# ANNEXURE 8

# The Transformation of South African Higher Education

Concept paper prepared for the second national Higher Education Transformation Summit, 2015

**The Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in South African Public Universities, September 2015**

***Real transformation can neither condone 'business as usual' nor can it be done 'on the cheap'.***

1. **Background**

i. The Ministerial Oversight Committee on the Transformation in [the] South African Public Universities (TOC) was established on 10 April 2013 in terms of notice in the government gazette (vol. 574, no 36356). The purpose of the Committee is to monitor progress on transformation in public universities and to advice the Minister.

ii. The coming into existence of the TOC, more than four years after the release of the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (Soudien Report 2008), happened in a context where the complaints received by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) since 1996, consistently confirmed alienation, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances across the education sector[1], including higher education. The figures captured in these reports also substantiate claims of widespread human rights violations linked to the equality clause[2] in the South African Constitution, including gender-based discrimination. The TOC continues a long tradition of struggles against racism and other forms of social exclusion and seek to promote human dignity in universities over many years.

> Dave Cooper states that the trends reflect a higher education system that has shifted since 1988 from one that reproduces serious social inequality based particularly on 'race' categories to which students are assigned, to one that reproduces an equally serious social inequality based, by 2012, on students' 'race-class' position.

**Higher Education in a Nutshell**

iii. Higher education has shifted, in substantive respects, from a fragmented and structurally racialised system of 36 public and more than 300 private institutions in 1994 to a relatively more integrated, 'system-like' formation of 26 public universities (traditional, comprehensive and universities of technology) and 95 private higher education institutions in 2015 (Blom, 2015). Nine hundred and ninety thousand (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 (MHET, 2013). *Despite this shifts transformation remains "painfully slow" and real and meaningful transformation is yet to be addressed.*

iv. There are at least **three different typologies** of universities in South Africa. (i) The apartheid-referenced 'historically white', English/Afrikaans speaking, 'historically black', rural African[3], Indian, coloured universities and Technikons;

[1] See Annual Reports of the South African Human Rights Commission since 1997: http://www.sahrc.org.za/home/index.php?ipkContentID=13&ipkMenuID=14

[2] Section 9: Equality - (3) 'The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth. (4) No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3). National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination.

[3] We utilise Cooper's usage of the apartheid race categories, used in lower case, to highlight the racially defined disadvantages that were shaped by apartheid policies. The category 'black' will refer collectively to the historically

(ii) the official typology of traditional, comprehensive and universities of technology (National Working Group, 2002); (iii) Cooper's (2015) proposed typology of three bands based on postgraduate enrolments and staff publications as indices of research-intensiveness at each institution: these are (a) five 'upper band' universities (b) seven 'middle band' universities and (c) eleven 'lower band' universities. As he says, these bands reveal rather than conceal the historical position of these institutions and therefore provide a more rigorous foundation on which to ask the question as to how race and class affect opportunities within the South African higher education system.

## 2. Critical Transformation Challenges South African Universities Face

South African universities face many critical transformation challenges that have been studied, described and researched through academic papers, commissioned and other reports. The common challenges are: "*Disempowering and Alienating*" Institutional Cultures; Poor Equity Profiles; Poor Staff Qualifications; Poor High-level Knowledge; and Skills Production; an Imitative Approach to Knowledge Production; Poor Understanding of the nature of our Students and Staff; Failure to confront the politics of epistemology and a pervasive culture of passive resistance to transformation. All these challenges are linked to ***"recalcitrant colonial-apartheid values and whiteness culture (euro centrism)".***

