CHAPTER THREE


Towards the delivery of quality education for all

Chapter 3 reflects on the key achievements made in the past decade in the area of large-scale reform, institutional reorganisation and system development. This chapter deals with progress made in improving participation, equity, quality and democracy in the system. In addition, Chapter 3 examines key interventions in institutional reform, provision of free general education, system stability, human resource development and international relations in the light of Nepad.

The overall assessment of the system is encouraging. Many of the achievements by the post-apartheid government have been in transforming and renewing the institutions that deliver education to one in three people in the population. This transition, in turn, has resulted in many of the successes that can be claimed for the education system in social and economic development in South Africa. These achievements include the following:
3.1 Addressing the ideological contestation

In the first years after the democratic transition, the intensity and the level of social, ideological and political confrontation between different actors in society were the subject of many articles in the media.

Even within the newly developing structures of cooperative governance in education and training, confrontational debate usually ensued on matters of importance to education and training in this time. In recent years, however, this has matured into a more vigorous form of engagement with the emphasis on issues concerning the public good rather than issues of regional, provincial, or even party political importance. Some traces of ideological difference still remain, though, with attacks on what is considered extremely progressive policy direction and legislation, particularly from conservative pressure groups. Recent examples include the "knee-jerk" and rather predictable responses to the Policy for Religion in Education, which was released in 2003.

Within society, the interaction between a wide range of social actors has also evolved (at national, provincial and local level) as a result of the changed political and enhanced democratic context within society. Media reports reflected these changes. Articles in media reports tended to rubbish or contest policy direction in Government in general, and in education and training in particular, as this was an area of interest to an emerging economic and social order. Media reactions to an outcomes-based curriculum, Curriculum 2005 (introduced to modernise and reform curriculum practices and outcomes for the skills development needs of the country within a globalised context), ranged from visceral opposition to ‘political correctness’ to regular calls for education authorities to be replaced. The situation today is very different. The reporting on education and training matters, though sometimes lacking in comprehension of the complexities of the system, is more supportive of the general policy direction, while being critical, mainly, and sometimes justifiably so, of barriers to implementation. Parliamentary debates, often held in camera, also contribute to an understanding of the system, and these also add to improving transparency in the education system. In recent years, in contrast to the situation in the mid-1990s, most articles criticising education and training interventions have criticised the implementation of policies (the pace and progress of implementation, and barriers hindering implementation), rather than the spirit or intent of those policies.

Put simply, consensus on the broad policy goals in education and training has been achieved in the public domain. Further evidence of this is a decline in public concern, from 34 per cent to 15 per cent between 1994 and 2002, about issues related to education implementation by Government, reported by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) in its Afrobarometer, which measures public opinion on key issues in society. These trends reflect the growing acceptance that public provision is, on the whole, functioning, with concern about areas where services are making less of an impact and improvement. This reflects the assessment of positive impact on the human development profile of the education and training system in South Africa, despite considerable development challenges.

3.2 Dismantling and reconstructing the system

Transforming the legacy of the past has involved the reconstruction and development of education and training in terms of form and content. This reconstruction has guided the reform of institutional governance, management and programmatic resourcing, as well as the curricular and the social and cultural environment in the education and training system. The geographical distribution of different population groups and the allocation of resources to these population groups have their roots in the historical and political legacies of under-development. The effects of these legacies have proved difficult to
eradicate, particularly in the face of the inefficiencies associated with the legacy of inequitable levels of development arising from fragmented systems. Before 1994, there were 17 different systems of education and training in South Africa. Education and training for whites, Indians and coloureds was governed under the tri-cameral system and by the four provincial administrations. Education and training for blacks was governed by the four TBVC States (or “Independent States”) and by the six self-governing territories, which, together, made up 10 “homeland” administrative structures. Since 1994, the process of merging these 17 administrations into one coherent, national education system while simultaneously redressing the imbalances of the past has been a challenge concerning the delivery of public services such as education and training in South Africa. This amalgamation into one system has been an immense organisational feat, which was achieved while simultaneously implementing instruments of reform in the system in less than a decade. This involved a level of organisational realignment that is rarely seen in the private sector in most countries, and even more rarely witnessed in public sector organisations.

