



## **Higher Education Change in post-1994 South Africa**

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## Introduction

I wish to thank the Department of Sociology and the Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust for the privilege of participating in this evening's *Wolpe Dialogue* and sharing this platform with Prof. Michael Burawoy.

In my view, there are two ways in which we can best pay tribute to the late Harold Wolpe, a radical scholar and activist who I happily acknowledge as my own intellectual mentor, and who, as Colin Bundy has written, was "one of those rare academics who give intellectuals a good name" (1996).

The first way is to ensure that Wolpe Dialogue serves as a special intellectual space where we can consider important academic and public issues freed from imprisoning orthodoxies, from fine-sounding but un-theorized claims, from perceptions that lack any empirical basis, and from breath-taking generalisations on the basis of the single case study. The second way is to ensure that the Wolpe Dialogue also has the unashamed moral purpose of nurturing and cultivating ideas, concepts and practices that refuse 'to accept the logic of inequality and the repression that it involves', and serves as a 'search for human agency, for the means through which inequality can be undone' (Hammami, 2006:32).

I wish to address four issues.

- The first issue is our changing world.
- The second issue is the purposes of higher education, the relevance of which will become clear in due course.
- The third issue is what I consider to be some of the key achievements of the past sixteen years, even if in some instances these achievements have to be qualified.
- Finally, I want to identify some significant shortcomings and weaknesses in South African higher education and some key challenges that continue to confront us, especially in relation to access, opportunity and success in higher education.

## A changing world

Our world is "dramatically different" from that of a few decades ago and even just 18 months ago.

For one, we live in the epoch of *globalisation*, which is characterised by "an expansion of economic activities across national boundaries" as manifested in "international trade, international investment and international finance", by the "flows of services, technology, information and ideas across national boundaries" (Nayyar, 2008:4), and by the global organisation of production through transnational corporations. The driving forces have been huge increases in the speed of travel and "the technological revolution in communications, the internet and large-scale computerized information systems", which have resulted in the compression of time and space and "make it possible to conduct business on a planetary

scale in real time” (Berdahl, 2008:46). The new “world market...is beyond the reach of the nation state” and also means a reduced agency on the part of nation state (ibid:47).

Driven by market forces and the technological revolution, globalisation has exercised “an influence on the nature of institutions that impact higher education”, and on the “ways and means of providing higher education” (Nayyar, 2008:7). It has also come to shape “education both in terms of what is taught and what is researched, and (has shifted) both student interests and university offerings away from broader academic studies and towards narrower vocational programmes” (Duderstadt et al, 2008:275).

For another, since 2008 we have been living under the severest *global financial crisis* that the world has experienced in over seventy years.

One reason for the crisis is that despite globalization and greater contact across regions, nations, cultures, religions and languages, during recent decades there has been an all too evident dosing of minds and negation of important human values. The negation of core human values – respect for human dignity, difference and diversity and human rights – has promoted destructive fundamentalisms of various kinds, intolerance and prejudice, and have made the world a much less just, safe and secure place.

The dosing of the mind has been evident in economic and social thought and policies that have prevailed during the past twenty years. Wisdom derived from vigorous intellectual debate, knowledge, and understanding has been disdained. Instead of the idea of the public good and ethical leadership, self-serving ideas based on arrogant power and narrow economic interests have triumphed. The result has been dubious and pernicious economic and social orthodoxies that have coalesced in the ideology of neo-liberalism (see Harvey, 2006).

Neo-liberal thinking and ideas, whether embraced willingly or imposed through the coercive or disciplinary power of powerful international economic and political institutions, have reshaped economic and social policies, institutions and practices. Instead of development as “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (Sen, 1999:3), the concept of development has been economized and reduced to economic growth and enhanced economic performance as measured by various indicators. Neo-liberalism has also brought in its wake a rampant “culture of materialism”, which has transformed “a reasonable utilitarianism...into Narcissist hedonism” (Nayyar, 2008:5), and a celebration of unbridled individualism and greed. In these regards, neo-liberalism has effectively incubated the seismic and grave financial and economic crisis that envelops the world today.

The orthodoxies of the last two decades have been especially harmful to how we think about the value, purposes and goals of universities, and about education and knowledge. Increasingly, the “logic of the market has...defined the purposes of universities largely in terms of their role in economic development” (Berdahl, 2008:48). Public investment in higher education has come to be justified largely in terms of economic growth and preparing students for the labour market.

Furthermore, neo-liberalism has come to define universities as “just supermarkets for a variety of public and private goods that are currently in demand, and whose value is defined by their perceived aggregate financial value” (Boulton and Lucas, 2008:17). As a recent monograph notes, “to define the university enterprise by these specific outputs, and to fund it only through metrics that measure them, is to misunderstand the nature of the enterprise and its potential to deliver social benefit” (ibid., 2008:17).

Neither higher education policy nor practice in South Africa, whether directly or indirectly as a consequence of wider economic and social policies have been able to avoid the impacts of globalization or neo-liberal thinking.

### **The purposes of higher education**

Arthur E. Levine, President of the Teachers College of Columbia University, writes that

In the early years of the Industrial Revolution, the Yale Report of 1828 asked whether the needs of a changing society required either major or minor changes in higher education. The report concluded that it had asked the wrong question. The right question was, What is the purpose of higher education? (Levine, 2000)

Levine goes on to add that questions related to higher education “have their deepest roots in that fundamental question” and that “faced with a society in motion, we must not only ask that question again, but must actively pursue answers, if our colleges and universities are to retain their vitality in a dramatically different world” (ibid.)

“Faced with a society in motion”, we must indeed “actively pursue answers, if our colleges and universities are to retain their vitality in a dramatically different world”. Yet, as we, as higher education and as universities, as governments and citizens, actively interact with our dynamic and changing world and changing societies and search for answers to historical and contemporary challenges, it is vitally important that we also hold on to the “fundamental question”: “What is the purpose of higher education?”