### i. Institutional Culture

Over the past two decades of democracy, questions about the institutional culture of universities have been raised and been the subject of much public debate and scrutiny. The type of incidents arising in universities raise concerns about societal identity, values, ethics and the morality that shape universities in South Africa. The moral dilemmas we find ourselves in are structurally-anchored and the product of a socio-economic order that has persisted in the post-apartheid period, although in a subtle mutated form. The institutional cultures of our universities, 21 years after democracy, show limited shifts in thecolonial-apartheid based values system that shaped universities prior to 1994. Every study or report undertaken so far, has described the culture as "alienating, disempowering with pervasive racism" (Dladla 1994, Soudien 2008, and National Working Group (NWG) 2002).Institutional cultures are also expressions of the persistent manner in which the broader socio-economic system articulates with and shapes and enforces hierarchies of privilege. For the University system, these hierarchies of privilege have been both at an institutional and individual level. The higher education system, in spite of all our attempts at an alternative paradigm, *rather than reducing inequality appears to be reproducing and entrenching inequality and discriminatory practices in society* (Cooper).

### ii. A crisis of staffing and high level-skill knowledge production

South African universities face a serious crisis now and in the future in four areas: an ageing professoriate; high student/staff ratios; low levels of academic staff qualifications and low levels of high-levels skills production. These 4 are interlinked. Of the 17800 permanent academic staff at Universities almost half are over the age of 50 and a significant number will retire within five years. The

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oppressed 'race' groups consisting of individuals classified under apartheid as African, coloured or Indian; the usage of the term 'black' was the one adopted by the anti-apartheid liberation movements. It should be noted as well however, that use of these socially constructed race categories does not imply acceptance of their validity or value as classificatory terms. (Cooper 2015: 238)

government has, over the past 20 years, more than doubled the size of the student population. But the rise in student numbers from 480,000 to 980,000 has not been matched by staff increases. In the same period - 1994-2014 - permanent academic staff positions have only gone up from 12800 to 17800. The system only provided some 5000 new permanent staff for 500,000 new students. This has seriously affected teaching quality and the academic profession itself. The ratio of permanent staff to student numbers has risen from 39 in 1994 to 55 in 2014. To attain even the very modest staff student ratios of 1994 the number of new permanent staff should have been at least eleven thousand – doubling the permanent staff to match the doubling of the students (Bozzoli 2015). Qualifications of staff are also a challenge with only 34% holding PhDs (ASSAF 2010) with the National Development Plan (2011) setting a target of 75% of academic staff to hold a PhD qualification by 2030.The system has also failed to meet its minimum research productivity requirement of one SAPSE Unit per academic staff per year set by the NWG in 2002 and its high-level knowledge production in terms of postgraduate supervision and throughput. The per capita research productivity was 0.34 in 2001 and 0.71 in 2013 (Mouton 2015). This can only be described as inefficient and poor. Government has grossly neglected the staffing needs of University academics. A bold plan is essential, with resources to support and to address urgent staffing requirements.

> The changes in higher education must be viewed in a context where the notion of a `traditional` student is no longer valid, either in South Africa or other parts of the world.

iii. **The politics of epistemology**

Key questions that need to be addressed are: How do we engage a diversity of students with really useful knowledge or with knowledge that does not dislocate them from their context and identity? What kind of students do we need for what kind of society? These questions are premised on, amongst others, Anne Edwards's (2014) research which makes it very clear that engaging students in their own learning is the single most important aspect to ensure their success – this is done through student centred pedagogy and curriculum. This means that if students are to succeed, we need to know who they are and what matters to them. She maintains a dual focus on learners and the knowledge and knowledge practices into which they are inducted by the teachers. She argues that teachers need to create an environment which assists students' self-regulation so that they are "agentically in control of their own learning".