Challenges in the dismantling of structures still exist. To a certain extent, the problems experienced currently are most evident in provinces with more pre-1994 systems to rationalise and reform. It is evident that the problems currently bedevilling the Eastern Cape, in which, before 1994, the governments of two former homelands as well as the tri-cameral system were present, are of far larger magnitude than those faced by other provinces with, for example, only one former homeland. These problems are not just related to organisational structure, but to organisational culture, work ethic and system development, all of which take longer to improve, as they involve changing human behaviour patterns.

The structure of the system at national level has, for the most part, been dictated by the education and training bands in the National Qualifications Framework. Branches have been set up for GET, FET, HE and System Planning. A recent addition has been the Quality Promotion and Development branch. Provincial structural arrangements have, for the most part, been left to the respective provincial departments of education to determine and elaborate. In turn, provincial administrative structures have evolved over the years in response to emerging priorities such as, amongst others, curriculum implementation and support, as well as management and governance development.

Integrating a fragmented system of education into a national system that is organised and managed, largely on the basis of nine provincial sub-systems has been an achievement with many challenges. Firstly, the nature of education and training and its contribution to development lends it to partnerships and collaboration. Furthermore, the constitutional arrangements in which two spheres of government, namely, national and provincial, have concurrent functions for education and training give rise to specific challenges. The relationship between national and provincial spheres is essentially cooperative, and is facilitated by structures such as the Heads of Education Departments Committee (HEDCOM) and the Council of Education Ministers (CEM), which investigate, consult and deliberate (and, in the case of CEM, advise the Minister of Education) on matters of importance to the education and training system as a whole. The role of HEDCOM and CEM in the elaboration and reform of the national education and training system cannot be underestimated, and it continues to be strengthened with time.

3.3 System stability

Spending levels on all budgets across the system have improved with improvements in monitoring and reporting systems at provincial and national level. The implementation of national Treasury guidelines and regulations relating to the PFMA have assisted in these processes, and strategic planning processes that seek to bridge the gap between policy, planning, budgeting and implementation have also contributed to stability and predictability in the system.
Labour disputes and person hours lost in the system have decreased, as have incidents of student and educator unrest at institutions. In the years before and immediately after 1994, frequent media reports of such incidents were common, whereas the situation has stabilised and reports of such unrest are now rare and fairly localised. The system for monitoring the exact numbers of days lost to labour unrest will need to be strengthened, but a good indicator of this is the frequency of media reporting of this phenomenon in the system.

3.4 Curriculum reform

Quality improvement has focused on the large-scale redevelopment of a modernised curriculum for the general and further education and training levels. Curricula now cover areas more suited to life and work, while extensive teacher development and upgrading in scarce skills areas have drastically improved average qualification levels in the teaching service. Nutrition programmes and learner support material inputs have been increased (the former in partnership with the Department of Health) to improve learner performance and quality, while more attention has been paid to monitoring and evaluating the quality of outputs and processes and to the extent of policy compliance in the education system.

In the past decade, curriculum reform, a critically important instrument of HRD in the education and training system, has been achieved with the implementation of the revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 in the Foundation Phase, and the approval, by the Council of Education Ministers and by Cabinet, of the National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12 (General), which is planned for implementation in 2006. In higher education, the approach to curriculum reform is through guiding the individual institutional programme and qualification mix in line with national human resource development requirements.
3.5 Human rights, constitutional principles, values and attitudes in education

One critically important aim of the education and training system is the development of learners or graduates who will contribute to social and economic development and will have an appreciation for, and a willingness to contribute to, social and civic life through enabling themselves and others to have access to and practise the human rights, social values and attitudes to diversity described in the Constitution of South Africa. The main achievements here are related to the integration of these issues into the revised National Curriculum Statement, so that the challenge for the next decade is facilitating the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of key aspects of the impact of these curriculum interventions. The implementation of complementary activities related to consolidating curriculum interventions will also form the basis of developments in the next decade, as a solid foundation has been built through the introduction of, amongst others, the curriculum, the Language in Education policy (1997) - which seeks to improve the diversity of languages for teaching and learning - and the Policy for Religion in Education (2003) - which seeks to ensure that children are responsibly educated about different religions and religious practices.