The former Principal of Edinburgh University, Lord Sutherland, writes that we need to define our identity in the changing and ‘new diverse world of higher education’. ‘The most essential task’, he suggests, is to create ‘a sense of our own worth’ by fashioning ‘our understanding of our identity’ – our understanding of what it means to be a university (cited in Graham, 2005: 155).

However, as the philosopher Gordon Graham notes, we ‘cannot have a satisfactory sense of (our) worth if (we have) no sense of what (our) purpose is’ (Graham, 2005:158). How, then, do we create ‘a satisfactory sense of (our) worth’? In what purposes are we to root our ‘understanding of our identity’ and what it means to be a university?

For good reasons, national higher education systems evince highly differentiated and diverse institutions, with universities characterised by different missions, varied social and

educational purposes and goals, differing size, different configurations of academic programmes, differing admission requirements, and varying academic standards as appropriate to specified purposes and goals.

The meaning of higher education and universities cannot be found in the content of their teaching and research, how they undertake these, or their admission policies. Instead, the core purposes of higher education and universities reside elsewhere.

The first is to *produce knowledge*, so that we can advance understanding of our natural and social worlds and enrich our accumulated scientific and cultural heritage.

This means that we “test the inherited knowledge of earlier generations”, we dismantle the mumbo jumbo that masquerades for knowledge, we “reinvigorate” knowledge and we share our findings with others. We undertake research into the most arcane and abstract issues and the “most theoretical and intractable uncertainties of knowledge”. At the same time we also strive to apply our discoveries for the benefit of humankind (Boulton and Lucas, 2008:3).

We “operate on both the short and the long horizon”. On the one hand, we grapple with urgent and “contemporary problems” and seek solutions to these. On the other hand, we “forage” into issues and undertake enquiries “that may not appear immediately relevant to others, but have the proven potential to yield great future benefit” (ibid.)

Above all, we ask *questions*. We don’t immediately worry about the right answer or solution. Instead, we worry *first* about the right *question* or the better question. It is as Einstein has said: “If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes” (cited in Vogt et al, 2003).

Well maybe not always in 5 minutes. But what is true is that it is the right questions, the proper questions that lead to the great leaps in knowledge and science, to the great discoveries and innovations.

The second purpose of universities is the *dissemination of knowledge* and the formation and cultivation of the cognitive character of students. The goal is to produce graduates that ideally: “can think effectively and critically”; have “achieved depth in some field of knowledge”, and have a “critical appreciation of the ways in which we gain knowledge and understanding of the universe, of society, and of ourselves”. Our graduates should also have “a broad knowledge of other cultures and other times”; be “able to make decisions based on reference to the wider world and to the historical forces that have shaped it”; have “some understanding of and experience in thinking systematically about moral and ethical problems”; and be able to “communicate with cogency” (The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000:84).

The final, if somewhat newer but increasingly accepted, purpose of universities is to undertake *community engagement*. We must make a distinction between a university being responsive to its political, economic and social contexts and community engagement. Being alive to context does not mean that a university is necessarily engaged with communities, however we may define these. That is to say, in much as sensitivity to economic and social conditions and challenges is a necessary condition for community engagement, it is not a sufficient condition.

At different moments, in differing ways and to differing degrees, community engagement has encompassed community outreach, student and staff volunteer activities and more recently what has come to be termed 'service-learning'.

Service-learning has sought to build on the core knowledge production and dissemination purposes of the university. Instead of being an add-on, disconnected from the University's core activities, as community outreach and volunteerism have been, service-learning seeks to become a "curricular innovation" (Stanton, 2008:2) infused in the teaching and learning and research activities of the University. As has been noted,

Service-learning...engage(s) students in activities where *both the community and student* are primary beneficiaries and where the primary goals are to provide a *service* to the community and, equally, to enhance student *learning* through rendering this service. ...This form of community engagement is underpinned by the assumption that service is enriched through scholarly activity and that scholarly activity, particularly student learning, is enriched through service to the community (CHE, 2006:15).

Necessarily, the idea of learning through community engagement has implications for curriculum, for the processes of teaching, learning and assessment, and also for knowledge production with respect to the purposes, aims and objects of research. In as much as specific disciplines or fields may shape the form and content of community engagement, such community engagement may also affect the form and content of teaching and learning and research in disciplines or fields.

Perhaps it is trite to discuss the purposes of higher education, but the discourses that prevail today suggest that these purposes are neither fully appreciated nor adequately affirmed.

## **Achievements**

There have been a number of achievements during the past sixteen years, even if some of them have to be qualified.

1. A comprehensive agenda and policy framework for higher education, as explicated in various policy documents, has been defined, even if the nature of the transformation agenda and certain elements require ongoing critical debate. The progressive realization of this agenda has the potential to create a higher education system that is congruent

with the core principles of social equity and redress, social justice, democracy and development.

2. The foundations have been laid for a new higher education landscape constituted by a single, co-ordinated and differentiated system encompassing universities, universities of technology, comprehensive institutions, contact and distance institutions and various kinds of colleges. The attendant institutional restructuring has provided the opportunity to reconfigure the higher education system in a principled and imaginative way, more suited to the needs of a democracy and all its citizens in contrast to the racist and exclusionary imperatives that shaped large parts of the apartheid system.
3. There has been increased and broadened participation within higher education to advance social equity and meet economic and social development needs, a crucial goal given the legacy of disadvantage of black and women South Africans, especially of working class and rural poor origins.

Student enrolments have grown from 473 000 in 1993 to some 799 388 in 2008. There has also been an extensive deracialisation of the student body, overall and at many institutions. Whereas in 1993 African students constituted 40% (191 000), and black students 52% of the student body, in 2008 they made up 64.4% (514 370) and over 75% respectively of overall enrolments (CHE, 2004; DHET, 2009).

