framework governing university engagement.

This may be less due to a lack of conceptual clarity about the nature, objects and different forms of engagement, but perhaps because of its policy and funding implications. Despite the policy vacuum, most universities have evolved engagement policies, and all are engaged in society in a myriad of different ways: 'top-driven' and 'bottom-driven' linkages; short-, medium- and long-term relations and programmes; industry-centred, civil society-based, labour-focused, public sector and government networks, and so forth. Typically, academics engage via their research projects, as well as training and educational projects with diverse societal interests, both in SA and internationally. Similarly, academics are involved in an almost infinite range of political, professional, cultural and social projects in society. Student bodies (political, academic, sporting, cultural, professional, etc.) also have diverse linkages in industry and civil society.

It seems neither necessary nor possible to mediate such 'horizontal' linkages centrally, and they are in fact, a healthy sign of an open, democratic society. At the same time, institutions should perhaps consider the following:

- setting core values, principles, goals and preferences for societal engagement, thereby fostering the search for a more equal, socially just and democratic society;
- encouraging partnerships in which students and academics join forces to work in democratic alliances with poor and marginalised communities;
- actively funding civic duty and community service of students;

- providing support for partnerships aimed at promoting democratic empowerment and building social capital ‘from below’ with an explicit focus on poor communities;
- using discoveries and innovations as ‘open source’ social technologies for the promotion of ‘public good’ instead of its privatisation and commercialisation where there is a clear case for public interests trumping private gain; and
- negotiating partnerships with the State and Capital on terms which could best advance ‘public good’ interests and democratic goals.

#### 4.7 Institutional equity and transformation

An important dimension of transformation relates to institutional inequities, particularly the impact of accumulated under-capitalisation of many historically black institutions (HBIs) and/or campuses inherited from HBIs as a result of merger/incorporation processes in 2005. Many HBI universities or campuses still face formidable challenges stemming from long legacies of chronic underfunding in infrastructure, staff and student services that, despite periodic, but generally wholly inadequate, policy interventions by Government since 1994, have not yet tilted the balance of economies within these institutions towards lasting sustainability. However, policy interventions alone are not sufficient to meet the challenges of structural inequality for most of these institutions. Fundamentally, many face significant problems in their underlying *business models and economies*, being located in small, rural or peri-urban areas, primarily serving students from poor communities and relatively disarticulated from the urban corporate support networks enjoyed by their urban counterparts.

Unless these two issues, inadequate policy support and economic disarticulation, are resolved, it is unlikely that these institutions will be able to successfully promote the goals of higher education transformation. Firstly, without proper infrastructure, services, solid management and governance systems, they cannot provide equitable services to, and/or attract and retain good quality staff and students. Secondly, without full financial aid, particularly via NSFAS, they will continue to endure chronic instability and dropout rates. And, thirdly, without integration into a supportive local and regional economic system, it is hard to see how they can adequately meet their differentiated mandates of research, teaching and engagement roles in wider society. Therefore, the recapitalisation and economic integration of former HBIs and campuses are a *sine qua non* for both their internal transformation and for playing a transformative role in their wider environments.

It cannot be expected, either by default or design, that HBIs should carry a disproportionate social responsibility - relative to their size and internal demographic composition - of enrolling students from poor communities, whereas a similar class demographic is often not reflected in the enrolment patterns of many other institutions across the higher education sector. Critics are often quick to point out that former white universities enrol numerically larger numbers of poor students than individual HBIs, ignoring the fact that HBIs still enrol a far greater proportion of students from working class/poor backgrounds. It surely should be a serious consideration that universities and the State agree on setting targets for the enrolment of students coming from poor and dysfunctional schooling backgrounds. Why should this responsibility only or mainly fall on former HBIs? After all, setting enrolment targets for working class students is a common and longstanding practice in countries, such as the UK, to break down inherited and reproductive class inequalities.

*Interventions* that may be required in this regard include:

- adequate financial recapitalisation of, and administrative capacity building at HBI campuses, focused on core infrastructure in teaching and learning facilities, student accommodation, transport and technology systems;
- closer linkages and integration of rural universities into local and regional economic systems with strong support from local government, business and communities; and
- DHET and universities agreeing on enrolment targets to include proportion of students from working class and poor backgrounds.