Fostering a knowledge and an understanding of history and language and respect for culture and values is of critical importance for enhanced social participation. These factors influence the social outcomes of education and training, especially through the socio-cultural profile of graduates and learners in the education and training system. Changes in the structure of social networks are slow to manifest in society and difficult to measure; the challenge in the coming decade will be to quantify and strengthen these changes. The publication of new history materials that are a true reflection of the history of the country is a key milestone and achievement for the education system. The revision of the National Curriculum, completed in 2003, places emphasis on the principles of Social Justice, a Healthy Environment, Human Rights and Inclusivity. The important role of history in encouraging respect for heritage and diversity in the broader population (in addition to learners) has also been recognised with the establishment of the South African History Project. National programmes that seek to expand participation in and awareness of historically significant events, national symbols, cultural heritage and activities of social and civic significance have been launched. Already, schools have been identified as key catalysts for such activities. In a 2001 survey 62 per cent of a sample of over 42,000 Grade 3 learners reported that they had been involved in sporting and cultural activities in 2001. Thanks to the expansion of access to sporting and cultural events and facilities, and the development of talent in this regard, young people have already started to show a greater interest, and to participate, in indigenous games.

Government’s focus on increasing social participation, networking and building social cohesion has been evident in interventions since 1995, from Early Childhood Development through to Higher Education. Although it is too early to assess the success of government initiatives in improving these social networks, the indications are that these initiatives are having a positive impact on levels of parental participation in the governance of education and training institutions and in school activities, and on the levels of learner participation in sporting and cultural activities.

3.6 Improved access

The accelerated participation of previously under-serviced communities (especially female and African learners) in education and training at all levels is widely reported in literature. Improving access has been one of the key thrusts of education reform since the democratic elections. A 20 percentage point increase in secondary participation since the early 1990s has been achieved, with gains in participation by females and learners from previously marginalised communities at all levels, particularly in higher education.
The rapid increases in participation have been linked to improvements in inputs such as poverty-targeted infrastructure and the provision of equipment and textbooks in poorer communities, the reduction of inequity in the teacher allocation processes as a result of the application of the post-provisioning formula as of 1998, the introduction of fee exemptions at school level, especially automatic exemptions for orphans and learners living in institutions, and the introduction of student financial aid schemes at higher education and training level. As a result of increased investment, more classrooms were built, which meant that Learner-to-Classroom ratios dropped from 43.1 to 38.1. This reduced the problem of educators without classrooms, while access to key physical infrastructure such as computers, toilets and sanitation improved since the mid-1990s, as reported in the 2001 Schools Register of Needs survey report.

The National Students Financial Aid Scheme is estimated to account for a third of the increase in enrolments at higher education institutions since the mid-1990s and was valued at R950 million in the 2003/4 financial year (half of which was provided by the State), an exponential increase from the R10 million available in 1994 for student financial aid. The average annual increase in higher education enrolments has been just over 12,000 per year since the mid-1990s, while the average annual increase in the number of awards made by the financial aid scheme was just under 4,000 (a third of the average annual increase in enrolment). Bursaries at higher education institutions have been made available to female learners gifted in key scarce skills areas and subjects, to enable them to pursue higher education studies.

Interventions aimed at reducing the marginalisation of and discrimination against poor learners, female learners, pregnant learners and disabled learners show signs of working, as the access rates and performance levels of female learners have improved in the system. Enrolment rates of female learners in higher education have increased from 44 per cent in 1994 to 53 per cent in 2001, and participation of girls in Mathematics, Technology and Science has risen since the
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start of the new millennium. Between 1998 and 2000, the proportion of African students in FET colleges grew from 71 per cent to 76 per cent. The challenge in the next decade will be to quantify and improve retention rates (of all learners, particularly vulnerable learners) in the system right through to further and higher education and training.

Since the mid-1990s, participation rates of young people in education have improved to levels over 95 per cent (even better than in many developed countries, and surpassing the Millennium Development Goal achievements of most developing countries) as a result of the policy of compulsory basic education. There has been a particularly encouraging increase in the rate of participation by younger children in the population - signalling an increase in the proportion of well-prepared young children who enter schools and who have a higher chance of performing well at, and completing, school. The challenge for the next decade will be to closely and objectively monitor drop out, repetition and attendance, a failing of the education system in the past few years.