There has also been commendable progress in terms of gender equity. Whereas women students made up 43% (202 000 out of 473 000) of enrolments in 1993, by 2008 they constituted 56.3 % (450 584 out of 799 388) of the student body (CHE, 2004; DHET, 2009).

4. In relation to the *National Plan* goal of 40% enrolments in Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), 30% in Business and Commerce (BC) and 30% in Science Engineering, and Technology (SET), there have also been shifts as desired – from 57% HSS:24% BC:19% SET in 1993 to 43% HSS:29% BC:28% SET in 2008 (MoE, 2001; CHE, 2004; DHET, 2009).
5. Isolated from the rest of Africa and the world more generally, democracy has brought a welcome internationalisation of the student body and also, although to a more limited extent, of the academic workforce.

International student enrolments increased from 14 124 in 1995 to 51 224 in 2005, constituting about 7% of the total student body. Students from the South African Development Community bloc increased from 7 497 in 1995 to 35 725 in 2005. Students from other African countries increased from 1 769 in 1995 to 7 586 in 2005. Students from the rest of the world totalled 7 913 in 2005.

6. With respect to teaching-learning, research and community engagement, in a number of areas of learning and teaching, institutions offer academic programmes that produce high quality graduates with knowledge, competencies and skills to practice occupations and professions locally and anywhere in the world. Various areas of research are

characterised by excellence and the generation of high quality fundamental and applied knowledge for scientific publishing in local and international publications, for economic and social development and innovation, and for public policy. In a variety of areas, there are also important and innovative community engagement initiatives that link academics and students and communities.

7. A national quality assurance framework and infrastructure has been established and policies, mechanisms and initiatives with respect to institutional audit, programme accreditation and quality promotion and capacity development have been implemented since 2004. These developments have significantly raised the profile of quality issues across the sector, and have linked notions of quality in teaching and learning, research and community engagement to the goals and purposes of higher education transformation. There has also been a concomitant emerging institutionalisation of quality management within institutions.
8. A new more goal-oriented, performance-related funding framework has been instituted, and a National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has been successfully established and expanded as a means of effecting social redress for poor students.
9. Following the constitutional provision for the existence of private higher education institutions on condition that they did not discriminate on the grounds of race, registered with the state, and maintained standards that were not inferior to those at comparable public institutions, a small private higher education sector has come into existence. Criteria that private institutions need to meet to achieve university status are in place.

Overall, South African higher education displays considerable strengths and much promise with respect to knowledge production and dissemination, to contributing to social equity, to economic and social development and democracy, and to the development needs of the Southern African region and the African continent.

## **Issues and Challenges**

Notwithstanding some significant achievements, a number of key issues and challenges continue to confront the state and institutions.

I will first identify certain policy and macro issues that require attention and then discuss specific issues related to access, opportunity and success.

1. A critical and urgent issue is the need to (re)theorise and clarify the scope, structure and landscape of higher education, including the purposes and roles of universities vis-à-vis further education and training colleges and other post-secondary institutions.

On the one hand, there is a growing need and demand for higher education, and more generally post-secondary education. On the other hand, the *National Plan for Higher*

*Education* set the target of a 20% participation rate by 2011/2016. If this target is to be achieved, an estimated 100 000 additional students have to be incorporated within higher education, in a context in which the capacities of public universities are already stretched. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for increasing the output of high quality graduates. All of these issues mean that it is important to give considered attention to the structure of higher education and the spectrum of post-secondary institutions that are required in relation to economic and social development needs.

2. There has been an intractable tension between a number of values and goals of higher education.

For example, to the extent that government and universities have sought to pursue social equity and redress and quality in higher education simultaneously, difficult political and social dilemmas, choices and decisions have arisen, especially in the context of inadequate public finances and academic development initiatives to support under-prepared students, who tend to be largely black and or of working class or rural poor social origins.

An exclusive concentration on social equity and redress without adequate public funding and academic development initiatives to support under-prepared students has negative implications for quality, compromises the production of high quality graduates with the requisite knowledge, competencies and skills, and adversely affects economic development. Conversely, an exclusive focus on economic development and quality and 'standards', (especially when considered to be timeless and invariant and attached to a single, a-historical and universal model of higher education) results in equality being retarded or delayed with limited erosion of the racial and gender character of the high-level occupational structure.

3. Locating higher education within a larger process of "political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity" (*White Paper*, 1997:1.7), the *White Paper* emphasised a 'thick' notion of the responsiveness of higher education that incorporated its wider social purposes.

Increasingly, however, the trend has been to approach higher education and investments in universities from the perspective largely of the promotion of economic growth and the preparation of students for the labour market and as productive workers for the economy.

As much as the Ministry of Education has maintained a multi-faceted conception of the value and purposes of higher education, the discourse of other state departments, various education and training agencies and sections of business has revolved around the supposed lack of responsiveness of universities to the needs of the economy, the alleged mismatch between graduates and the needs of the private and public sectors and the demand for a greater focus on 'skills'. This development has its roots in four conditions. a) One is that the new knowledge-based economy under globalisation "depends upon the creation and application of new knowledge and hence upon

educated people and their ideas” (Duderstadt et al, 2008:273), which means that higher education has come to be viewed as fundamental to economic growth and competitiveness. b) The thrust of reducing higher education to its value for economic growth has been also occasioned by the grave and considerable shortage of high-level professionals in South Africa, which has acted as a constraint on economic and social development. c) Furthermore, it has revealed the ascendancy of the early 1990s assertions of the ANC and radical trade union movement that privileged ‘human capital’ and ‘human resource development’ (Badat, 1995; see also Kraak, 2001) and, concomitantly, the extent of the erosion of the 1980’s people’s education movement ideas of education for critical and democratic participation and citizenship. d) Finally, it also signalled the increasing permeation and prevalence of neoliberal thinking and ideas among sections of the government, state officials and the business sector.

