Making a difference
Universities contribution to the Anti-Poverty Strategy

Higher education’s contribution to the South African government’s anti-poverty strategy. Download the full document at www.hesa.org.za
Welcome Message from HESA’s Chief Executive Officer

As part of putting into operation HESA’s vision of providing the voice of higher education leadership in the changing and transforming higher education system in South Africa, the HESA newsletter, *Insight*, aims to present “cutting edge” perspectives of the higher education leadership on topical issues. We anticipate that by engaging with these perspectives, the sector would be able to engage on debates to reach positions that would contribute to a well positioned sector in delivering on its collective mandate and those of their institutions.

Early this year, Vice-Chancellors were invited to write letters to the incoming government on issues that need the urgent attention of government for the strengthening and enhancing of both the quality and diversity of our institutions of higher learning for an effective response to national development. The response from the Vice-Chancellors was overwhelmingly positive and provided useful input into a strategic workshop that finalised a HESA Strategic Framework for the next 10 years on the basis of which HESA aims to engage government and other higher education stakeholders.

This inaugural issue of *Insight* contains the executive summary of the HESA Strategic Framework entitled Pathways to a Diverse and Effective South African Higher Education System and a selection of the letters from Vice-Chancellors who represent the diversity of our higher education system. These letters add individual and institutional perspectives which might be also important to be understood by policy makers as specific voices within HESA. They have also been selected for their depth in engaging with the theme of the workshop as well as for the passion and vision they present.

The articles in the newsletter reflect the sector’s willingness and readiness to embrace the future. While there is the need and value in strengthening what has worked in the past and what we have achieved using the strong values and capacities of the past to create the future, the sector feels strongly challenged to go much beyond adaptation to new challenges by seeking to vigorously shape the South African higher education system and effectively demonstrates its worth to government and the general public. Strong partnerships and collaborations with government are essential for the realization of this ideal.

The sector leadership has taken a strong short to medium term perspective, as highlighted in the executive summary of the synthesised report, while mindful of the immediate pressing needs and challenges facing the sector and the nation which should necessarily inform the agenda of engaging with government. The government is indeed facing tough policy challenges and choices, exacerbated by the local and global economic crisis and uncertainties, which create an opportunity for government to reframe its relationship to higher education and for higher education to deepen and strengthen its role of providing solutions to the most pressing national challenges.

We are grateful to the contributors for their individual voices and to the Minister of Higher Education and Training for an engagement with the sector leadership during the workshop in June.

I sincerely hope that you will find the *Insight* Newsletter thought provoking, and we welcome your comments and advice!
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary expresses HESA’s views on the challenges and opportunities facing higher education (HE) in our country during the next 10 years or so.

1. BACKGROUND

During the post 1994 period HE was subject to some far reaching legal, administrative and policy changes, as well as a significant restructuring of the HE institutional landscape. The policy changes, with some exceptions, were generally supported by universities in South Africa and mainly affected the following three areas of HE endeavour:

- academic and enrolment planning;
- quality assurance; and
- funding.

The largely successful development and implementation of these policies can be ascribed to the existence of constructive relationships between the HE sector and the Department of Education (now Higher Education and Training).

The institutional restructuring programme launched by Government in 2002 was met with mixed reaction within HE. Nevertheless, while HESA has not yet carried out a formal assessment of the success (or otherwise) of this programme, a number of the mergers and incorporations appear to have had very positive outcomes for the institutions involved. A few more years may be required to enable the newly established institutions to settle down in terms of their identities and visions and missions.

This period has also seen some undoubted advances in HE, particularly in relation to achieving greater levels of equity in access to HE, increased enrolments for advanced postgraduate studies, and increased research outputs. However, some major challenges remain such as high student drop-out rates, low completion rates, particularly for African and Coloured students, and low marginal increases in overall HE participation rates. In addition, a particularly daunting challenge faced by HE during this period, and one which seems set to continue facing HE for the foreseeable future, concerns the inadequate levels of preparedness of school leavers for HE study. This has resulted

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1 The full version of the document is available on the HESA website www.hesa.org.za
in most HE institutions entrenching school level education functions within their HE mandate which could have negative long term consequences for HE and for education in South Africa in general.

2. NATIONAL POLICY GOALS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

HESA is fully aware of the fact that Government’s national policy goals for the next number of years will be pursued in arguably the most severe worldwide financial downturn for the past 40 to 50 years, which is not leaving South Africa untouched. Despite the many social, economic and political challenges brought about by this financial crisis, universities in South Africa wish to pledge their full support for the development of policies, plans, initiatives and processes by which the negative effects of this crisis can be counteracted for the good of the people of South Africa.

Government’s national policy goals form part of a renewed emphasis on socio-economic development in our country. In this context HESA expects that the notion of a developmental state will feature strongly in Government strategy and policy making. HESA supports such a developmental agenda based on Government’s national priority areas:

- Creation of decent work and sustainable livelihoods
- Education
- Health
- Rural development, food security and land reform
- The fight against crime and corruption

HESA has taken note of linkages between these priority areas, and their subsidiary objectives, and those of our HE institutions. In this regard universities wish to express their commitment to explore, together with Government where applicable:

- Ways of strengthening collaboration with Government in achieving these goals within their respective institutional mandates.
- The incorporation of these national aims and goals in their own prioritisation exercises and delivery programmes in a manner appropriate to their own distinctive visions and missions.
- Ways of responding effectively to shortages in scarce skills areas as defined by Government Departments such as Labour, Trade and Industry, and Science and Technology (especially NACI and the National Research Foundation).
- Ways in which all universities, but in particular our rural universities, could play an instrumental role in Government’s emphasis on rural development.

HESA makes these commitments within the following context:

First, the multiplicity of goals for HE as set out in the White Paper on HE: A Framework for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997):

- To meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes throughout their lives;
- To address the development needs of society and provide the labour market, in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society, with the ever changing high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy;
- To contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens; and
- To contribute to the creation, sharing and evaluation of knowledge.

Second, in respect of the above-mentioned five priority areas, universities obviously are not providers of social services as such. They are knowledge providers and provide learning/teaching and research outputs and become involved in community service where such learning/teaching and research outputs can be put to use in the socio-economic development of communities.

Third, by their very nature as institutions of higher education, universities concentrate on the production of graduates who possess high and higher middle level skills in distinction to middle and lower level skills. HESA believes that the supplying of skills at the latter two levels fall within the domain of other education and training structures but pledges its support and co-operation to such structures where feasible.

Against this background, universities in South Africa wish to express their willingness and their readiness to play a constructive role in supporting the achievement of the various development goals set by Government for the next five years.

3. HESA’S VISION FOR OUR HE SYSTEM FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS

Universities believe that for the next decade or so our HE system should be characterised by some factors enabling our universities to function optimally. These enabling conditions require achieving an appropriate balance between institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability and based on these enabling conditions, HESA supports a HE system displaying the following four major characteristics:
i. High levels of quality comparable to the best in the world.

ii. High levels of institutional diversity based on institutional self-differentiation.

iii. Significant transformation, social cohesion, non-discrimination, and freedom of speech and of association.

iv. High levels of responsiveness and relevance.

4. HESA’S SYSTEM AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE HE SYSTEM FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS

Within this context HESA’s system and policy considerations for the next 10 years or so, are:

4.1 Achieving an appropriate balance between institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and public accountability

HESA is in full support of reasonable measures aimed at achieving greater levels of public accountability by universities and agrees that universities, through engagement with the public, need to account for themselves far more effectively than has often been the case. Such public accountability should, however, be circumscribed by a policy framework which ensures satisfactory levels of institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

- In this regard HESA wishes to commit itself anew to a wide-ranging approach of self-regulation in order to improve levels of public accountability, while at the same time appealing to Government to honour present levels of institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

- In addition HESA is of the view that some pressing governance issues facing universities brought about by matters such as: The tendency of some Councils of universities to become operationally involved in the day-to-day running of institutions; delays in obtaining Council approval for university crises which require quick governance responses; and Council members not being able (or willing) to function in their personal capacities in the overall interest of the institution but rather in terms of ‘mandated’ positions from their related constituencies, require urgent resolution.