Spending on provincial education (the majority of which is school related) also increased from R45 billion in 1995/96 to an estimated R48 billion in 2002/3 in real terms (in 2001 Rand), while higher education expenditure since 1994 increased from R4.8 billion to just under R7.1 billion in 2001/2. Enrolment increases have also been effected since 1994, with an increase in higher education student enrolment of just over 50 per cent between 1996 and 2001.

Pro-poor nutrition programmes enable and enhance participation and learner achievement. The increase in funds allocated to these nutrition programmes in recent years has led to expanded participation in education and training and local economic development, owing to the involvement of SMMEs as service providers. The provincial share of the R832m budget (in 2004/5) for the Integrated Nutrition Project is similar to the provincial share of poor learners of school-going age, showing that the funds are utilised in areas of need. The Government is developing implementation and monitoring systems.
An assessment of ten years of education and training in South Africa to ensure that the poorest learners in primary schools in the Reception Grade receive a State-funded meal on all school days. The challenge is to ensure better provision of this nutrition to the poorest of the poor in the system now that this project has been moved to the Department of Education, and to implement the plan to provide a nutritious package to the poorest 40 per cent of learners in Grade R to Grade 9 in the medium term.

3.7 Improved equity

Before 1994, education was deeply inequitable in terms of provision, resourcing, personnel and capacity. Since the 1994 elections, this situation has been tackled aggressively at the national level, through the Equitable Shares Formula, which directs larger funding allocations to needy provinces (based on infrastructure and other backlogs and the size of the school-aged population). This has improved inter-provincial equity by 60 per cent, although backlogs persist. As well as this, intra-provincial equity has been enhanced through the Norms and Standards for School Funding, which came into effect in April 1999 and which require the construction of a resource targeting table to determine allocations to learners and schools.

Provinces have shown a notable improvement in, and a more equitable distribution of, key learner inputs, including infrastructure and learner support materials, and of education provision in general. This has been possible because of the improvement in the equity of distribution of resources through poverty-targeted interventions, pro-poor resourcing and a formula-driven allocation of educator resources, rather than the racially driven investment model that was used before 1994.

Education reform in terms of equity has seen a 60 per cent decline in the inequity in spending per learner in schools, while progressive poverty-targeted funding regimes and interventions have been introduced (spending per learner in the poorest schools is seven times the spending in the least poor schools, and poor learners are exempted from school fees, where levied). Equitable resource allocation has seen a decline in inequitable distribution of infrastructure, particularly in the least resourced provinces, which show the highest percentage increases in the provision of classrooms, sanitation, water and telecommunication. The allocation of education resources shows a more equitable distribution than income in South Africa - a laudable achievement, bearing in mind the medium- to long-term benefits of human capital investment. Between 2000 and 2003, 111,713 classrooms and 25,117 toilets were built and installed at schools and 554 water connections were extended to schools. Added to the gains made between 1996 and 2000, this brings the total to 39,006 classrooms, 6,670 telecommunication links, 1,965 water connections, 3,717 electrical connections and 36,160 toilets at schools. In addition, per capita spending per learner has risen from R1,554 in 1991/2 to over R4,000 in 2002/3.

The challenge is to ensure that the distribution of achievement and the quality of performance mirror the equitable distribution of inputs through the improved effectiveness and efficiency of the translation of resources into education outcomes. In 1998, the Post Provisioning Norms were implemented to equalise Learner-to-Educator ratios of schools across the country and to eliminate the apartheid legacy of under-resourcing of schooling in personnel terms for certain population groups relative to others. The introduction, in 2002, of a redress pool of between two and five per cent of educators, created to be allocated to schools with the poorest learners, made it possible to supply more teachers to needy learners in our system. Apart from this, considerable technical capacity has been developed to ensure that funding follows the poorest learners in the schooling system. The Department of Education has developed strategies to reduce the burden borne by poor parents in respect of the high cost of uniforms, quality textbooks and supplementary resource materials. Currently, orphans living at institutions qualify for an automatic exemption from any fees that a school may decide to levy.
Education improves the opportunities for individuals and communities to generate income and acquire assets, and this has spillover effects, particularly in the medium to long term. Human capital development interventions must therefore be seen as investments in the future of our society and the means of breaking the cycle of poverty in which many households are trapped. Analyses of education and income levels carried out recently showed that holders of a Matriculation (or Senior) Certificate earn almost double the income of those who do not have this qualification, while the benefits accruing to holders of more advanced qualifications are higher. Any steps taken to improve the quality, efficiency and equity of human resource development interventions, and to expand access to these interventions, therefore assist in reducing human capital poverty in society.