By looking at knowledge historically, Michelson (2015) shows that epistemological hierarchies are imbedded in discourses of gender, race and class; in so doing, she addresses epistemology as politics. Taking both Edwards's (2014) and Michelson's arguments, in order to transform universities and ensure students success, we need to understand who the students really are and we need to acknowledge the politics of epistemology. This is essential to 'de-colonise' the curricula within our African historic contexts and realities.

iv. **Student and Staff Equity**

The higher education system is perceived to be reproducing the individual and institutional inequalities that were entrenched by apartheid and this is in spite of

policy reform changes in the higher education landscape. The reproductive impulses are easily verified by the massive empirical data at our disposal which underscore the fact that the systemic challenges that the higher education sector inherited from the colonial-apartheid past, despite several and significant shifts (e.g. enrolment patterns, student financial aid), have not fundamentally changed. The 'system' still reproduces student and staff development outcomes reflective of the enduring legacies of our past. The Vital Statistics (2014) report of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), which captures audited data from 2007 to 2012, confirms that despite some significant progress in enrolment rates, our higher education system still reproduces much of the racialised participation rates of the past. The annual reports of the Employment Equity Commission demonstrate the same patterns for higher education and other societal sectors.

a. **Who are the staff?** The figures that indicate the extent of change in staff demographic profiles at universities since 1994 are stark (see for example, Makholwa 2015). They suggest that painfully little has been done, at least not on a systematic basis, by higher education's leadership, nationally and institutionally, to 'grow' black academics of all genders. This has resulted in transformation inertias across the national system. The figures for disabled staff and students are even worse, though some improvements are noticeable.

b. **Who are the students?** The changes in higher education must be viewed in a context where the notion of a `traditional` student is no longer valid, either in South Africa or other parts of the world. The dominant notion that shapes university administrative structures, is that of a predominantly homogeneous population of 18-24 year olds who '*have time on their hands'* (SAQA/DLL 2015) to study full time and to attend classes during the day. Michelson (2015) adds that in general terms the university globally and the way it/we conduct teaching and learning has the young, prosperous white heterosexual male body as its reference.

3. Cooper (2015) argues, in a 'new, post-Marikana phase of real transformation' we need to know through further research, movements across institutions in relation to social class. Alongside and related to this, the 'traditional division between full-time and part-time learning is increasingly becoming less distinct' (McLinden 2013: 6), and students are looking for more flexible ways of studying that fit with their work, family and other commitments. In particular, HBUs' student profiles are different from most HWUs; the majority of them are women, are financially stressed and are engaged in paid or unpaid work. The majority also 'drop out' or 'stop out' for a range of economic or academic reasons. The maintenance of a particular conception of who the majority of students are, is an example of the HWU/ middle class view continuing to dominate understandings of higher education in South Africa. Most of the students, according to this argument, are therefore 'non-traditional'. This is preposterous.

4. **<u>Highlights of Transformation 'attempts' at South African Universities</u>**

i. At the onset of democracy in 1994, the Mamdani and the Makgoba episodes at UCT and Wits respectively drew the attention of the public to certain impulses within some universities to preserve the status quo and resist different ways of thinking about universities. The hearings associated with the `Soudien Report` a few years later, catalysed by the Reitz incident at the University of Free State, again showed the difficulties confronted by universities when attempting to change racist practices and develop more inclusive policies. The Soudien Report, several University Climate Surveys and the recently released "Luister"

Video made by some students and a staff member at the University of Stellenbosch highlight tenacious racism. Complaints of racism from staff and students at historically white universities (HBUs) suggest that 'whiteness', particularly white maleness, is privileged and is often associated with 'quality' and 'high standards'. 'Blackness' on the other hand is often associated with `inferiority`, `ineptitude`, `stupidity`, `corruption` and a `decline in quality and standards`. Racism in the post-apartheid period is also perceived by some to be `in reverse`. There are some white students and staff who complain about reverse racism, interpreting affirmative action and redress measure as restrictive of access and opportunities for a new generation of post-apartheid white students. By some, there are also critiques of the ways in which redress strategies are conceptualised and of the reification and re-inscription of the offensive racial categories used by the apartheid state.

ii. We have also seen violent protests by students over: limited financial aid funds; initiation practices which led in one instance to the death of a black student at the University of the North West; references to Nazi-ism by white students at the University of the North West and black students at Wits University; the insidious nature of sexual harassment and sexual assault; dissatisfaction of many students with the language policies; the content of the curricula; and the 'colonial nature' of South African Universities.