4.2 Arriving at an adequately funded HE system

While HESA understands the effects of the worldwide financial downturn on Government spending, it will be very difficult for HE to play its intended supportive role in Government’s development agenda if the target of spending on HE of 1% of GDP is not reached soon and even increased to, say, 1.5% of GDP over the next 10 years.

HESA is pleased to learn that the Minister of HET has launched a review of NSFAS in order to find ways of better assisting deserving students with the rising costs of HE. HESA pledges its full co-operation to this review.

Through its Funding Strategy Group, HESA intends undertaking a review of the present funding framework in respect to its suitability for supporting a differentiated HE system. In addition HESA would welcome a more strategically directed management approach to earmarked funding in which short to medium term priority themes for such funding, are made known in advance on a regular basis to the HE system. Particularly important to the sector, have been the grants for infrastructural renewal over the past 4-5 years. If at all possible, such grants should become an embedded feature in the system of earmarked funding.

4.3 Achieving quality levels comparable to the best in the world

Achieving desired levels of quality in HE institutions is influenced by a number of factors of which only a few are presented next:

i. Academic quality of school leavers: HESA wishes to again register its concern with the overall levels of preparedness for HE study of our school leavers. This problem which universities are willing to tackle to the best of their abilities can, however, in the longer run only be solved by tackling it there where it originates - in the school system. Universities in South Africa wish to commit themselves to assisting in any way compatible with the goals and objectives of HE institutions, in finding resolutions to this problem.

ii. Qualification and other academic policies for HE: A new HE Qualifications Framework (HEQF) is in the process of being implemented. While HESA feels that it contains many positive aspects it also has some elements that need urgent attention if it is to support a differentiated HE system. Some of these issues requiring urgent resolution due to the way they affect Universities of Technology in particular.

iii. Quality of academic staff in HE institutions. HE institutions are facing a real crisis regarding their ability to retain and attract academic staff of a suitable calibre. Universities are experiencing alarming levels of ageing of their academic staff and given the tight financial strictures under which universities are operating in South Africa, this problem can probably only be solved by a significant increase in the block grant component of the funding framework for HE institutions.
HESA acknowledges that in this particular area much work still needs to be done. Insufficient progress has been made on a conceptual understanding of what transformation in a knowledge-based institution entails, what policies and processes would support an institutionally inclusive approach to realise such a view of transformation; and what is needed for such policies and processes to find their practical fulfilment in the hearts and minds of staff and students.

In addition, HESA is firmly of the view that approaches to transformation in HE must be embedded within the three core functions of universities – learning/teaching, research and community service. Any view or approach to transformation which largely leaves these core functions untouched cannot be viewed as fundamental HE transformation.

4.6 Strengthening institutional responsiveness and relevance

Increased levels of responsiveness and relevance in HE institutions should be inextricably linked to their core functions: learning/teaching, research and community service.

In this regard an indication from Government, mediated by the DHET – and assisted by others such as the Departments of Science and Technology, and Trade and Industry – of priority areas for HE for the next decade which are derived from the list of national policy goals discussed earlier, would be of great assistance to HE.

HESA is furthermore of the view that greater synergy within HE would be promoted if the DHET, through earmarked funding, dti (through support for THRIP), and DST (through NRF funding) could achieve better levels of co-ordination of their funding of such priority areas.

HESA wishes to emphasise that our country’s dire need for increased HR skills at the middle, lower middle, and lower skills levels cannot be resolved by only looking to universities in this regard. HESA believes that a strengthened and expanded FET College sector could play a decisive role in taking in many students who now unsuccessfully seek entry to university study.

4.4 Developing institutional diversity in terms of self-differentiation

Through Government’s restructuring of the HE institutional landscape by means of institutional mergers, three main types of HE institutions were established: traditional universities (11), comprehensive universities (6) and universities of technology (6).

HESA fully supports the principle of a differentiated HE system because it allows for different development trajectories for HE institutions. However, other less clearly delineated groupings of HE institutions either already exist or are beginning to emerge.

For many years historically disadvantaged institutions have held that their developmental needs required that they be treated differently from historically advantaged institutions. Similarly the former technikons, now universities of technology, have long argued that due to past policies and practices, they have not enjoyed sufficient Government support to make significant progress on a development trajectory which differs from that of traditional universities.

More recently, rurally based universities have argued that they face unique developmental obstacles and hindrances compared to urban based institutions. In the past few years an informal grouping of five or six universities, sometimes referred to as research-intensive universities, seem to have arisen in HE. These universities tend to feel strongly that for South Africa’s HE system to become truly internationally competitive, Government will have to make some hard choices and choose a few universities and support them in their research efforts to become ‘world class’.

HESA supports a system of progressive self-differentiation based on varying institutional visions and missions accompanied by policies and processes that enable institutions to make meaningful progress in their distinctive trajectories. Specifically, differentiation should not occur at the cost of some institutions in order to advance others.

In order to move towards the development of a framework within which self-differentiation by universities can progress, HESA intends establishing a Task Team to draw up a set of principles and criteria governing self-differentiation. Once this is complete, HESA would welcome interaction with the DHET on these principles and criteria.

4.5 Advancing transformation, social cohesion, non-discrimination and freedom of speech and association

There’s no question of reducing academic staff numbers given the already high student: staff ratios our universities have to contend with.

iv. Internationalisation. South African universities face a number of challenges in the area of internationalisation – some of them still the result of the apartheid based HE policies of the past. One of these is that the internationalisation of staff and student bodies require flexible policies and highly effective management of applications for study visas, work permits etc. by the Department of Home Affairs.

HESA would appreciate the mediation of the DHET in reaching acceptable arrangements with the Department of Home Affairs which would expedite applications for study visas and work permits from students and visiting academics. The inclusion of HE in bi or multi-lateral agreements with other countries set up through the Department of Foreign Affairs would also be of assistance to HE institutions in their internationalisation efforts.

There’s no question of reducing academic staff numbers given the already high student: staff ratios our universities have to contend with.
HESA pledges its support for any initiatives aimed at providing a greater set of study opportunities for school leavers and is of the view that the number of school leavers that cannot be accommodated within the present public HE system, point to the urgent need for the development of a co-ordinated, flexible and differentiated post-secondary education system consisting of institutions such as universities, teacher education, FET, nursing and agricultural colleges.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, HESA wishes to commit itself to working together with Government in its various forms and structures in establishing a HE system which fulfils the goals and aims set in the White Paper on HE (1997), the National Plan on HE (2001) and subsequent relevant HE policy documents, as well as those set out in this memorandum.

July 2009
For good reasons, recent events must signal the demise of the uncontrolled, soulless and destructive free-market capitalism to which humanity has been subject the past 20 years. These events also provide the opportunity for a new imagination that is freed from the stifling and dangerous orthodoxies of the past decades. “We need to rekindle our capacity to imagine, and to see through the still-gathering storm to what lies beyond”.2

The current global crisis creates the space for new ideas, and for the recovery of important values related to human development, justice, solidarity, freedom and internationalism. It enables us to think about and act to construct a different kind of world and different kind of citizenship, “a world where markets are servants, not masters”. 3

Whether and to what extent this happens, whether amidst these ‘worst of times’ and ‘winter of despair’ we move into ‘the spring of hope’ with ‘everything before us’ depends on us. It depends on whether, as scholars and citizens and as universities and governments, we take on the responsibility of re-thinking and re-making our world and our societies on the basis of other principles and logics than the ones that have dominated in recent decades.