It is important to note that the distribution of public education resources has an inequality index of 0.15, at worst, compared to 0.60 for the distribution of income in South Africa. This means that public spending on education is much more equally distributed than income in society, and therefore has a powerful impact on improving human (and social) development outcomes in future. An index of inequality in per capita public spending on school learners per province showed a marked improvement, from 0.29 in 1995 to 0.10 in 2001. Since 1998, there has been an overall real increase in allocations to provincial education, which further complements these changes in equity in the education system, and efficiency gains, particularly at public ordinary schools, which consume over 80 per cent of provincial education allocations.

In addition, national Integrated Sustainable Rural Development and Urban Renewal strategies enable interventions to be made across sectors in development nodes, in order to increase the quality of the social services, especially education and training, provided to poor communities. Fees are not compulsory, but where schools set them, they supplement State funding. Proposals that the Department of Education made in 2003 include abolishing school fees for 40 per cent of learners - that is, the poorest learners in the school system.

In spite of the tremendous barriers that female learners face in participating in education, it is clear that the various initiatives to improve their performance and achievement levels are beginning to pay off. Girls are doing better at key competency tests. In the Grade 3 systemic assessment exercise carried out by the Department of Education in 2001, average scores for female learners were higher than those for male learners. This pattern is also observed in the Grade 12 Senior Certificate Examination if the quality of passes is examined. In almost all the provinces, the proportion of female learners who passed with merit (an average score of between 60 per cent and 79 per cent) and with distinction (an average of over 80 per cent) was larger than the proportion of male learners. In addition, it seems that the number of female learners who pass the Senior Certificate Examination at Grade 12, as a proportion of the female cohort of 18-year-olds (or the pass ratio for female learners), is larger than the pass ratio for male learners.

This means that the pass efficiency in the cohort of female learners is slightly higher than that of male learners, despite the fact that more female learners (247 159) sat the examinations in 2001 than male learners (202 212), and the fact that the pass rate of female learners (60.1 per cent) was lower than that of male learners (63.6 per cent). It must be noted that the pass rate does not take account of the size of the cohort participating in the examinations, whereas the pass ratio does. This means that improvements have been made in the proportion of females of the appropriate school graduating age who leave the education system into the world of work and higher education and training.

3.8 Enhanced quality

The years since 1994 have been taken up with the development of policies, laws and frameworks to ensure quality improvement in teacher education (particularly in scarce skills areas) and performance management, in school effectiveness and functionality, and in
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performance management systems and systems for attending to the needs of vulnerable learners and learners in distress. Nutrition and early childhood interventions have also been established to improve the levels of achievement among poor learners, and awards for teaching and academic excellence have been instituted at national and provincial level.

Government has prioritised the teaching and learning episode as being the most important determinant of achievement and human capital development in the education system. Since 1994, teacher development and professional upgrading initiatives have paid off, with an increase of about 20 percentage points in the proportion of qualified teachers in schools since 1994. This achievement is most dramatic in the more rural provinces, where the need for upgrading has been generally higher.

Other strategic interventions include improvement of the quality of teaching in key subjects and a strengthening of the outcomes and effects of HIV/AIDS interventions and life skills programmes in education. Conditional grants have ensured special assistance for improving school effectiveness, the implementation of literacy programmes, coordination and graduate output; restructuring and curriculum development in further education and training; improving participation in mathematics, science and technology, particularly for female learners; improving the administration and credibility of, and performance in, the Grade 12 Senior Certificate examinations; strengthening organisational effectiveness, including management and planning enhancing values in education and the status of history in education; and enhancing HIV/AIDS interventions through providing life skills competencies in the national curriculum. Rural and farm schools have been targeted for special assistance and teachers in these schools will continue to receive support in areas such as multi-grade teaching and special interventions related to the development of teachers through the National Strategy for Mathematics, Science and Technology. These initiatives have started to bear fruit in the form of the increased participation of learners in these subjects in
The Whole-School Evaluation Framework launched in 2000 seeks to evaluate different aspects of school functionality, school management and governance, safety and discipline, resourcing, performance, and the quality of teaching. Evaluation by external evaluators forms the basis for school development and improvement plans and activities, and enhances quality in the system. Together, the results of the evaluation exercises indicate areas that need attention in terms of improving learner performance and achievement and enhancing quality in the system.