iii. The Rhodes Must Fall Movement, Open UCT, Open Stellenbosch, Open Wits and Open Rhodes movements have featured prominently in the news. These movements predominantly represent the voices of students who were "born free," and who are in pursuit of second order substantive change, that is framed by new values and a post-colonial definition and conception of the South African University. The questions we are faced with are: how do we move our moral and ethical compass so that we can lead change in society rather than simply mirroring it? Why have we failed so dismally in building democratic practices and a new values base? What needs to be done?

iv. All the above highlights support the conclusions of the Soudien 2008 report i.e. '*transformation is not only painfully slow but also that discrimination in particular to racism and sexism is pervasive in our institutions'*.

v. To redefine the post-apartheid university has been an insurmountable task and in spite of a new political order, Constitution and Bill of Rights, the dominant belief systems of students, staff and institutional leadership[4], the educated elite of the country, continues, in many instances, to perpetuate and further entrench discriminatory practices and preserve and retain old forms of privilege.

vi. The current embedded colonial-apartheid narrative has failed higher education and its transformation programme. The creation of a new narrative of real, radical transformation is a matter of urgency.

[4] By using this term, we are not referring to Vice Chancellors but to all levels of leaders/managers in universities.

5. **Transformation Deferred**

i. Equality as a right, value and principle, is a central theme of our Constitution[5] and higher education policy[6]. Its systematic deferment from policy and practice, except at the level of rhetoric, has resulted in the unfettered growth of inequalities on the back of predatory economic arrangements and the wholesale commodification and corporatisation of education at almost all levels, which valorises competitive individualism and elitism, which undercut human solidarity.

ii. University leaders and managers have options to challenge the status quo, although the pressures to ride the globalising waves, turning universities into corporations, are great. Few people expect universities to work against these impulses in totality. However, many are disappointed that universities may have given up on possibilities of alternatives, besides poorly funded, small initiatives; this in the light of recent memories of university struggles against apartheid-colonialism, the dramatic evidence of planetary degradation, and gross inequalities to which the current economic system contributes.

## Transformation of Higher Education

Two National Policies underpin the process of Transformation of Higher Education. These are The Education White Paper 3: The Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (July 1997), and The White Paper on School Education and Training (MHET 2013). The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (PSET) (Minister of Higher Education and Training [MHET] (2013) emphasises the importance of the integration and articulation of the system for education, training and development. The White Paper advocates higher education (HE) programmes and modes of provision that are responsive to students' needs and realities and 'which take into account their varying life and work contexts, rather than requiring them to attend daily classes at fixed times and central venues' (MHET 2013: 48).

[5] Kate O' Reagan, 2013: 'Equality is a central theme of our National Constitution. It permeates the constitutional text. Right at the start, in Section **1,** the Constitution provides that the founding values of our Constitution are (amongst others): human dignity, the achievement of equality, the advancement of human rights and freedoms, as well as the principles of non-racism and non-sexism. The pervasiveness of equality is evident elsewhere as well: Section **39,** a provision which guides the interpretation of the Bill of Rights stipulates that in interpreting the Bill of Rights, a court must promote the values that underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom'.

[6] See Badat (2010): 'The Higher Education Act declared the desirability of creating "a single coordinated higher education system", restructuring and transforming "programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs", redressing "past discrimination", ensuring "representivity and equal access" and contributing "to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, in keeping with international standards of academic quality". and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy" (ibid:1.3)