It is not disputed that higher education must cultivate the knowledge, competencies and skills that enable graduates to contribute to economic development, since such development can facilitate initiatives geared towards greater social equality and social development. Nor is it disputed that in many cases there is need for extensive restructuring of qualifications and programmes to make curricula more congruent with the knowledge, expertise and skills needs of a changing economy. However, it cannot be blithely assumed that if a country produces high quality graduates, especially, in the natural science, engineering and technology fields this will automatically have a profound effect on the economy. The formation of professionals through higher education is a *necessary condition* for economic growth and development, innovation and global competitiveness, but is not a *sufficient condition*. The contribution of graduates is also dependent on the institutional economic environment outside of higher education - in particular, industrial policy, the availability of investment capital and venture capital and the openness and receptivity of state enterprises and the business sector. There should also be no pretence that, in terms of a higher education response to labour market needs, it is a simple matter to establish the knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes that are required by the economy and society generally and by its different constituent parts specifically.

An instrumental approach to higher education which reduces its value to its efficacy for economic growth, and calls that higher education should prioritize professional, vocational and career-focused qualifications and programmes and emphasise ‘skills’ development is to denude it of its considerably wider social value and functions<sup>1</sup>. For one, higher education has intrinsic significance as an engagement between dedicated academics and students around humanity’s intellectual, cultural and scientific inheritances (in the form of books, art, pictures, music, artefacts), and around our

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<sup>1</sup> Singh rightly argues that great care must be taken that institutions and academics do not allow the demand for ‘responsiveness’ to be ‘thinned’ down to purely market and economic responsiveness. She notes that, today, “the traditional knowledge responsibilities of universities (research as the production of new knowledge, teaching as the dissemination of knowledge, and community service as the applied use of knowledge for social development) are increasingly being located within the demands of economic productivity” The danger, of course, is that the “the notion of responsiveness (could become) emptied of most of its content except for that which advances individual, organisational or national economic competitiveness” (Singh, 2001).

historical and contemporary understandings, views and beliefs regarding our natural and social worlds. Here, education is the pursuit of learning in and through language/s of nature and society, which is undertaken as part of what it means to be human (Oakeshott, cited in Fuller ed., 1989).

For another, higher education also has immense social and political value. As Nussbaum argues, education is intimately connected to the idea of democratic citizenship and the “cultivation of humanity” (2006:5). Nussbaum states that “three capacities, above all, are essential to the cultivation of humanity” (ibid:5). “First is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one’s traditions’....Training this capacity requires developing the capacity to reason logically, to test what one reads or says for consistency of reasoning, correctness of fact, and accuracy of judgement” (ibid:5). The “cultivation of humanity” also requires students to see themselves “as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern” – which necessitates knowledge and understanding of different cultures and “of differences of gender, race, and sexuality” (ibid:6). Third, it is, however, more than “factual knowledge” that is required. Also necessary is “the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have” (Nussbaum, 2006:6-7). Finally, higher education also has profound value for the promotion of health and well-being, the assertion and pursuit of social and human rights, active democratic participation and critical citizenship.

4. A fourth key issue is that of the establishment of a national, co-ordinated and differentiated higher education system

In 1994, the higher education sector comprised of 21 public universities, 15 technikons, 120 colleges of education and 24 nursing and 11 agricultural colleges. By 2001 all the colleges of education were either closed or incorporated into the universities and technikons. Thereafter some of the 36 universities and technikons were merged and incorporated to give rise to the present landscape of 11 universities, 6 comprehensive universities (one distance) and 6 universities of technology. 2 institutes of higher education were created, as facilities through which particular academic programmes of the existing universities could be provided in provinces that did not have universities. The institutional restructuring that occurred after 2001 provided the opportunity to reconfigure the higher education system so that it was more suited to the needs of a developing democracy. While various challenges remain, the foundations have been laid for a new higher education landscape.

The 1997 *White Paper* made clear that “an important task in planning and managing a single national co-ordinated system was to ensure diversity in its organisational form and in the institutional landscape, and offset pressures for homogenisation”, and “to diversify the system in terms of the mix of institutional missions and programmes that will be required to meet national and regional needs in social, cultural and economic development” (DoE, 1997:2.37, 1.27). Four years later the *National Plan* reaffirmed its commitment to these goals. (MoE, 2001:49). Since then there have been two elements

in the creation of a new differentiated institutional landscape. One has been institutional restructuring which reduced the previous 36 higher education institutions to 23 through mergers and incorporations based on various criteria. The other has been the negotiation of the academic offerings of institutions, in terms of which institutions are restricted to specific approved undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications and programmes, must seek state approval for the offering of new qualifications and receive quality accreditation from the CHE. Nonetheless, differentiation has been and remains a difficult and contentious policy issue for a number of reasons.

First, there have been sharply contested and differing views on the kinds of differentiation appropriate for South African higher education, with support expressed for differentiation on the basis of clear institutional types, functional differentiation and differentiation based on institutional missions and programmes. Buffeted by strong differences among key constituencies, in 1996 the NCHES advocated acceptance “in name, and in broad function and mission, the existence of universities, technikons and colleges as types of institutions” and to allow a new system to “evolve through a planned process which recognises current institutional missions and capacities, addresses the distortions created by apartheid, and responds to emerging regional and national needs” (cited in Kraak, 2001:113). Kraak terms the NCHES view as a “middle-ground position” that “fudged” the differences between what he describes as “functional and flexible differentiation” – the latter being institutional mission and programme based differentiation (Kraak, 2001:112-13).

The *White Paper*, as noted, in 1997 proclaimed its intention “to diversify the system in terms of the mix of institutional missions and programmes”. In 2000, the CHE came out on the side of institutional ‘differentiation’ and ‘diversity’. ‘Differentiation’ was used to “refer to the social and educational mandates of institutions, which were to “orient institutions to meet economic and social goals by focusing on programmes at particular levels of the qualifications structure and on particular kinds of research and community service” (CHE, 2000:34). ‘Diversity’ referred to “the specific missions of individual institutions” (ibid). In terms of their mandates three types of institutions were defined on the basis of the extent of their postgraduate teaching and research programmes and research, while provision was also made for a “dedicated distance education” institution (CHE, 2000:8-9).