A national Systemic Evaluation system has recently been set up for quality assurance purposes, to monitor and evaluate the performance of learners in the system in key learning areas. When fully elaborated, a national sample of learners will be monitored at Grade 3, 6, and 9 level and learner performance in key learning areas will be tracked over time to monitor trends in learning outcomes in the education and training system. In addition to this, the destination of graduates from FET colleges and HE institutions will be assessed so as to measure the external efficiency of outputs at key exit points in the system. The process of systemic assessment and evaluation cannot be unlinked from performance monitoring and the gap perceived between different monitoring and evaluation exercises within and outside the education and training system will need to be successfully breached to make a tangible impact in the next decade.

There has been a significant improvement in the Grade 12 (Senior Certificate) Examination pass rate in recent years, from 53 per cent in 1995 to 73.3 per cent in 2003. The examinations were subject to a Quality Assurance exercise carried out by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, which certified the examinations as being of high quality. Since 1999, improvements in the pass rate have been accompanied by a concurrent stabilisation in the pass ratio (which is the proportion of the 18-year-old cohort who leave the system with a pass in Grade 12), which shows that the decline (observed in the early 1990s) in the number of people who leave the system with a pass has been arrested.

3.9 Efficiency and stability

There has been an increase in the number of appropriately-aged learners at each phase in the system, shown by the fact that the number of over-aged learners in Grades 10, 11 and 12 declined from 56 per cent of enrolment in 1997 to 48 per cent of enrolment in 2001. These efficiency gains have enabled spending levels per learner to rise, to enable higher levels of resourcing of learners in the system, at no additional cost. The application of policies such as the Admissions Policy and the Age Grade Norms has enabled the normalisation of the flow of learners through the system and reduced the number of inappropriately-aged learners in the system. Moreover, over-aged learners are being directed to more appropriate institutions, such as ABET or FET colleges, to complete or further their studies after leaving school. The indications are that repetition rates and drop-out rates are also declining, but these will be accurately and objectively assessed in the short term to confirm trends observed at local level in the system.

3.10 Democratic participation in governance and management development

Improvements in the management and governance of education institutions through community involvement have been made and put into practice, so that accountability for quality is institutionalised from the point of entry into, to the point of exit from, the education system. The determination of key policies relating to language in education, whether or not to pay fees, and school financial management has been decentralised to governing bodies in an effort to improve democratic participation.

These governance structures create new networks, which, if supported by training and management development, will expand the pool of transferable skills in individuals and communities nation-wide. It is no
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surprise that a survey of Grade 3 parents showed that seven in 10 parents had been involved in school activities at least two or three times a year. This is very different from the situation before 1994, when the relationship between education institutions and the communities they were expected to serve was distorted by the political and economic situation under apartheid. In addition, by 2002, almost 20 per cent of schools had established governing bodies managing finances at school level. As this responsibility is linked to financial management training and development, this increased financial literacy has spilled over into broader society.

The emerging issues that will need to be tackled in the next decade will be whether decentralised governance structures do contribute to improved democracy, participation in and access to basic and general education. In doing this, issues to be confronted include whether governing bodies at schools have been sufficiently capacitated to drive institutional reform at local level, the role of national leadership in the innovation and implementation of different models of governance structures, and increasing the effort to systemically monitor the impact of governance structures in nationally representative samples.