iii. The Minister of Higher Education and Training, 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); the transformation battles at North West University (NWU); and similar ones at various institutions of higher education across the country. However, such criticisms are by no means restricted to these institutions as the transformation challenge, read in its widest, multi-dimensional meaning, affects all institutions, both historically black and white, albeit in differential terms. Our view is that no single South African higher education institution today can claim to have overcome these challenges which are inscribed in differential forms and states of transformation across the institutional landscape (see Govinder et al 2012). Historically black institutions have to confront quality as a major factor in their transformation projects going forward. In a meeting with the Transformation Oversight Committee on 26 May 2015, the Minister also foregrounded the transformation challenges at Historically Disadvantaged Universities (HDIs) in relation to functionality, efficiency, quality and good governance, in addition to the challenges experienced at other 'types' of universities. Between 1994 and 2012 the Minister appointed 14 assessors to deal with public higher education institutions in crisis; this includes governance breakdown, maladministration and near collapse of institutions (see Lange and Luescher-Mamashela, forthcoming). These are described as follows: 'Factional councils that have failed to exercise their fiduciary responsibility; a lack of leadership and absence of efficient administrative systems; academic matters often involving weak, marginalized or dysfunctional senates; maladministration, corruption and financial crises' (*ibid*).

> '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', Minister Blade Nzimande, Parliament, May 2015.

iv. The real demand for equality and diversity has been limited by the emergence of the discourse on transformation tension, which reduces the transformation project to trade-offs between equity and quality; redress and efficiency; and change and development (for example, Cloete and Moja, 2007 and Cloete, 2014). This leads to only one particular conception of excellence and quality being possible. The Africa Summit on Higher Education in Dakar and Johannesburg confirm this as a system-wide pathology. There has been, at a deep level of inequality, a seamless continuity between pre- and post-1994 higher education in South Africa.

**The way Forward (What is to be done now)**

v. **Create an alternative new Transformation Narrative**

After 21 years, taking into account both evidence and experience, the time is ripe for a new narrative. ***A narrative of Transformation that confronts our reality: Africans in Africa living through a globalising world and places Knowledge at the centre of transformation.*** In addition, two daunting obstacles should be acknowledged if universities are to act agentially: 'the persisting power and prestige of market thinking, even in the aftermath of the worst market failure in eighty years' […] [and] the rancour and emptiness of public discourse' (*ibid*). Both these obstacles have crowded out morals from the market; making the emergence of ethical democratic communities almost impossible. The role that universities were meant to play, that is, contributing to social and public will-formation based on solidarity has not materialised. Instead, in the space of the 'social' we have crafted the conditions for an ethic of materialistic hedonism that is in the process of overwhelming us all. Neo-liberal values have become a 'global culture: competition, deception, and imitation have replaced the ideals of justice' – 'where people are rewarded for their greed— with increasingly little room for the expression of higher human values and qualities such as generosity, compassion, social solidarity, selflessness, and willingness to fight for justice'[7]. The active encouragement and support of universities (staff and students) to be leading, together with others, public debate, scholarship and social activism, in the collective search for a more socially, economically and environmentally just society, are called for.

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vi. Establish more definitively through a National process (drawing on data available and undertaking new research if necessary) who our universities are (African Universities *versus* Universities in Africa, imitative and mimicking *versus* original universities), who our university staff are (support, academics, leadership), and who students are in terms of race, gender, age, social class, life-style including working status, etc.

vii. Build incentives so that scholarship, pedagogy, research and administration respond to who we (i.e. staff and students) are, and to the social, economic and environmental justice imperatives, at local, regional and global levels.

viii. Prioritise 'transformative machinery 'in universities, through adequate funding, and their placement at the centre of the institution; they need to be institutionally appropriate to change institutional cultures, to have deliverables and operate against set targets which are integrated into IOPs and against a national transformation framework.

[7]See Fotopoulos, T. (2008). Values, the Dominant Social Paradigm and Neoliberal Globalisation. *The International Journal of INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY*, vol.4, no.1.

ix. Develop a major initiative to build the next generation of quality scholars and academic leadership through a bold, well-resourced initiative, building on other initiatives that are already under way through DHET and DST.

x. Ensure that the `transformative machinery` at the level of government is unambiguous in terms of its responsibilities.

xi. Real transformation can neither condone 'business as usual' nor can it be done' on the cheap**.**

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