Second, the creation of a new differentiated institutional landscape has had to address the issue of institutional identities, including the institutional missions, social and educational roles, academic qualification and programme mixes, institutional cultures and organisational forms and structures and practices, of all institutions. Graham has argued that universities should avoid aspiring to “ideal(s) which they cannot attain”. Otherwise, “no sense of worth will be forthcoming” and they can have no “proper self-confidence” (Graham, 2005:157). It must also be recognised that there are many conceptions and models of the ‘university’ and that these have changed over time. It must be accepted that the “name ‘university’ now applies to institutions with widely different functions and characters” (Graham, 2005:157), and that this means that the “ideals each can aspire to” will be different (ibid:258).

In as much as it may be acknowledged that the social goals and development challenges of democratic South Africa require a differentiated and diverse higher education system, in practice the trend has been towards institutional isomorphism, with “many institutions (aspiring) to a common ‘gold’ standard as represented by the major research institutions, both nationally and internationally” (MoE, 2001:50). This has been so irrespective of the current capacities and capabilities of institutions with respect to the kinds, levels and breadth of academic qualifications and programmes that can be provided, and the kinds of scholarship and research that can be undertaken. There could be many drivers of institutional isomorphism: the influence of the Humboldtian model of the university; the assumption that status and prestige are associated solely with being a ‘research’ university; institutional redress conceived as an obligation on the state to facilitate historically black universities becoming ‘research’ universities, as well as the new funding framework which funds postgraduate student outputs at significantly higher levels than undergraduate student outputs. Be that as it may, Graham is correct that “no sense of worth will be forthcoming” if South African universities aspire to “ideal(s) which they cannot attain”. Instead, the “ideals each can aspire to” and institutional mission and goals must be shaped by educational purposes, economic and social needs and available capacities and capabilities even if these capacities and capabilities may need to be enhanced in order to facilitate the effective undertaking of the institutional mission and goals.

Third, the creation of a new differentiated institutional landscape has also needed to confront the historical burden of South African higher education: namely apartheid planning which differentiated institutions along lines of ‘race’ and ethnicity and institutionalised inequities that resulted in institutions characterised by educational, financial, material and geographical (white) advantage and (black) disadvantage. In this regard there were understandable concerns among historically black institutions that a policy of differentiation and diversity could continue to disadvantage them, especially in the absence of development strategies and institutional redress to enable them to build the capacities and capabilities to address social and educational needs. The key question has been “redress for what” (MoE, 2001:11). As the *National Plan* stated “notions of redress” had to shift from being “narrowly focused on the leveling of the playing fields between the historically black and historically white institutions” to one of capacitating historically black institutions “to discharge their institutional mission within an agreed national framework” (ibid).

It is clear that the achievement of a differentiated and diverse institutional landscape has been bedevilled by a number of issues. Newby argues that “today’s universities are expected to engage in lifelong learning (not just ‘teaching’), research, knowledge transfer, social inclusion..., local and regional economic development, citizenship training and much more. No university is resourced sufficiently to perform all these functions simultaneously and in equal measure at ever-increasing levels of quality” (2008:57-58). Institutions, therefore, have to identify niche areas of strength and increase the diversity of their missions. He also suggests that “different activities in universities have different geographical frames of reference” (Newby, 2008:57). That is to say, that research tends

to be more globally oriented, undergraduate teaching and learning more nationally focused and knowledge transfer and community engagement more regionally and locally focused, which, of course, has implications for different kinds of universities. However, to the extent that differentiation is less the product of teaching excellence as much as of research performance and if research of international quality is to be reserved for some institutions, what is the role of other institutions beyond these being considered as simply teaching institutions. This is a vital issue that he correctly notes has received little attention in the processes of state planning and steering.

A second issue has been that while the “name ‘university’ now applies to institutions with widely different functions and characters” (Graham, 2005:157), and there are today ‘universities’, ‘universities of technology’ and ‘comprehensive universities’ this has not fully settled the issue of diversity or institutional missions. If, as an advocate of what he terms “flexible differentiation” (based on missions and programmes) Kraak contends that the NCHE “fudged” the issue, his own preference and that of the *White Paper* and *National Plan* could arguably also be fudging of the issue. What is required, as Kraak himself has argued elsewhere is “simultaneous consideration of both the intrinsic and institutional logics of a policy” (Young and Kraak, 2001:12). Can ‘functional’ differentiation or differentiation based on institutional missions and programmes be entirely unhinged from the question of institution and organisation, and do not both result in de facto institutional differentiation, even if through planning flexibility is accommodated and rigid institutional types that constrain responsiveness to economic and social needs are avoided?

Another issue has been institutional aspirations, notwithstanding current academic capacities and capabilities. Certainly, academic capacities and capabilities are not fixed and can be built but where envisaged institutional missions are greatly at odd with existing capacities and capabilities this is a long-term project that requires significant financial resources. It also does not resolve the question of institutional missions appropriate to context. A fourth issue has been the efficacy of the instruments of planning, funding and quality assurance in shaping and settling institutional missions. For all the expressed commitment to differentiation on the basis of institutional missions and programmes, it can be argued that through the process of determining the qualifications and programmes of institutions and other measures the state has pursued a policy of functional differentiation (de facto institutional differentiation?), which could account for the ongoing contestation between the state and some institutions.