This new logic must first and foremost put human development, people’s needs, justice and human rights at the centre of all our actions. It must more greatly appreciate, respect, and affirm difference and diversity related to race, gender, language, sexual orientation and culture as well-springs of social vitality and strength. It must embrace the idea that we have inherited the earth in safe-keeping for future generations and must abandon the reckless degradation of our environment in the name of ‘progress’ and ‘development’.

The orthogonies 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. The have also sought seeking to reduce universities to simply training schools for the production of technicians and instruments of the economy and business. The new logic must revalue knowledge and education as cornerstones of human development and restore to universities their important and varied educational and social purposes. Shunning the ideas of higher education as a market, universities as ‘firms’ and students as ‘customers’, it must also resource universities to effectively discharge their vital public good functions.

**ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

1. In much as it may be necessary to revise or augment policy where necessary, and to pursue certain imperatives with greater purpose and vigour, it is essential that there is also a high degree of certainty, consistency and continuity with respect to national higher education policy.

Universities have only recently emerged from a period of great flux (institutional mergers and restructuring, myriad new policies and initiatives, etc.) and it is vital they be provided the space and support to pursue the trajectories that they have defined for themselves or have had defined for them as a consequence of institutional restructuring.

2. As a newly created ministry, the Ministry of Higher Education and Training provides the welcome opportunity for theorising and clarifying the scope, structure and landscape of higher education. This includes 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 demand for higher 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

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3 Ibid.
is a pressing need for increasing the output of high quality graduates. All of these issues mean that it is important to give considerable attention to the structure of higher education and the spectrum of institutions that are required in relation to economic and social development needs.

3. There should be a continued strengthening of relations between universities, Higher Education South Africa, the Council on Higher Education, government and other key social actors in higher education.

The President’s Higher Education Working Group served as valuable forum and should be retained under the new administration. At the same time, attention should continue to be given to creating at various levels dense networks of relationships and partnerships between universities and other constituencies.

4. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are necessary conditions if universities are to advance their social purposes and undertake their varied roles. Concomitantly, they are also values in which rights and duties inhere. These duties on the part of universities, academics and administrators include advancing the public good and being democratically accountable. They also encompass a deep and bold engagement with economic and social orthodoxies and resultant public policies that could seriously misunderstand and distort the functions of universities, stripping universities of their substance and leaving them “universities only in name”. Lastly, they also entail that “the legacies of intellectual colonisation and racialisation” should be recognised “as threats to academic freedom” and that “the powers conferred by academic freedom go hand in hand with substantive duties to deracialise and decolonize intellectual spaces”.

5. 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), 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%

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”.

The conclusions are clear: “this has central significance for development as well as social inclusion”, and “equity of outcomes is the overarching challenge”. 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”.

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

6. 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.

7. 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 that has been provided to universities since the 2007-2008 financial year 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.

8. 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. 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. Moreover, 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. The overall funds available to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme fall far short of providing effective support for all eligible students in need and facilitating the achievement of a 20% participation rate.

9. 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 2007, there were 1 271 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.

10. 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 Training and the Ministry of Science and Technology.

11. 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 designed to build a new generation of academics and to extend and generalize these.

12. 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.
Given the well-attested key role of higher education in development, the establishment of a Department of Higher Education and Training is a crucially important cabinet portfolio in the current phase of the development of South Africa.

In its strategic plan the University of Stellenbosch has committed itself to a “Pedagogy of Hope”. Working towards the achievement of this ideal, we have identified a range of specific projects to redirect the university’s core academic activities toward the promotion of the Millennium Development Goals, summarized in the following themes: the eradication of pandemic poverty and related conditions, the promotion of human dignity, the promotion of peace and security, the promotion of democracy and environmental stability. All these projects have been approved and Council has shown its hand through the provision of seed-funding to be used as a basis for a funding campaign currently undertaken by the university.

At the same time these projects aim to simultaneously drive the repositioning of Stellenbosch University as a home for all – stepping up our diversity, access and equity to significantly higher levels by 2015.

We are confident that, through the leadership offered through the new Department, an environment and climate will be created nationally that will be conducive to the success of strategic initiatives such as these. As is normal with any new government, the sector expects that some changes (some more dramatic than others) will be made to government’s policy framework as well as to the level and nature of support that government renders to the sector.

The higher education sector, however, is eager that any such changes should be communicated as soon as possible. A vibrant and performance orientated higher education sector is key to the meeting of national as well as supranational current and future development needs, and, for this sector to be able to deliver the required results, it is imperative that an incoming government should fundamentally rethink its policy framework as well as level and nature of support that government renders to the sector.

The national as well as supranational priorities which society has to deal with, dictate that the output performance of the sector as a whole should be significantly enhanced, both in terms of the quality and quantity of its combined outputs – in order to ensure enough and appropriately qualified persons as well as the requisite and appropriate bodies of knowledge in the various fields of study, so as to be able to successfully deal with the complex developmental challenges faced by society.

I would like to use this opportunity to indicate a number of issues that I consider to be of importance for government action in the years to come.

1. The current levels of funding, especially with regard to the size and growth of the block grant component relative to the earmarked component.

It remains a matter of concern that the relation between the block grant and the earmarked component of state funding for higher education has changed from 86.7% in 2004/5 to 74.5% in 2009/10. We concur with the sentiments on institutional autonomy expressed in the report of the CHE (cf. the report of the independent task team on Higher Education, Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom (HEIAAF): Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and Public Accountability in South African Higher Education), and we are not arguing for an “absolute” institutional autonomy. However, the arguments against the continuous erosion of the block grant are well known and we believe this trend is not in the best interest of higher education in South Africa.

2. Revisiting the block grant formula

Various factors necessitate to our mind a revisiting of the block grant formula, including:

a. The finalization and implementation of the new CESM categories.

b. The appropriateness of the current cost matrix.

c. The current capping of the teaching input units and its impact on enrolment planning.

d. The reconsideration of the teaching development grant.

e. The reconsideration of the research development grant.
3. The national policy on the allocation of funds for new buildings

We welcome the infrastructure and efficiency funding made available by government in recent years, and in particular the substantial funds allocated for 2010/11 and 2011/12. Undoubtedly this will contribute to the alleviation of the back-logs currently impacting negatively on HEIs. However, the sector will be well served if a transparent national policy for new buildings at HEIs is developed which is based on norms and accurate information on current provision and which take account of international good practice.

4. The NSFAS scheme

a. In the context of the concerns regarding the affordability of higher education for individuals and families, the recapitalization of the NSFAS scheme is of utmost importance. We support the recommendation that government should strengthen NSFAS and that may help to alleviate pressures on students by making tuition fees more affordable, provided that it is clear that additional funds to be possibly allocated to NSFAS should not be to the detriment of the levels of (first stream) funding of higher education. In short, new and additional funds should be allocated to NSFAS and not simply be reallocated from existing provision.

b. The NSFAS institutional allocation formula needs to be revisited to facilitate access to adequate resources for all deserving students. It is our contention that NSFAS should be seen as a pro-poor instrument for HEIs.

5. The lack of a viable and sustainable pipeline for the next generation of academics

The aging of the publishing workforce continues to be a major concern with more than half of article production in 8 out of the 20 scientific fields analyzed now being produced by authors over the age of 50 (cf. the report “Human Capital and the South African Knowledgebase” produced for NACI in 2007 by the Centre for the Study of Science and Technology). Following through on this report, we recommend that government mandate NACI to convene a national task team to address the challenge regarding the continuing ageing of the active scientific workforce in South Africa in a systematic and coordinated manner. Such a task team would need to consider initiatives and programmes that would achieve the following:

- Ways in which young and emerging scientists could be trained and supported to produce their first national and international scientific publications. Tied to such initiatives would be a recognition and reward system for young scientists who publish internationally and regularly.
- Initiatives aimed at increasing the participation and completion rates of doctoral students in all fields. Some of these initiatives would be aimed at providing research methodology and project management training to doctoral students (the idea of a National Doctoral Academy), while others would aim at training and supporting young and inexperienced doctoral supervisors. Another initiative would be to create a new category of doctoral contract appointments funded by the NRF that would allow doctoral students to be appointed to research and teaching positions while completing their studies.
- Programmes that would encourage doctoral students to remain in the science system. One such programme could be a national fund for post-doctoral support. South African universities support less than 700 post-doctoral students per year. This number needs to be increased three- or fourfold in order to provide a new stream of possible scientists for the future” (CREST Report to NACI, 2007, p. ix – x).