#### 4.8. The funding environment in higher education

Is it possible to create a fully transformative and transformed higher education, in which universities have the capacity to fulfil their complex public mandates, in the context of declining (relative to operating costs) levels of state funding to universities? Can we truly achieve student equity of access and success in the context of underfunding the financially-needy and academically-deserving students from rural and urban working class communities? Can we expect universities to produce high rates of student success in the context of large student: lecturer ratios? Can we realistically expect universities to finance the costs of creating low-cost, high quality student accommodation?

Since 1994, Government's support for higher education has been significant. The funding of universities has been on an upward trend, from R11 billion in 2006 to R26 billion in 2013. At the same time, it should be noted that higher education expenditure has been declining in student per capita terms, and in the costs of running universities. It is also declining as a percentage of the Government's budget and of GDP: from 0.76% in 2000 to 0.69% in 2009 (2011: 292). This decline in Government subsidies has put pressure on the other two sources of income available to universities, namely tuition fee income and third stream income (typically research grants, contract income, donations etc). While universities have increased levels of third stream income to some degree these increases have by no means compensated for the decline in Government subsidies, thus leaving universities in increasingly worsening financial positions, compounded by crippling student debt.

Although the allocation to the NSFAS is set to increase from R5.1 billion in 2013 to R6.6 billion in 2016/17, the recent student protests at some universities highlight the sad reality that the allocation is not adequate to meet the funding needs of students eligible for NSFAS loans and bursaries. Apart from the inability of NSFAS to fund the increasing number of eligible students already in the system, three other factors are likely to compound the funding challenge of universities in the coming period:

- the White Paper on Higher Education and Training (ibid) sets a target of university participation rate at 25% by 2030 (representing an enrolment of around 1.6 million students) through planned growth. It also reaffirms the principle of the cost recovery of loans as the basis for a sustainable national student financial aid model. It further makes a commitment to progressively introduce "free education for the poor in South Africa as resources become available";
- the NDP (2012) also proposes an increase of gross enrolments from 950,000 in 2010 to 1 620,000 in 2030. The Plan admits that a 'greater understanding within government is required to acknowledge the importance of science and technology and higher education in leading and shaping the future of modern nations' (ibid). Given this acknowledgement, and despite recognising that funding for higher education as a proportion of GDP has declined, it is disappointing that in a report bristling with

targets, the Plan refrains from setting a target for increased GDP funding for higher education, noting only that ‘additional funding will be needed’ (2012: 293) to fund the targeted expansion in enrolments and research. It is becoming self-evident that without such a guaranteed increase in state revenue, attempts at expansion cannot succeed; and

- the class of 2013 achieved a National Senior Certificate (NSC) pass rate of 78%, the highest since 1994. The number of bachelor’s passes increased by 60%, and the number of overall passes increased by 32% (DBE, 2014). It is projected that this number of passes will increase in the coming years, putting pressure on universities and other post-school education and training institutions.

Fundamental questions arise: how is the projected student enrolment growth in universities going to be funded? How will NSFAS support be sustained over time, in order to make possible increased participation in higher education to meet both equity and growth targets? What is required to plan for, and adequately resource the expected growth, given the tighter fiscal space and the funding shortfall for students who are already in the system? How does the state align the policy aspirations expressed in the White Paper and NDP and available funding to ensure that enrolment growth, equity and quality are all pursued simultaneously?

## 5 Differentiation, transformation and the idea of the university

Our higher education system has differentiated itself for well over four decades now, beginning prior to the collapse of the apartheid system to date, yet our policy and funding system has not explicitly come to terms with and provided for an adequate framework for supporting differentiation. The residues of the ‘classical’ university type still form a dominant major part of our thinking, public discourse, the intellectual system of knowledge production, funding models and current strategies of national higher education development. The most well-known, but inadequate mode of differentiation is that stemming from the ‘institutional landscape’ reforms introduced by Government from 2005, with the creation of the so-called ‘universities’, ‘comprehensive universities’, and ‘universities of technology’ types to designate morphologically distinctive types of educational offerings and forms of knowledge creation. Whilst the exact boundaries marking the transition from one to the other institutional ‘type’ is less than clear, and often disputed in the literature, the higher education system has also not been able to codify their supposedly differentiated funding and policy support requirements.

Moreover, beyond these broad distinctions, universities are differentiated across a range of markers including: programme configurations and areas of specialisation; their links to segmented and specialised local, regional, national and international markets for students, staff, resources and intellectual exchanges; their internal funding models; their skills profiles and strategic orientations; the nature and intensity of their links to industry, commerce and public sectors; their application of knowledge and strategies of innovation; their pedagogical and curriculum praxis, and so on.