Finally, the absence, until very recently, of significant new funds for higher education has necessarily caused anxieties and fuelled contestation. Post-2001 there has been inadequate financial support from government for the creation of effective developmental trajectories for all higher education institutions, given their different institutional histories and conditions and the challenges these have presented and the new economic and social development needs and goals of the *White Paper* and the priorities of the *National Plan*. “Fiscal restraint and a shift towards conservative macro-economic policy” (Kraak, 2001:104) especially affected the historically black institutions, despite the provision of merger and recapitalisation funding and a new funding formula

that introduced aspects of institutional redress funding. In such a context, differentiation and diversity become a financially a zero-sum situation, with certain clear winners and losers. However, the recent allocations of some R 2.0 billion to universities for capital infrastructure and 'efficiency' during 2007/08 - 2009/10 and a further R 3.1 billion during 2010/11 – 2011/12 as well as the commitment of significant additional funds for capital infrastructure in coming years means that differentiation need not be a zero-sum situation and can now potentially be pursued without any necessary financial disadvantaging of historically black institutions.

The creation of a differentiated and diverse institutional landscape is unlikely to succeed unless all these issues are effectively addressed. It remains to be seen whether the state will pursue differentiation and diversity explicitly and openly on a planned systemic level or opt to do so at the level of individual institutions using the levers of planning and funding and quality assurance.

The institutional restructuring of higher education and a new landscape was intended to 'lay the foundation for an equitable, sustainable and productive higher education system that will be of high quality and contribute effectively and efficiently to the human resource, skills, knowledge and research needs of South Africa' (MoE, 2001: 16)

However, while institutional restructuring is a *necessary* condition of the transformation of South African higher education it is not a *sufficient* condition. Other concomitant initiatives are required to give effect to higher education transformation and realise its contribution to social equity and the economic, social, cultural and intellectual development needs and goals of South Africa.

Whether mergers in general and specific mergers in particular have created equitable, productive and sustainable institutions and contribute to the effective and efficient achievement of wider national goals has yet to be rigorously assessed.

5. An enabling policy framework that encompasses thoughtful state supervision, effective steering, predictability in policy and adequate public funding is vitally necessary for higher education to realize its social purposes. However, while an enabling policy framework is vitally important, it is on its own not enough. Such a framework must be also supported and reinforced by wider economic and social policy frameworks; otherwise the promise of higher education will be undermined by inadequately supportive economic and social environments and financial constraints. For example, the Higher Education & Training Ministry's commitments to increasing enrolments and participation rates and to access, equity and redress may be handicapped by the inadequacy of the state budget devoted to higher education. Similarly, equity of opportunity and enhancement of quality may be retarded by the absence of or limited funding for programmes of academic staff and student academic development at institutions.
6. To effectively undertake its diverse educational and social purposes, a university must have a commitment "to the spirit of truth" (Graham, 2005:163), and must possess

academic freedom and institutional autonomy. However, while academic freedom and institutional autonomy are necessary conditions, they are also rights in which duties inhere (Jonathan, 2006). In the African context, we must recognize, as Andre du Toit urges, “the legacies of intellectual colonisation and racialisation as threats to academic freedom” (2000); and that “the powers conferred by academic freedom go hand in hand with substantive duties to deracialise and decolonize intellectual spaces” (Bentley et al, 2006). Other duties on the part of universities, academics and administrators include advancing the public good and being democratically accountable. They also encompass bold engagement with economic and social orthodoxies and resultant public policies that may seriously misunderstand and distort the purposes of universities, stripping them of their substance and leaving them “universities only in name” (Boulton and Lucas, 2008:6).

7. In the face of an aging academic workforce, an additional key challenge is to develop a new generation of academics. If attention is not given to this issue, in the years to come academic provision, the quality of graduates and the research outputs of universities will be severely debilitated. Given the current social composition of academics, the development of a new generation must also ensure that the social composition of the academic work force is simultaneously transformed.

Currently, there are important and innovative programmes at various universities designed to build a new generation of academics. These are all, however, largely donor financed. Not too long ago vitally necessary academic development programmes that were donor-funded were debilitated because of the absence of state funding. This resulted in the dissipation of valuable expertise and experience. If a similar tragedy is not to recur, it is essential that dedicated state funding is made available to support programmes at universities which are designed to build a new generation of academics.

8. Finally, as a consequence of the higher remuneration provided by the private and state sectors, universities experience considerable difficulties in attracting outstanding graduates to the academic profession and also retaining academics and administrative and support staff.

The improvement of public subsidies to facilitate the recruitment and retention of academics and administrative and support staff is vital for the future well-being and contribution of universities.

9. I wish to now specifically address the issues of *access, opportunity and success* in higher education.
  - Although black student enrolments have increased since 1994, the gross participation rate of black, and especially African and Coloured, South Africans continues to be considerably lower than for white South Africans.

Figure 1: Participation rates by 'Race'

'Race'	Participation rate	
	1993	2005
Africans	9	12
Coloureds	13	12
Indians	40	51
Whites	70	60
Overall	17	16

(CHE, 2004:62; Scotte al, 2007:10)

In 2001 the *National Plan for Higher Education* estimated the gross participation to be 15% and set a target of 20% gross participation rate by 2011/2016 (MoE, 2001). Clearly, there has been only a minimal improvement in the overall gross participation rate and severe inequities continue to exist in the participation rates of African and Coloured South Africans relative to white and Indian South Africans. Indeed, "given that the participation is expressed as gross rates and includes appreciable numbers of mature students – well under 12% of the (African) and coloured 20-24 age groups are participating in higher education (it) must be a cause of concern, for political, social and economic reasons, if the sector is not able to accommodate a higher and more equitable proportion" of those social groups that have been historically disadvantaged and under-represented in higher education (Scott, et al, 2007:11).

- Enrolments at a number of historically white institutions continue to reflect lower black representation than their demographic representation. Thus, even though there has been a significant deracialisation of these institutions, white students continue to be concentrated at the historically white institutions. Conversely, there has been little or no entry of white students into the historically black institutions, which means that they remain almost exclusively black.

There is an important social class factor at play here. Students from the capitalist and middle classes tend to be concentrated at historically white institutions, while those from the working class and rural poor are concentrated at historically black institutions.