6. Academic policy

The finalization of the HEQF in 2007 and the adoption of the NQF Bill in 2008 are crucial enablers towards a more responsive HE system in the country geared towards national development needs, especially in the provision of the graduates necessary for economic growth and the alleviation of poverty. We welcome the role in standards setting allocated to the CHE in the new legislative dispensation and urge government to capacitate the CHE adequately to deliver on its additional mandate.

7. Quality Assurance

Major progress was made during the last decade in the establishment and successful implementation of a national quality assurance system for higher education. With the end of the first cycle of institutional audits in sight, the development of the audit criteria for the second round need to be attended to. Preferably the audits during the second round need to be more focused. Although the notion of “institutional self accreditation status” (SAS) was entertained in policy discussions in the CHE and HEQC, it has not yet been implemented. In the light of international best practice, it remains advisable that the responsibility for QA should be located within institutions. Towards this end, further clarification of the responsibilities and powers that go with SAS and the actual granting of SAS to HEIs that qualify would be welcomed.

8. The advisory role of the CHE

Given the daunting task of the CHE to establish the national quality assurance system (since 2001), it was inevitable that the CHE had to prioritize and attend to that. We believe that the CHE has nevertheless succeeded to do well in its advisory function during the decade of its
existence. However, with the QA system relatively stable, it will be welcomed if the advisory function of the CHE can be strengthened.

9. A new Commission of Higher Education

Given the challenges listed above, and also the many other issues confronting higher education in our country and beyond, we believe the time has arrived for government to establish a new commission to conduct a comprehensive review of higher education. Only such a comprehensive review can adequately address the systemic challenges, especially the changes needed in the funding system. Looking back to 1996 when the NCHE report was published, the higher education context in South Africa differs radically from the context within which NCHE conducted its investigations in the first part of the 1990s.

OUR BROADER RESPONSIBILITIES

Cognisance should also be taken of the fact that the higher education sector is a subsystem of the Education system/sector with the most prominent other subsystem being the school system/sector. The success of the higher education sector is highly dependent on the optimal functioning of the school system, especially in terms of the nature of the dynamic interaction which takes place at the interface between the two subsystems. To enhance the quality of this dynamic interaction, the higher education sector had to, over time and out of necessity, become directly and indirectly involved in important but resource consuming activities in the school subsystem – with the aim to increase access to higher education as well as to enhance success. In most cases individual higher education institutions endeavour to sustain such activities via philanthropic fundraising. The current global socio-economic ‘meltdown’ has had a marked negative effect on the continued availability of such philanthropic funds and it would be very regrettable if these extremely important activities have to be curtailed due to lack of funding. The question should also be posed as to whether such important activities, given the legacy of the school system attributable to the pre-1994 socio-political dispensation in South Africa, should be dependent on varying degrees of philanthropic fundraising. This reality also requires the urgent attention of the new government.

It is our additional submission that:

• The higher education sector holds the vital key to the optimal development of society.
• The key enablers/dimensions in which the sector has to perform are clearly articulated.
• The sector’s performance is dependent on the degree to which it performs in terms of a number of interrelated elements pertaining to student success, staff success, community interaction success, research success, the quality of physical infrastructure, technology and systems as well as the sector’s financial sustainability.
• The sustainability of the sector is under threat and this can pose serious barriers to the sector in terms of being able to play its vital enabling developmental role.
• The challenges faced by the sector are exacerbated by the nature of its interaction with the school subsystem and the need to launch direct/indirect interventions in the school subsystem – with the aim to not only enhance access to the higher education sector, but to ensure access and success. These interventions put additional pressure on the limited resources of the higher education sector.
• A well functioning and differentiated higher education sector is best suited to support the diverse development needs of society and such differentiation should be supported by government.
• The government should revisit the policy framework as well as nature and level of government support to the higher education sector. To this end the sector’s leadership is willing, available and able to engage government in an interactive concurrent design process with the aim to ensure the optimal and sustainable performance of this vital sector.

We are eagerly looking forward to working with you and to discuss initiatives at Stellenbosch University to position this institution as a home for all and a 21st Century university with a Pedagogy of Hope.
Higher Education Study in South Africa

An information feature from Higher Education South Africa (HESA) for school-leavers and prospective higher education students.

In South Africa, nearly one in five school-leavers who pass “matric” – the current Senior Certificate and, from 2008, the new National Senior Certificate – will enter a university, comprehensive university or a university of technology.

Who gains access to university is of great importance, not only to students and their families but also to South Africa. Universities are engines of knowledge production and produce the skilled people needed by our society and economy.

Universities are also places where those who are academically inclined continue their studies at higher levels across different fields of study. Higher education gives students the opportunity to expand their minds, build a sound knowledge base and gain specialist knowledge and skills.

At the same time, universities are dynamic centres where researchers conduct studies to expand the frontiers of knowledge, produce new products and techniques and find solutions to real-world problems. In this way, higher education improves society and drives development.

Today, well over 700 000 students study at 23 different universities across South Africa and are working towards internationally recognised qualifications. While it is important to keep in mind the role of higher education in society, part of a student’s personal motivation is no doubt to gain a higher qualification that can lead to a high-skills career and a good income.

Going to university

Whether an individual decides to pursue university studies depends on a range of choices that relate to:

a) interests and abilities;
b) dedication and motivation to learn;
c) levels of prior achievement – at school, FET college or in the world of work;
d) school subject choices or, for adults, work-related formal and informal learning opportunities; and
e) the future goals a person may have set for her or himself.

Pursuing a higher education qualification must be based on thorough research and fact-finding.

Getting into university

To attend university, learners must meet the minimum admission requirements set out for certificate, diploma and degree study. Universities are entitled to decide on cut-off point for specific learning programmes and the levels that would-be students must achieve to qualify for admission. Setting entry requirements enable universities to choose fairly and accurately from the large pool of individuals who apply for places. Prospective students who meet admission requirements can be confident that they have the basis for successful study.

SA’s higher education system

South Africa has 23 public higher education institutions that offer advanced or higher learning in many fields. There are three kinds of university in South Africa: universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities.

Qualifications and fields of study

South Africa’s 23 universities offer hundreds of different courses and learning programmes that lead to a wide range of qualifications and careers. Undergraduate or “first level” study can be pursued at certificate, diploma or degree-level. Where a student starts depend on her/his study and career plans, as well as the strength of previous performance.

The following are broad fields of higher education study:

- Humanities, Social Sciences and Law
- Commerce, Economics and Business Studies
- Sciences and Applied Sciences
- Engineering and Technology
- Health Sciences
- Education.

Alternative entry routes

Generally, admission to university is based on the strength of school-leaving performance and/or the recognition of prior learning. However, there are a number of “alternative” or “2nd chance” entry routes for intellectually talented students:

- Entry level testing;
- The assessment of prior learning, especially in the case of adult learners who have gained valuable experience in the workplace;
- Starting with a “lower” higher education qualification;
- Gaining entry through a foundation programme;
- Gaining entry through a link with FET qualifications offered by FET colleges.
Current and Future Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Education Study

Minimum admission requirements with the current Senior Certificate

- Higher certificate, advanced certificate, diploma and advanced diploma – a senior certificate
- Bachelor’s degree – senior certificate with matriculation endorsement, or a certificate of complete or conditional exemption from endorsement

Minimum admission requirements with the future National Senior Certificate (from 2008)

- Higher Certificate – National Senior Certificate (NSC)
- Diploma – National Senior Certificate (NSC) with an achievement rating of 3 (Moderate Achievement, 40-49%) or better in four recognised NSC 20-credit subjects
- Bachelor’s Degree – National Senior Certificate (NSC) with an achievement rating of 4 (Adequate Achievement, 50-59%) or better in four recognised 20-credit NSC subjects chosen from the DESIGNATED SUBJECT LIST.