3.11 Provision of free general education for the poor

The provision of textbooks and other materials, infrastructure, funding and nutrition, all of which are poverty targeted, has improved and continues to be refined, while fee exemptions have been made mandatory for, until now, an unspecified percentage of the poorest learners. In 2003, Government adopted a Plan of Action for Improving Access to Free and Quality Basic Education for All. The Plan of Action represents a victory for pro-poor funding. It proposes that higher school allocations, in Rand terms, will be targeted at poor learners. All poor learners will receive the same amount of resources, wherever they are in the country. The Plan of Action also proposes that automatic exemption from fees, and State-funded nutrition at school, will be extended to the poorest 40 per cent of learners.

3.12 Institutional reform for medium- and high-level skills development

The foundations were laid in the first five years after the democratic transition. Institutional reform in the early childhood, general schooling, adult education and training, further education and training, and higher education sectors have since been implemented, although, in adult education and early childhood development centres, implementation has been slower. Programmes for this reform involve large-scale reform of institutional orientation, structure, culture, operation, governance and curricula. School-level changes have occupied a large part of the effort of reform, particularly as schooling accounts for 80 per cent of the system. However, in terms of mid-level to high-level skills, other institutions have also undergone restructuring.

In the Higher Education (HE) and Further Education and Training (FET) bands, institutional reform was achieved when 50 FET colleges were formed from 152 technical colleges, and 24 HE institutions from 36 universities and technikons in the second half of the past decade. This reform is being carefully guided so that the new, flexible and responsive institutions will serve the skills development needs of the country in the medium to long term. New institutions will need to transform their systems, programmes, capacity, ethos, funding, governance and administrative structures to allow national policy goals and objectives to be realised.

In Higher Education, the Department of Education has set up a Merger Unit to provide technical support to institutions involved in mergers and incorporations, in order to facilitate a smooth transition for affected institutions. A Ministerial Reference Group has also been established to monitor the mergers, to ensure that the intended policy goals are promoted. To this end, new funding and reporting arrangements are being developed to promote greater accountability in the governance and management of these institutions.
A similar process is unfolding in FET colleges, with new funding arrangements, options and proposals for student support and financial aid, and an overhaul of programmes in terms of relevance and output, which, it is envisaged, will drive the production of mid-level skills for the nation.

3.13 Establishment and review of the NQF system

This system has been established in partnership with the Department of Labour to straddle the divide between education and training. The establishment of the NQF was a key milestone in the initial stages of transforming the education and training system towards meeting the economic, social and cultural development needs of South Africa. The underlying rationale was that the NQF would open up learning opportunities and career progression for all South Africans, including those who were denied the opportunity to receive formal learning. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was established in 1995 with a mandate to facilitate access, mobility and progression within education, training and employment; to enhance the quality of education and training; to accelerate redress of educational and job opportunities; and to advance personal, social and economic development.

Owing to the magnitude of the inherited problems of a disjointed education and training system, the implementation of the NQF proved to be too slow in reaching the desired outcomes. In [year], the Minister of Education decided to appoint a study team to review all processes and systems involved in the implementation of the NQF and make recommendations on how to accelerate these, so that the NQF could work for the people as had been intended.

The Study Team submitted their report to the Ministers of Education and Labour early in 2002, making several recommendations that included, amongst others, the need for the Departments of Education and Labour to play a more strategic and proactive role in leading the implementation of the NQF. The two Ministers established an inter-departmental Task Team to review the recommendations, with the intention of coming up with a single government response to the Study Team's report. The Task Team reported to the Ministers at the end of June 2003, and it was hoped that a process of drafting a new NQF Bill would begin after comments from the public on the Task Team’s report had been reviewed. This Bill would, amongst others, attempt to integrate education offered in the educational institutions with the training that occurs in the workplace. The Bill would also integrate the various pieces of legislation that pertain to education. When the Bill is eventually enacted, the NQF will be accessible to all people, the principle of recognition of prior learning will be upheld, and experience gained through work and life in general will be recognised alongside formal qualifications.

3.14 Nepad and International Relations

In the years since 1999, there has been a sustained harmonisation of development support at provincial and at national level, in line with national priorities. This is due to the re-establishment and strengthening of many multilateral relationships with United Nations organisations. Many Higher Education Exchange programmes have been implemented, particularly on the African continent. It has been possible to improve the linking of national priorities in the education and training system with development assistance, regardless of whether assistance is given to the national Department of Education or to provincial education departments. Together with the improvement in reporting on development assistance by means of improved reporting methods implemented as a result of the PFMA, this has the potential for streamlining implementation and development support, to achieve better educational impact.