Despite initiatives to reshape the apartheid institutional landscape through mergers of institutions and other means, the historical patterns of advantage and disadvantage continue to condition the current capacities of historically black institutions to pursue excellence, provide high quality learning experiences and equity of opportunity and outcomes. In short, if equity of opportunity and outcomes were previously strongly affected by race, they are now also conditioned by social class.

- The progress of both black, and especially African, and women students, while significant, masks inequities in their distribution across institutions, qualification levels and academic programmes. Large numbers of African students continue to be

concentrated in distance education, and both African and women students continue to be under-represented in science, engineering and technology and business and commerce programmes. Post-graduate enrolments across most fields are also low.

- Judging by drop-out, throughput and graduation rates a substantial improvement in equity of opportunity and outcomes for black students remains to be achieved. Contact undergraduate success rates should, according to the Department of Education (DoE, 2006b), be 80% “if reasonable graduation rates are to be achieved”. Instead, they range from 59% to 87% with an average of 75%. White student success rates in 2005 were 85%, while African student rates were 70%. The DoE’s target for throughput rates “is a minimum of 20% which would imply a final cohort graduation rate of about 65%” (ibid.). Instead, throughput rates for 2000-2004 were between 13% and 14%, and the cohort graduation rate was 45% in 2004, with an overall drop-out rate of 45% (ibid).

A recent study notes that “the major racial disparities in completion rates in undergraduate programmes, together with the particularly high attrition rates of black students across the board, have the effect of negating much of the growth in black access that has been achieved. Taking account of the black participation rate, the overall attrition rate of over 50% and the below-average black completion rates, it can be concluded that the sector is catering successfully for under 5% of the black (and coloured) age-group” (Scott et al 2007).

The conclusions are clear: “this has central significance for development as well as social inclusion”, and “equity of outcomes is the overarching challenge” (ibid). Clearly, if higher education institutions “are to contribute to a more equitable South African society, then access and success must be improved for black (and particularly black working class) students who, by virtue of their previous experiences, have not been inducted into dominant ways of constructing knowledge” (Boughey, 2008).

There is, however, a further and important conclusion, namely that the under-performance of black students “will not change spontaneously. Decisive action needs to be taken in key aspects of the educational process – and at key points of the educational ‘pipeline’ – to facilitate positive change in outcomes”<sup>2</sup> (Scott et al, 2007:20).

In the light of unacceptably poor current pass and graduation rates and high drop-out rates, the enhancement of the academic capabilities of universities, and specifically academics, to ensure equity of opportunity and outcome, especially for

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<sup>2</sup> “Such key points occur particularly at the interface between major phases of the system: between general education and FET, for example, as well as between FET and higher education, and, increasingly significantly, between undergraduate and postgraduate studies....(C)ontinuity in the system as a whole is necessary for improving graduate outcomes, without which meeting national developmental needs will continue to be an elusive goal” (Scott et al. 2007:20).

students of working-class and rural poor social origins, is an urgent and important task.

- The enhancement of academic capabilities includes adequate public funding for academic development initiatives. Equity of opportunity and outcomes is constrained by inadequate funding to address under-preparedness (conceptual, knowledge, academic literacy and numeracy) of especially indigent students.
- Concomitant with the building of academic capabilities is ensuring that institutions are provided the necessary capacities in terms of infrastructure and equipment for effective learning and teaching and the production of high quality graduates. The infrastructure funding being provided to universities is a welcome contribution and must be continued. At the same time, and in the face of the infrastructure challenges, the extent to which such funds can be creatively leveraged to provide more funding for universities should be explored.
- Postgraduate student enrolments and outputs, and especially doctoral enrolments and outputs, are low and inadequate in relation to South Africa's economic and social development needs. In 2008, there were 1 181 doctoral graduates (45% black and 41% women). South Africa produces 23 doctoral graduates per million of population, compared to 43 by Brazil, 157 by South Korea and almost 200 by Australia. Black and women students continue to be under-represented in doctoral programmes, and only 32% of university academics possess doctorates.

The National Research Foundation's 2007 *South African PhD Project* seeks to double the number of doctoral graduates by 2015, while the Department of Science and Technology wishes to increase doctoral graduates five-fold by 2018. These ambitions are welcome, but there are various constraints that will have to be overcome.

One of these constraints is the lack of any real confluence between thinking, policy and planning in science and technology and in higher education. If important goals are to not be compromised, an important task is to ensure an effective confluence in specific areas between the new Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Science and Technology.

- One reason for the very high rate of drop-outs among black students is almost certainly inadequate state funding in the forms of scholarships, bursaries and loans. Although an efficient and effective National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which operates on a means-test basis, has been successfully established and considerable funding has been allocated to effect redress for indigent black students, the overall amounts allocated have fallen far short of providing effective support for all eligible students in need. This highlights the reality of the inter-connection of race and class - equity of access for black students from working class and impoverished rural social backgrounds will continue to be severely compromised unless there is a greater commitment of public funding for financial aid to indigent students.

The colonial and apartheid legacy has meant that there is a strong coincidence between class and race, with black South Africans hailing from predominantly working class and rural poor social backgrounds and white South Africans having their social origins largely in the capitalist and middle class. There are, however, also white South Africans of working class and rural poor origin. If the goal is not only redress for historically disadvantaged social groups but social equity more generally, the needs of all who are of working class and rural poor origin must be addressed.

- However, the extent to which there exist at all institutions academically supportive cultures that promote higher learning, cater for the varied learning needs of a diverse student body through well-conceptualised, designed and implemented academic programmes and academic development initiatives, and mechanisms to promote and assure quality are also moot issues. An important recent study argues that “systemic responses are essential for improving the educational outcomes”, and that

necessary conditions for substantial improvement include: the reform of core curriculum frameworks; enhancing the status of teaching and building educational expertise...to enable the development and implementation of teaching approaches that will be effective in catering for student diversity; and clarifying and strengthening accountability for educational outcomes (Scott et al, 2007:73).