NOTE: Institutional and programme needs may require appropriate combinations of subjects and specified levels of achievement.

Other options

Nowhere in the world does every school-leaver enter university. There are many satisfying careers that do not require university study.

- Further Education and Training (FET) colleges offer technical careers in a wide range of different trades. Visit www.education.gov.za
- Learnerships are administered by the Department of Labour and enable students to earn while they learn. Visit www.labour.gov.za
- Volunteering or taking a gap year in another country after school can expand the mind and broaden experience before studying further. Visit www.sangcnet.org.za
- Entrepreneurs are smart people who start small and grow their business gradually. Visit www.youthportal.org.za
Among many other demands, there are five main challenges facing higher education into the next decade and that should enjoy priority under the new government.

1. **THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY**

This is a major problem that requires stronger co-ordination between what happens in school and what happens in university. There is considerable evidence that school preparation is inadequate for the majority of students who nevertheless “pass” and then struggle to succeed in the first years of university, leading to the pervasive problem of low retention rates at significant costs to students, their families and, of course, higher education. It is now clear that compensatory programmes are not enough to overcome the gap between high school preparation and university training for many students. While universities clearly can and should do more to better accommodate students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the long-term resolution of this problem lies principally in deepening the quality of school learning for all students. Government is urged, in this context, to convene a special series of forums and workshops to address this problem: how to strengthen the link between school and university.

2. **THE PROBLEM OF NEXT-GENERATION ACADEMICS**

For a long time the key indicators of development suggest a coming crisis in the production of adequate numbers of well-qualified academics to replace the ageing cohort of existing academics. This problem is especially acute with respect to the next generation of black academics. It is important that government, working in concert with universities and interested bodies like the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) and the National Research Foundation, to act decisively and proactively to reverse this critical problem. The PhD project of ASSAf funded by the National Research Foundation is one lever for addressing this crisis, but there is a role for government in terms of policy, planning, co-ordination and funding that could make a significant contribution to this national concern. Government is urged to convene a national panel to outline the problem and examine strategies to address next generation issues, perhaps in the form of a new National Plan for Higher Education.

3. **THE PROBLEM OF STUDENT NEED WITHIN UNIVERSITIES**

While government has significantly increased the volume of funding for students at university, this problem remains unresolved for the poorest of students. The multiple needs of students from basic tuition to accommodation to books to transportation (let alone income foregone) have escalated the challenge of student finance to a point of perpetual crisis. Year after year several universities fall into the routine of protest and disruption that further erodes confidence in higher education in the public eye. Government is urged to develop, in consultation with stakeholders, a comprehensive plan to resolve this problem.

4. **THE PROBLEM OF STUDENT CULTURES**

The culture of disruption and violence that often accompanies protests (mainly around financial need but also as a result of political competition among student groups) must also be addressed as a matter of urgency for institutions to remain focussed firmly on teaching, learning, research and community service. For a critical segment of universities, the job of training young people for competitive placements in the labour market is seriously compromised when a disproportionate amount of management time is deflected into trying to keep their institutions stable. This is not a problem that will dissipate easily, and Government is urged to work with constituencies to systematically address the problem of disruptive student cultures especially in those higher education institutions most vulnerable to such challenges in the annual calendar.

5. **THE PROBLEM OF FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING**

The problem of foundational learning. The problems reflected later in university life lie primarily in the foundation years. It is a single achievement of the current government that “foundations for learning” is beginning to be signalled in policy and planning as a primary concern. The new Government is urged to make the foundation years a top priority for renewed investment by steering the preparation of a new cadre of primary school teachers through professional incentives and specialist training and high-quality materials for the early years.
The University of Limpopo acknowledges and recognizes the massive contribution Government has made in transforming and developing higher education in the Republic of South Africa. The landscape is richly diverse and presents specific challenges.

Each university is a unique entity and should be treated as such; it has its own particular circumstances, challenges and long-term potential. Without a long-term perspective guided by those at the coal-face we will not solve these challenges. Short-term instant fixes guided by both internal and external assessments, administrators and consultants, are doomed to failure. Especially as they do not understand, nor properly consider, the structural challenges, especially for those historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) on the fringes of the labour market and in a context of skill shortages, with inadequate budgets to compete fairly. Nor do they properly take into account the local circumstances in all their complexity. This can only be guided by those on the ground.

The University, given its unique location as a rural-based institution faces specific challenges regarding access to higher education by financially constrained students with demonstrated potential. Despite its restraints, the University of Limpopo succeeds in empowering and developing its students having achieved one of the highest throughput rates.

The University of Limpopo submits the following interrelated issues and policy recommendations for consideration:

1. Differentiation, uniqueness, strengths, long-term potential

Rather than a system of categorising universities within finite categories one needs to take a long-term perspective enabling institutions to develop in terms of their unique potential and circumstances. Premature totalisation into hard categories is not only punitive and demoralising but hinders and limits the development of their rich potential. We need a long-term vision beyond the present. Institutions of higher education, especially the rural HDIs, need to be treated in terms of their uniqueness and supported in terms of their distinctive needs and potential. Their achievements should be recognised and they should not be punitively compared with other urban-based institutions which have had the advantage of being supported by Government, alumni and industry.

A funding formula has to be devised which will be in keeping with the different levels of development, facilities and potential. Such a formula will have to take into account the origin and socio-economic status of the student population.

It should be noted that students from impoverished communities rely much more on institutional housing and general infrastructure, as do members of the surrounding communities, especially at campuses set in rural or peri-urban environments, where the economic infrastructure is not as well developed as that in urban areas.

In addition, it is generally acknowledged that it costs more to run a University at the periphery of the labour market and far from the amenities of a city like Johannesburg or Pretoria or Cape Town.

2. Staffing and salaries

The need to review salaries of staff in general and particularly of scarce and critical staff, especially with regard academics at
tertiary institutions, is not only urgent but also long overdue. Salaries of academics lag far behind those paid in the private and public sectors for the equivalent skills and experience.

Tertiary institutions, especially universities, are at the centre of the human resource and skills development agenda of the country. Not only do they play an important role in producing the necessary skills for the economy at large, they also produce knowledge through research.

In reviewing salaries at universities, it is imperative that the principle of differentiation be applied. Criticality and scarcity of skills, should become central factors in determining such differentiation in salaries. Although these elements are always considered in determining the salaries of staff, it is perenni\ally difficult to recruit and retain such skills without sufficient sustainable funding. In addition factors that they are key in developmental initiatives must also be taken into account.

Conditions of service, including levels of salaries paid, at universities have a direct bearing on staffing in general.

The challenge faced by universities, in general, and particularly HDIs, in this area of staffing, lies in attracting and retaining the right academic skills in the required numbers and quality. Another complicating factor in this regard, is the stiff competition for talent, with the private and public sectors locally and globally.

The challenges posed by the salaries and staffing imperatives, call for more, and different, formulae for the funding of a tertiary institution, particularly redress and differentiated funding taking into account the location of the institution and the large communities they serve. They also call for a more collaborative, rather than competitive, approach to staffing among universities.

More urgently Government could, in the short-term, consider injecting funds into HDIs to help close the salary gap between urban-based Historically White Institutions” (HWI) and HDIs and the rurally based HDIs, as this might help to stem the tide of talent to the metropolitan universities and begin to allow HDIs to compete and successfully attract and retain experienced senior academic staff as the academic champions they so sorely need.

There is an urgent need to encourage and support the development of a new generation of academics, given the ageing profile of the current ones.