Towards the start of the new millennium, however, the global development environment shifted towards matters of International
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terrorism and developing countries worldwide started experiencing sharp declines in development assistance. This adds pressure to the education development enterprise in South Africa, which has a leading role to play in deepening the outcomes of Nepad interventions on the continent.

3.15 Partnerships in human resource development

Delivery of education and training in the post-1999 era has been characterised by partnerships involving collaboration in research, resourcing, mobilisation and consultation, and technical assistance. Engagement in these partnerships with the private sector has been most vigorous and evident in the FET sector, which has ensured that FET priorities are adhered to in the implementation of these partnership arrangements.

Education reform has happened in partnership with education partners such as, amongst others, communities, unions and teacher associations, school governing bodies, religious organisations, business entities and research agencies. This is a far cry from the dysfunctional relationship between the broader education community and the Government in the years before 1994. Governance systems and bodies have made democratic participation in education a reality in the system and have, in so doing, improved accountability at local and at institutional level. The challenge for the next decade will be to consolidate and strengthen these interventions at all levels, so that the graduates produced in the education and training system will be the ones who can and will contribute socially and economically to a better life for all in South Africa.

The development and introduction, in 2001, of the Human Resource Development Strategy by the Government, led by the Departments of Education and Labour, signalled an upward shift in the efforts to match the supply of skills and training more closely to the demand in the labour market in the country. Through White Paper 1 of 1995, the Department of Education is mandated to conceptualise and manage the transformation of the education and training system, to give effect to the fundamental right to education embodied in the Constitution, to ensure that the quality of education delivery and performance is progressively raised in keeping with nationally and internationally recognised standards, to protect the integrity of academic awards, and to ensure that the education and training system produces good citizens with sound values and empowers them to become productive members of society and to contribute to the economic well-being and prosperity of the nation. The White Paper also articulates the erosion of divisions related to class and occupation.

This Strategy also established firm collaboration in matters pertaining to human resource development, including, amongst others, the NQF. The establishment of the inter-departmental NQF Task Team by the two Ministers has cemented the appreciation that each Department has for the other’s mandate and has affirmed the need for the two Departments to strengthen their collaborative efforts to provide strategic leadership in the area of human resource development.

The five strategic objectives of the HRD Strategy are:

- Improving the foundations for human development (schooling, early childhood development and adult basic education)
- Improving the supply of skills, particularly scarce skills (higher education and further education and training institutional performance)
- Increasing employer participation in skills development and lifelong learning (public and private sector training)
- Supporting employment growth through innovation and research (investment in research and development, and in its application at work)
- Ensuring that the other four strategic objectives of the Strategy are linked
In ensuring human development gains, the HRD Strategy can be seen as an umbrella strategy for the National Research and Development Strategy, the National Skills Development Strategy, the Manufacturing Strategy, and the Public Service HRD Strategy. The Department of Education is therefore crucial in the delivery of the HRD vision for South Africa in its role as an employer and as a provider of skills.

A lot has been done to implement the HRD Strategy throughout the education and training system, at national and at provincial level. Extensive reform in the FET, HE and GET sectors is beginning to bear fruit and is bringing about the reorientation and strengthening of institutions, and democratic governance. It is also improving the quality and relevance of outputs and programmes, and the relevance of funding frameworks.

The underlying principle of developing a high-quality public education and training system is based on expanding the notion of education for human capital development and economic growth. It acknowledges the role of education and training in social development and the importance of the development of values, attitudes and behaviour patterns that contribute to social cohesion, strengthen the expression of social justice and contribute to peace and stability in society. A system that progressively seeks to eliminate class and other social distinctions and to improve equality of opportunity will not be achieved in a purely market-driven context, nor can it be developed without confronting the pressures of globalisation.

A vibrant, high-quality public education and training system is, therefore, the means for achieving HRD goals, and will need to be developed using all instruments, tools and means available to Government and its partners. Chapter 4 looks at the areas and gaps that, if strengthened and filled, respectively, will enable the human development goals to be met through the education and training system as an employer, and by the education and training system as a provider of skills and learning.