Until recently, equity of opportunity and outcomes has been constrained by the absence of state funding for academic development initiatives. While the provision of funds is welcome, the amounts, however, remain inadequate for enabling the changes and initiatives that are required to address under-preparedness (conceptual, knowledge, academic literacy and numeracy, linguistic) of especially indigent students.

Here, it is necessary to emphasise the continued under-developed institutional and particularly academics capabilities of historically black institutions. Providing access to and admitting students from rural poor and working class families, the inadequate state support for institutional redress compromises the ability of historically black institutions to ensure equity of opportunity and outcomes.

- Institutional cultures, especially at historically white institutions, could in differing ways and to varying degrees compromise equity of opportunity and outcomes. The specific histories of these institutions, lingering racist and sexist conduct, privileges associated with social class, English as the language of tuition and administration, the overwhelming predominance of white academics and administrators and male academics, the concomitant under-representation of black and women academics and role-models, and limited respect for and appreciation of diversity and difference could all combine to reproduce institutional cultures that are experienced by black, women, and working class and rural poor students as discomforting, alienating, exclusionary and disempowering.

This has possible negative consequences for equity of opportunity and outcomes for these students. Even if equity of opportunity and outcome are not unduly compromised, the overall educational and social experience of such students may be diminished. The reproduction and limited erosion of class-based, racialised and gendered institutional cultures also obstruct the forging of greater social cohesion.

- Finally, the pace of social equity and redress in higher education continues to be severely constrained by conditions in South African schooling.

Despite almost universal formal participation in schooling, South Africa's schools evince significant problems related to drop outs, retention, progression and successful completion. As has been noted, "the simple reality is that enrolment is not the same as attendance and attendance does not imply learning" (Sayed, 2007:8). South African school students perform extremely poorly on a range of international assessment tests, in terms of which "65% of school leavers...are functionally illiterate" (ibid.:6).

There remains a powerful link between the social exclusion of disadvantaged social classes and groups, and equity of access, opportunity and outcomes and achievement in schooling. Currently, 60% of African children in South Africa come from families that earn less than R800 a month; conversely 60% of white children are from families whose income is more than R6 000 per month. The consequences of this are manifest in differential school performance and achievement. Without appropriate and extensive interventions on the part of the state to significantly improve the economic and social circumstances of millions of working class and rural poor (and primarily black) South Africans, the experiences of school drop-outs, poor retention, restricted educational opportunities and poor outcomes will be principally borne by these social classes.

One measure of the formidable challenge is that currently 10% of some 7 000 secondary schools – independent schools and public schools previously reserved for white students - produce 60% of all senior certificate endorsements (the entrance requirement to higher education). Another 10% of mainly historically black schools produce a further 20% of all senior certificate endorsements. Thus, 80% of senior certificate endorsements are generated by 20% of secondary schools, while the remaining 80% of secondary schools produce a paltry 20% of senior certificate endorsements. It is clear that a fundamental challenge is to improve the quality of education in schools.

## **Conclusion**

In as much as there has been significant institutional change in higher education since 1994, there has been no "total, rapid and sweeping displacement" of structures, institutions, policies and practices (Wolpe, 1992:16). It is also arguable whether there could be, given the post-1994 policy choices of the ANC, the constraints of the negotiated political settlement in

South Africa, and various other conjunctural conditions and pressures. Nonetheless, during the past 16 years there have been “a multitude of changes that have transformed higher education in South Africa” (Jansen, 2004:293) and “while continuities remain, the higher education system does not represent the distortion, upheaval and fragmentation that marked the sector at the start of the 1990s” (ibid.).

In summary, change in post-1994 South African higher education has been characterised:

- By *relative stasis* in certain areas, such as the decolonisation, deracialisation and degendering of inherited intellectual spaces and the nurturing of a new generation of academics who are increasingly black and women, and by *great fluidity* in other areas, such as the composition of the student body.
- By *ruptures and discontinuities* with the past resulting in a recasting of higher education values, goals and policies and the emergence of a new institutional landscape and configuration of public universities; and by *continuities* in institutions and conditions – such as institutional cultures; greater access and success for students from the capitalist and middle classes; and limited change in the social composition of academics. Thus, in 2008, black academics constituted only 43% of the total academic staff of over 15 000. Women academics, who made up 46% of academics, continued to be concentrated at the lower levels of the academic hierarchy. As a result “the knowledge producers in higher education remain largely white and male” (Jansen, 2004:311) and there has been little democratisation of knowledge production.
- By *conservation* of institutions as well as by the *dissolution*, restructuring and reconstruction of institutions and institutional types.
- By “small and gradual changes (and) large-scale changes” (Jansen, 2004:293), and by modest improvements, more substantial reforms and deeper transformations, as in the case of the emergence of new institutional landscape.
- By policies that have sought to proactively signal, direct, facilitate and regulate, and by policies that have followed and attempted to respond to changes already in train within the system and institutions
- By policies that have served as “political symbolism” in that at particular moments policy development “hinged largely on the symbolism rather than the substance of change in education” or was “limited to the symbolism of policy production rather than the details of policy implementation” (Jansen, 2001:41, 43), and by policies that have been of a substantive, distributive, redistributive, material and procedural nature (de Clerq, 1997).
- By successes as well as by failures and shortcomings in policy, planning, strategy and implementation, and
- By attempts on the part of government and institutions to address ambiguities in policy and practice and also resolve profound paradoxes and their attendant social dilemmas,

resulting in antinomies in policy outcomes, difficult trade-offs and the privileging of some goals and the sacrificing of others.

O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) have written of transitions in terms of the "numerous surprises and difficult dilemmas", of "elements of accident and unpredictability, of crucial decisions taken in a hurry"..., of actors "facing insolvable ethical dilemmas and ideological confusions, of dramatic turning points reached and passed without an understanding of their future significance".

This could also be an apt characterisation of the nature of change in post-1994 South African higher education.

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