3. Redress funding

Campuses, especially in rural areas, are not only often the major centres of higher education and training, but serve a myriad of functions in the social, cultural, economic, political and intellectual development of their provinces and South Africa and their human resource needs in a period of rapid development.

Redress funding is sorely needed to enable the universities to achieve equivalence in resources, facilities and staffing so they can further mine their potential. It will take many years before alumni and donors support the HDIs sufficiently to enable them to build their infrastructure and staffing (through attractive and competitive salary structures).

Most HDIs struggle to cope with the wholesale poaching of staff and students by the better endowed HWIs (so they can achieve their equity targets). Researchers are not attracted to the rural based HDIs because of lower salaries, the lack of research funding and infrastructure and their distance from major metropolitan areas.

As part of Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment the Government should provide redress funding (which was promised many years ago, yet never to materialise) based on an assessment of the unique circumstances and needs of each university. This is a long-term project but the subsidy could gradually decline as:

• Third stream income grows, enabled by adequate staffing, infrastructure etc.
• Alumni and other donations increase, to the level the HWI’s are achieving.

It should be emphasised that the key to any kind of redress is adequate funding and support systems for underprivileged students.

Separate dedicated funding could be channelled towards new teaching and learning programmes and fields of specialization, as identified in the provincial and National Growth and Development Strategies.

4. Social equity issues

Since the election of a new democratic government in 1994, Black students have increasingly gained access to universities and constitute the majority of the student population in most universities. However, a similar trend is not reflected in the staff profile or programme profile level. Inequities in terms of race, class and gender prevail in many high-demand and high-status programmes such as Medicine, Engineering and Accounting, with African students, particularly if they are from poor and rural communities having the lowest representation.

Deeper analysis reveals that although statistics show an increase in Black enrolments at all universities, Black African students have the highest attrition and failure rates. Hence students enter the system, fail and remain for many years at the university and eventually drop-out – a phenomenon commonly termed the revolving door syndrome.

However, the University of Limpopo with a student population which is drawn from the most disadvantaged communities has a throughput rate which matches that of University of Cape Town (UCT) while UCT’s throughput rate for disadvantaged students is less than half of Limpopo’s.

A decade and a half into our democracy, race alone is an insufficient basis.
There is a need to focus on socio-economic status and introduce mechanisms that encourage universities to grant access, establishing appropriate mechanisms to ensure success for students from the poorest and most rural communities of South Africa.

The system of support established at the University of Limpopo has been able to assist students in many ways. It includes a voluntary mentorship programme where senior students mentor entering students, computers that are made available, and an extended degree programme is offered. Good results have been achieved, leading to a throughput rate of 24% in 2007, which is remarkable and is based on information received from the Department of Education and compares favourably with those throughput rates of the other 22 institutions in the country.

5. Governance issues

The present governance structures in terms of the Higher Education Act (1997) have proved clumsy in a time of radical transformation and development and crisis management has been forced on our institutions for many of the abovementioned reasons. This is especially true for the rural based HDIs. But the enforced size of Councils makes it difficult to get immediate quality decisions thus delaying urgent actions, and quorums, risking the possible worst-case scenario in which internal members of the University Council can end up governing. The changing representation sometimes hinders the consistency of direction. Decisions can differ depending on who is present at meetings leading to difficulties in implementation.

Perhaps, more importantly the inclusion of so many stakeholders, especially internal ones, risks decisions being made on the basis of other criteria than those central to the development of the university as a national asset. The inclusion of all stakeholders, further, puts management in a difficult situation with regard to the conflicts of interests of some of the Council members, especially those representing internal structures which are sometimes in negotiation with management.

Instead of having to resort to assessors and administrators, Government could consider reviewing the Higher Education Act and replace the cumbersome Councils by appointing five person Councils from experienced senior members from the private sector, civil society, external senior academics and public administrators committed to the development of the particular university and located in their near proximity. The review and composition of Councils should be congruent with the King Report on Co-operative Governance.

6. Over-regulation

Currently it would appear that there is a serious case of over-regulation and policy overload by a number of regulatory agencies.

Higher Education is regulated by the Department of Education and Training through the Act, which is understandable, but organs like the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), and South Africa Qualifications Authority (SAQA) create an overload of demands on the already busy schedules of academics and administrators. Compounding this, are the various professional bodies which also place heavy demands on the already burdened academic and administrative staff.

It is not to say that these regulatory bodies do not play a meaningful and important role in the development and transformation of higher education but the overload factors and the concern that these regulatory bodies sometimes appear to be too prescriptive to the point where they verge on threatening the autonomy of institutions of higher education.

7. Developmental role of the rural-based HDI's

The South African government, in particular provincial governments, are faced with the huge challenge of providing basic services to the South African people, the majority of whom are the rural poor. At the same time government has to compete with other economies in a technologically-oriented and globalised world. For the country to stake a claim in this terrain, there is a dire need for expertise in terms of competent and suitably qualified personnel: the demand for the right skills has never been so great in this country as it is at present.

For all rural, poor communities, provincial governments ought to look to rural based universities, such as the University of Limpopo, to assist in providing the required personnel. These should assume the form of providing a platform for the training of government officials in the respective areas, the provision of short requisite courses geared towards improvement of service delivery, best management practices, and such other analytical skills and consultancies as may be required.

8. Government support in developing local institutions

By partnering with rural-based HDIs, Government can help to ensure confidence in the HDIs and other institutions. Through this support Government will be sending a very clear message to the South African public, and the world, that it takes these institutions seriously as they are needed for rural development among other things.

As the issues confronting higher education are complex, diverse and trenchant, a forum should be convened to ensure that structures of governance at all levels contribute to the development of the higher educational institutions in their particular locality, and that national departments ensure the allocation of a fair share of their consultancies etc. to the various institutions.
Government could also consider circumscribing spheres of influence of powerful universities in the proximity of weaker universities.

9. Experiences and challenges of the mergers

The merger process still continues, while the funding has ceased, thus placing still very large financial pressures on the University of Limpopo partly because of the distances between the two main campuses, but also because of the added costs of running them.

In this regard a ten-year funding framework could be put in place to assist with the long-term implementation and consolidation of the mergers.

There is thus a need to deal systematically with certain tenacious problems that arose out of the mergers.

10. National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)

The current NSFAS allocation to universities is based on an outdated formula whereby the cost of study at the university is multiplied by the number of students by race. We are aware that the formulae are being reviewed, but currently, disadvantaged universities like ourselves, have far more deserving cases than the previously advantaged universities. Generally speaking the poorer student would attend our university resulting in almost 80% of our student base requiring sponsorship from NSFAS and/or other donors.

If every qualifying student were supported to the full at our university we would have a shortfall of R39 million. We, therefore, cannot support students fully and this results in increased debt for students and eventually being excluded from the university on financial grounds rather than academic performance. It is especially important to note that it is difficult for a student to study if they cannot afford meals because their funding is reduced. This point is far more deserving of serious consideration than it appears and should be noted expressly.

The NSFAS formulae need to be changed to include only disadvantaged students of all races. This information is readily available at all Universities.

11. Policy recommendations

The following policy reviews are recommended:

- Institutions should be recognised for their uniqueness and should be supported in terms of their distinctive needs and potential;
- A funding formula, taking into account the origin and socio-economic status of the student population, should be devised;
- Salaries, taking into account the factors of criticality and scarcity, should be revised as a matter of urgency;
- Urgently, funds should be allocated to rurally based HDIs to close the salary gap between them and their urban-based counterparts;
- Redress funding, based on an assessment of the unique circumstances of each university, should be allocated to enable universities to achieve equivalence in resources, facilities and staffing;
- A mechanism should be found to encourage universities to grant access, and establish appropriate measures to ensure success for students from the poorest and most rural communities of South Africa;
- The Higher Education Act should be amended to allow for the appointment of considerably smaller Councils that are committed to the university they serve;
- The over-regulation of higher education should be moderated;
- The developmental role of the rural-based HDIs should be recognised by local and provincial governments who should be required to support the development of HDIs within their region and partner with them;
- Government should partner, effectively and actively, with HDIs, and should circumscribe the sphere of influence of powerful universities in the proximity of weaker universities;
- A ten-year funding framework should be instituted catering for the long-term costs of the mergers;
- The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) should be amended to benefit only disadvantaged students of all races.
This contribution is formulated as a succinct crystallization of a number of priority issues that need to be addressed in order for South Africa’s higher education sector to operate optimally to fulfill its role in the development of the country, both in the immediate as well as the longer term.