Whilst almost all university leaders recognise these distinctions, they do not nearly coincide with institutional-type demarcations depicted at policy level, as all universities have evolved in a myriad of ways of combining their teaching, research and engagement praxes. All our universities embrace, and should embrace, the three core mandates of teaching and learning, research and engagement. It is therefore curious to see attempts by some universities to artificially distinguish their institutions as ‘research’ universities, as if they eschew their other mandates and/or imply, by default, that the rest of the university system does not embrace research as a core part of their differentiated mandates.

This attempt at projecting the elite ‘research’ university often sits alongside an unspoken ‘hierarchy of knowledge’ (‘higher’ and ‘lower’), which is itself tied up with value assumptions and preferences; the elitist pretensions of some universities pitched as ‘global’ or ‘international’, whilst others are being deemed, by default, as ‘local’ or ‘regional’, and yet others as ‘national’ in their nature and ambitions. It is also tied to the implicit or explicit privileging of ‘research’, and particularly ‘blue sky’ research amongst the three institutional mandates of universities, and with this, promoting by some university leadership, the myth of the so-called ‘research’ universities as the apex-type university in the South African higher education system. The unstated claim underpinning this logic is that such universities constitute the ‘idea of the archetypal university’ in South Africa.

This patently *ideological construction* of the post-apartheid university system needs to be contested and debunked if we are to develop a conception of the university system as open, discursive, multipolar, and not arranged along some kind of imperial, hierarchical and self-interested lines which put competition and mimicking a European or North American ideal of the university over collaboration, collegialism and a commitment to tackling the deep-seated issues of African development, whilst holding onto an internationalism that is normatively based on the values of democracy, social justice, equality and human solidarity.

It is in this context that the transformation imperative has to grapple with the idea of ‘what kinds of universities’ we strive to establish: an extension of the European or North American ideal (itself fully reflective of those realities) or the evolution of universities fully embracing and drawing on their African existence and identities as currency in a wider cosmopolitan and democratic internationalism.

## 6 ‘Measuring’ progress in transformation:

Whilst this document does not attempt to develop a *theory* of higher education transformation, it hopes to provide a heuristic and critical framework for enabling us to recognise the multi-dimensionality, interconnectivity and relational nature of that which we seek to transform. The precise ways in which specific institutional cultures ‘construct’ these relations is a matter of further empirical investigation, not possible in this framework document.

Furthermore, there can be no absolute state or end point of transformation for the simple reason that societies are inescapably in states of transition, and change is a permanent feature of life. We must resist simplistic, cartoon-like media descriptions of universities as either ‘transformed’ or ‘untransformed’, as if this depicts a singular empirical datum. Transformation per definition is a set of social changes at various internal states of transition along a continuum. We must insist on asking ‘what’ exactly is being referred to when we characterise the ‘state of transformation’ in a particular setting, and how this relates to other elements in the same system. Hopefully, a more complex system revealing uneven, contradictory and convergent processes of change and resistance to change will emerge, so that we can appreciate the full ‘balance sheet’ of social transformation in higher education.

As we build a better understanding of the uneven, contradictory ‘states of transition’ within this system, and the powerful mechanisms and constructs shaping institutional cultures, it must be borne in mind that there is always a level of indeterminacy of how these mechanisms and constructs shape individual behaviours; that we are talking about a living system inhabited by human beings who are irreducibly complex, whose identities and responses to their worlds cannot be ‘fixed’ in a static set of

representations of social orders, and that they always have the capacity for self-reflection and change. After all, true transformation such as that envisaged by our Constitution cannot emerge only on the basis of the law, policy, compliance or force. It has to emerge as deeply personal, emotional, intellectual, if not ‘spiritual’ (in the sense of the human spirit) from within us all if it is to lead to a lived experience.

Universities South Africa is engaged in a productive consultative process to develop an open-ended and flexible *transformation barometer*. The broad themes to be captured in the barometer are institutional culture; equity and redress; research, scholarship and post-graduate studies; leadership, relations with external stakeholders and community engagement; and teaching and learning. As this process unfolds, sets of indicators will be developed to be adapted to the contextual realities of individual institutions. We hope to enrich a compliance approach with more substantive indicators for transformation that can guide transformation charters, transformation plans and transformation reports. In this process, student and other voices will feature strongly and deepen our interpretation of national policy imperatives.

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