The document does not intend to be comprehensive in its treatment of all issues confronting the sector, but rather identifies a number of strategic points of intervention which, if addressed in concerted ways, would critically assist to gear the sector for an enhanced and powerfully transformative role in our society and economy now and in the future.

This document does not attempt to offer policy advice; we believe rather that the issues need to be thoughtfully articulated in all their complex character before systematic policy formulations can be proposed. These policy proposals would need to be developed through appropriate processes, involving the insights provided by key stakeholders.

The document is structured in two parts: a prefatory framing of the role that the sector plays and should play into the future, and a discussion of the priority interventions required to optimize this role.

**THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

Higher education institutions today play a key role in addressing the challenges of sustainable social and economic growth and global competitiveness. In producing high-level skills and cutting-edge research, universities are part of national and global systems of innovation needed to drive a changing industrial base, the demands for new knowledge-intensive production and services and to address the problems of social development.

Manufacturing is being replaced by knowledge-intensive work with knowledge becoming a key economic resource. Without effective investment in human capital, that resource will be scarce. With effective investment, knowledge can become not only abundant but renewable and self-generating – a distinction that will be critical for future economic prospects (UNESCO 2006). 13

The innovations required to address the challenges of society are scientific, technological, and social. To this end, a key strategic role of higher education institutions is to develop a socially-conscious science and technology that recognizes its contribution to building a democracy and addressing poverty and powerlessness.

Further, investment in top-end research and skills across the spectrum of disciplines enables other sectors of the economy and society to operate at appropriate levels of sophistication. Our participation in (and the benefits derived from) globally networked knowledge flows and consequent economic activity depends precisely on our capacity to produce top-level knowledge and innovation. Competitive and successful societies need strong higher education institutions. We believe that it is through the production of high-level intellectual capital and strategic innovation that societies are able successfully to reshape their destinies.

**PRIORITIES FOR THE SECTOR**

Every higher education system globally has to confront the dual priorities of producing, firstly, globally competitive knowledge and skills and, secondly, of widening participation. Our submission while acknowledging the vital and complementary role of the latter emphasizes the former.

As noted above, the achievement of sustained economic and social development depends in very large measure on the capacity of our system to generate high-order skills, leading-edge research and strategic innovation. These provide the wellspring that nurtures our capacity to deliver in all the other sectors. There is no single other more strategic point of provision. In particular, we believe that the production of top-end research and postgraduate skills constitutes a vital component of the wider sector, feeding as it does the succeeding layers of expertise needed for quality endeavour more broadly. The focus of this document is thus on this

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selected dimension of higher education capacity, and does not address other areas of priority attention, as important as these are for the vitality and success of the system as a whole.

We argue here for three interlinked dimensions of investment and intervention aimed at optimizing the current capacity of our system and growing its capacity into the future. These are: rewards, infrastructure and specialization.

1. Rewards

At the heart of the performance of any higher education system is the human capital that can be brought to bear on its purposes. It is common cause that our system currently is characterized by an ageing professoriate, that all institutions have staffing complements of varying talent, and that we are failing to reproduce our academic capacity (of any race or gender) at levels that will sustain the current system, let alone grow it dynamically into the future. It is imperative that our system attracts top talent nationally and internationally. Talent in any human endeavour is attracted and retained where there are appropriate incentives and rewards, and the same applies to academia.

It is widely acknowledged that the remunerative conditions in the sector have not kept pace with other sectors of society and talent is diverted to employment in the public and private sectors. Academia needs to recover its status as a prestigious and rewarding career in order to attract and retain the best academic talent in the sector. In considering this issue, we need also to bear in mind that we compete for talent in the international market, with players increasingly unsentimental about the erstwhile noble covenant with knowledge and who instead are now sharply aware of the exchange value and mobility of top-level skills. We must create the environment that makes South Africa a compelling destination in the global reticulation of top-flight intellectual capital. The excellent work of top talent in our setting will, in turn, attract further talent in a virtuous spiral. However, our remunerative provision must be realistic. It is far from that now.

If salaries at home cannot compete with overseas employment offers, brain drain will continue to beleaguer many already struggling poorer nations. … This also risks driving top talent away from a career in higher education. (THES 2008.)

The sector must consider the issue of affordable escalating rewards for top performers in areas of rare, scarce or strategic activity. In other words, the reward gradients should rise steeply for those who are strongly productive. While incentives exist within the system to encourage academics associated with science, engineering and technology (SET), we believe that our remunerative environment should take both an immediate view to reward currently evident achievement, as well as a longer-term view that encourages top talent into fields of fundamental, applied and strategic research, which in due course will be foundational to successful innovation.

Finding solutions to this complex issue will be far from straightforward, but this cannot delay addressing the matter. This is a national imperative with far-reaching implications. The cost of providing effective solutions will be dwarfed by the cost incurred should we fail to do so.

2. Infrastructure

Top talent, once in place, needs the conditions under which academic careers are fulfilled optimally. Sadly, many talented academics confront an environment which is short on the infrastructure required for intellectual potential to be mobilized to best effect. Very recently the State has moved boldly to provide support for physical infrastructure, mostly related to teaching and learning priorities. This is warmly to be welcomed, and reflects recognition of the strategic value of the sector in the provision of skills for the economy.

This needs now to be complemented with concomitant investment in the facilities and other support needed for high-quality knowledge production: research equipment; opportunities to collaborate with the best of their counterparts in the world; and the ability to attract and support postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Provision currently is made for the acquisition of research equipment, but the budget allocation is a fraction of the actual need at present, with the consequence that existing research capacity is under-exploited. More seriously, our prospects for the order-of-magnitude growth that we seek in quality, quantity and scope of research will be constrained.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST), usually through the National Research Foundation (NRF), has instituted a number of far-sighted programmes to support high-quality research (e.g. the NRF Sighted programmes and the Centres of Excellence) and we’re seeing the positive results of these measures. However, not all of these schemes have been carried through to promised completion and some have been scaled down or aborted in the face of funding shortfalls. These measures need to be brought to scale, focused in those areas which have the capacity to absorb the funding.
Again, we must not fail to sustain a strategic vision for the national niche strengths and development priorities, as well as of the competitive positioning we seek in the global knowledge game. Inevitably, this excellence requires our embeddedness in the global networks that feed selected fields of study, and the quality of our facilities and our capacity to support academic exchange will play as much of a role as the attractiveness of our academics as research partners.

3. Specialisation

A complex and charged debate exists on whether differentiated approaches should be taken to developing the capacities of our universities. One view has it that our system is already strongly differentiated and this diverse landscape can be used to best effect for appropriately specialized purposes. Another view is that all institutions should properly have the ambition and the means to attain and fulfill the full range of knowledge functions of traditional universities. It is important at this point to distinguish between a longer-term strategic vision for – on the one hand – the respective purposes and developmental trajectories of individual institutions, and the relationships between these institutions and – on the other hand – the specific fields of intellectual specialization and the upper reaches of achievement that need to be identified and nurtured.

Our view is that in an environment of limited resources, and in a context of both present and future purposes, choices have to be made about points of strategic investment of those resources. In the short term at least, excellence cannot be achieved through comprehensive attention by all institutions to the full palette of imperatives confronting the sector. Instead, excellence is achieved and grown as a result of targeted and sustained investment in those destinations best equipped to give effect to the chosen purposes, whatever those happen to be.

High quality intellectual capital (whether in research or teaching) is accumulated incrementally over time, needing usually the achievement of a critical mass of accomplished talent. Such pockets of capacity need painstakingly and deliberately to be grown (but perversely can be rapidly dissipated), and high-quality productivity relies crucially on the presence of secure intellectual foundations (strength in defined fields of study, well-qualified staff, established research and/or teaching programmes, etc). What is required is well-developed capacity in some fields of study that may be distributed across various institutional sites in the sector, together with the wherewithal needed to coalesce these capacities for optimal effect as is the case in the Centres of Excellence model.

Sadly, there are no shortcuts to excellence. We cannot evade the need to make choices, and it would be irresponsible to under-invest in areas of existing strength.\(^{17}\)

The issue of strategic specialization in our system needs urgently to be resolved to ensure that the resources made available to the sector are directed to areas best calculated to turn these to optimum effect.

CONCLUSION

We have consciously addressed only a limited dimension of higher education – that of top-end research and postgraduate training – believing this to be one powerfully strategic priority required for the order-of-magnitude deepening and expansion of the sector as a whole.

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7. In the longer-run, the strength of the whole will be based on the strength of its parts, as has been shown in HE systems elsewhere that have been most successful in producing intellectual capital e.g. India and the USA, where strength has emerged from sustained investment over time in highly diversified systems. But as has also been demonstrated (in the UK for example), endogenously-driven diversification into niche positions in the sector have been crucial to the competitive advantage of individual institutions (e.g. Oxford-Brooks, Nottingham, etc).
Issues affecting education will no doubt be uppermost in the minds of policymakers, and I take this opportunity to offer some perspectives on what I consider to be key and relevant issues for further consideration.

1. One of the biggest challenges facing higher education in South Africa is the need for public higher education institutions to become effective teaching institutions, and related to this is the imperative to improve the pass and throughput rates to acceptable levels. The subsidy system and NSFAS rules should be adjusted to make it possible for institutions to introduce Bachelor degrees over four years for all but the better prepared entrants to higher education institutions (HEIs). The option of a standard four year degree programme must take into account the fact that few students complete a three year degree in the minimum time. The three year degree myth is compounded in that funding a student is often extended beyond three years and students often develop a negative self-image as a result of taking longer than the standard three years to complete their qualification.

2. Funding to support students will continue to be a key issue. The higher education sector would value further engagement on any likely future policy of free undergraduate education. Currently, 70% of students at the University of Cape Town pay their own fees. Free education would in effect see government pay the study fee costs of students who are able to meet their costs, while at the same time reducing capacity to assist those who can’t afford to pay. This is the inevitable outcome of a general free education policy and the monetary cost to the state will be huge. It may well be that the answer lies in finding the best balance between the imperative to offer free education for those who need it most but not to over-subsidize those who can in fact afford to pay, either in full or in part. In this context, free education for those below a certain means threshold would have strong advantages. This critical matter speaks to the key issues of access and transformation and, with this in mind, how funding policy could be used to best effect.

3. NSFAS has been incredibly successful in facilitating access to higher education. However, our experience is that we have not been able to give students enough funding support to avoid their having to take extra part-time jobs or sub-let their rooms because of the reality that many of them also have to contribute towards supporting their families. In order to promote lifelong learning we believe that it is necessary for a review of the NSFAS which does not make provision for loans or bursaries for students studying part-time. Most adult learners study only on a part-time basis because of other commitments. Given our legacy in South Africa, this is surely an area that needs further attention given that many adult students would have been denied study opportunity for reasons that we are all aware of. We believe that the limit for eligibility for financial aid should be set such that a larger pool of students can be considered for NSFAS support.

4. The Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF), gazette in 2007, is underpinned by an approach premised on approved level descriptors at the outer layer of the framework and standards for different qualification types and specializations. However, we understand that whilst the CHE has been allocated the standard-setting function in terms of the revised National Qualification Framework Act, this has not been accompanied by additional funding for this work. As a result there has been a significant delay in setting up the appropriate mechanisms for implementing the HEQF. This in turn is creating confusion and high levels of frustration in the sector. These delays are putting the whole HEQF at risk.

5. Autonomy and academic freedom are very important not only to institutions of higher learning, but also for the advancement of knowledge and debate for the country as a whole. The academic community would appreciate confirmation that the government will respect university autonomy and will not interfere with the appointment of management or the selection of staff, except under extreme and rare conditions when the governance of a university is threatening to collapse. At the same time, government will continue to have at its disposal the levers of funding to incentivize universities to align with government goals, as in the case of the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) and as is still the case with transformation initiatives.
6. The status of residences and residence life in higher education institutions all over the country is another central issue. In the short to medium-term there is an urgent case to be made to Treasury for the expansion of funding support for developing new residences everywhere. A comprehensive policy must be developed for making residences more than just dormitories. With appropriate planning, residences could contribute in critical ways to dealing with the challenges that young people bring and have to deal with.

Good residues offer the opportunity to improve the quality of student learning and their success rates.

We face real constraints in accommodating student numbers, particularly given the commitment to grow the student population. Residence capacity is a critical factor that will impact on our success in meeting enrolment targets, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The lack of sufficient residence capacity has a particularly devastating effect on black students who tend to live much further away from the university than their white counterparts and whose home circumstances often make it impossible to study at home, or stay late to work at the university. Hence there is a direct relationship between being in residence and success.

7. The policy in respect of funding of health science education remains a matter of concern. There has been much discussion around the development and implementation of a new national framework for the governance and funding of health sciences education and the training of health professionals. This is a matter that needs urgent attention. For example, the stalemate on the Joint Agreement between the Provincial Government of the Western Cape and the higher education Institutions remains unresolved after many years, and requires national leadership to resolve.

8. It is well recognized that Nursing in South Africa has been facing a serious crisis and the National Department of Health has now developed a strategy for the nursing profession, the 'Nursing Strategy for South Africa' (National Department of Health, 2008). Consideration should be given to reintroducing undergraduate nursing programmes within HEI’s Faculties of Health Sciences and reopen nursing colleges to education and train nurses in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the country. The current postgraduate nursing educational programmes should be expanded and/or refocused to meet the increasing need for clinical postgraduate training. The focus on clinically-based postgraduate diplomas and degrees will be well supported in the workplace with the public sector occupational specific dispensation for nurses more appropriately remunerating nurses for advancing clinical specialization. The achievement of the strategic objectives will require collaborative work and modelling to be done with the involvement of the National and Provincial Departments of Health, SANC, Nursing Education institutions, representatives of Community Based Organisations, Professional Associations and the Private Sector.

9. The Department of Education has done much to improve the public school system. However, the challenge remains a formidable one. Universities are constrained in student enrolments where students have been the victims of educational disadvantage; where students have not taken the right subjects at the right level; and where curriculum design, assessment and quality of teaching are often not at the level that it needs to be. A huge sustained effort is needed to address the situation. This does raise the issue of the role of universities in teacher training and, from a government perspective, the policies and funding that will be needed to address the challenge on a scale that matches the size of the problem.

10. Internationally, tertiary institutions are entering into partnerships with one another to promote internationalization amongst their students and staff. These partnerships cover a wide range of activities including exchange agreements, recognition of credits, credit transfer, etc. as well as joint academic programmes. Currently, tertiary institutions in South Africa are not able to offer programmes jointly with international universities. The effect is impacting on our ability to grow postgraduate numbers and government should consider reviewing this.
Graduate Attributes
A baseline study on South African graduates from the perspective of employers

Hanlie Griesel and Ben Parker
January 2009

The survey was a baseline study undertaken as a partnership project between HESA and SAQA with additional financial assistance received from SAGRA. The outcomes of the Report points to the need for more innovative ways in which higher education and business can work together to create a seamless interface between two crucial sectors of society. The Report can be downloaded from the HESA website. www.hesa.org.za