HIV prevalence and Related factors
Higher Education Sector Study
South Africa
2008–2009

The HIV prevalence and Related factors is a study that investigates the HIV prevalence and knowledge, attitude, behaviour and practices in the higher education sector of South Africa. Download the full document at www.hesa.org.za
Higher Education South Africa

The university as an agent of change

This edition of *Insight* is dedicated to transformation issues within higher education. It is partly intended to feed into the upcoming Summit which will be devoted to this topic but it is also intended as an opportunity for Vice-Chancellors to reflect on this vexing question and to propose practical solutions that are currently being employed on campuses around the country.

It is now generally admitted that the focus on transformation that grounded the *White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (1997) was somewhat simplistic in its definition. Its guiding assumption was that if the numbers of students and staff reflected the demographics of the country, racial and gender transformation would be achieved. However, after the Reitz incident – together with other instances and practices outlined in the Soudien Report – the sense within the sector was that a quota-based understanding of transformation was inadequate.

There is a bigger, and more urgent, question that underpins transformation in this country. In the 16 years since the advent of democracy, exactly how far have we come? At this point in time, the media feeds on an apparently never-ending stream of public figures making racial and sexist jibes, of hate speech and an increased polarisation of the country. If broader society can’t get it right, why should we expect anything different from our universities? But we do have different expectations because our institutions of higher education are supposed to be examples of tolerance.

The fact that we do have great expectations of our institutions has much to do with the historical and symbolic importance of the university in South Africa. Even during the darkest days of apartheid, many universities were at the forefront of societal change. Especially among the historically disadvantaged institutions, many universities were united in calling for change, for actively engaging with the socio-political debates of the day and, as a consequence, for holding a certain moral authority. In other words, the South African university occupies a unique position within our social configuration: it is an institution that has the ability to bring about social change.

The university occupies a special space that provides (at the same time) for creativity, for self-discipline, for social awareness, for experimentation and for the stretching of cognitive functioning. There is no other social space that permits such exploration. It follows that we expect much of the university and rightly so. So when transformation appears slow, when examples of racism or sexism appear on the grounds of our institutions it necessarily worries not only the university management but the rest of society. The sense is that if the university can’t get it right how can the country?

What becomes evident in these pieces from leaders of institutions is that the transformation of the university is multi-faceted. It is not (only) about quotas and targets; it is about the culture of residences, about curriculum, historical and cultural legacies, distance and contact institutions, the quest for innovation and institutional typology. In short, any one of these levers can function to entrench social injustice or, at the same time, to provide liberation from it. A racially integrated residence, for example, can be a powerful vehicle for dismantling racial and cultural stereotypes and for bringing about enduring shifts in the behaviour of students. Or, as was the case at Reitz, a site for embedding prejudice.

It is hoped that these contributions can feed into the conference deliberations and its outcomes, especially in those cases where positive and innovative initiatives are currently changing the way that universities operate. The transformation of higher education is crucial not only for the sector, but – given the role the university needs to play in South Africa – for the aspirations of the country itself.

Prof E Duma Malaza
CEO, Higher Education South Africa
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Responding the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in South Africa’s Public Higher Education Institutions, South Africa’s HEIs have accepted that transformation is a challenge facing every institution in the sector. The universities, moreover, are cognisant of the importance of their role in promoting a culture of human rights and advancing the socio-economic rights of South Africans as central to the challenge of developing and sustaining democracy. The twin responsibilities of making institutions accessible to South Africans and of serving the needs of the society are also accepted and acknowledged. However, institutions have been concerned and have pointed out that what these responsibilities mean in practice and how to go about realising them in any deep or meaningful way should be the subject of legitimate ongoing debate and discussion rather than something that can be achieved by uniform measures adopted by decree across the sector. The pervasive tension that exists between the claim for the autonomy of HEIs on the part of some and the call greater accountability of these institutions on the part of others for is a theme running through the responses to the Report. These tensions and differences of emphasis reflect the fact that there is neither a single institutional response to the Report nor a single sector response possible or even desirable. There are multiple responses within institutions and in the sector as a whole and this multiplicity cannot accurately be reduced to a single homogenous ‘position’ on the Report.

The very concepts of discrimination, transformation and social cohesion emerge in the responses to the Report as contested ideas. One of the resultant tensions that emerges concerns whether these debates and contestations in themselves act as bulwarks against change rather than being part of a genuine process of interaction with a view to making progress with a far-reaching transformation agenda for the sector. For some, endless debate is an excuse to stall change. For others, debate and ongoing contestation are an essential, inevitable part of the very meaning of higher education. The very clear articulation of the meaning of transformation in Education White Paper 3, understood as much more than mere compliance with national policy goals, and incorporating both formal processes in the university (teaching, learning, research) and more informal processes including both the day-to-day ways in which people interrelate with one another and the traditions, customs, habits and symbols which are the matrix within which those relationships occur, is accepted in the institutional responses to the Report as a common starting point but has perhaps not been sufficiently percolated into everyday discourse and practice at institutions.

This raises one of the most significant common learning points to emerge from the responses to the work of the Committee, namely the urgent need for the creation of a climate of honest and open debate that can lead to greater understanding and mutuality within institutions with respect to some of the core issues related to transformation. Institutions, in their responses to the Report, indicate an awareness of the widespread perception that emerges in the Report that these critical discussions are either absent or, if they do happen, are superficial and lacking in a sense of genuine willingness to engage and to shift entrenched mindsets, perspectives and positions. Reflected too in the institutional responses to the Report is an acceptance of the special responsibility of higher education bodies to play a leading role in society with respect to the elimination of prejudice and the fostering of a climate of social justice rather than simply being content to reflect the injustices and inequities of the broader society.

1 In this paper the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions is referred to as the Committee, and the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions is referred to as the Report.
Turning to the substance of the Report, taking Education White Paper 3’s vision of a transformed higher education system as its starting point, the Report argued that transformation incorporates three elements: policy and regulatory compliance, epistemological change, and institutional culture and the need for social inclusion and suggested that while institutions have gone a long way to achieving regulatory compliance, concerns remain in the areas of policy implementation and the larger questions of transforming curricula and institutional cultures. The urgent need to move beyond policy formulation and to achieve practical, tangible equity goals and to create an observable shift in the cultures of institutions which in many instances, albeit difficult to define, and sometimes barely perceptible ways, continue to legitimise the subordination of the disabled, women and black people, is widely embraced in the sector. If there is a tension, it lies in the difference between those who are concerned to stress that these processes, if they are to be genuine and far-reaching, are slow processes which are necessarily built on multiple fronts and in subtle ways informed by conceptually complex debates, and those who see in this line of reasoning an attempt to excuse lack of institutional will and an unacceptably slow pace of change.

With respect to the key challenges related to staff and student equity and development, it is acknowledged that South Africa’s HEIs remain predominantly white and male in their leadership and professoriate. Post-graduate programmes, particularly in certain faculties and disciplines, remain male-dominated and disproportionately white. What this means is that programmes to transform institutional cultures along with practical measures aimed at redress have not yet been successful in creating a climate in which both men and women and both black and white students and staff can flourish and succeed in equal measure. Changing this picture, it is acknowledged, requires more than simply the implementation of narrow policy targets. The complex terrain of institutional culture and subtle racism and sexism are often the unseen matrix upon which discriminatory practices and experiences are founded and perpetuated. This terrain is difficult to chart and, as a result, difficult to traverse. Often the interventions aimed at making an impact at this level are disparate and may seem small and ineffectual. Institutions nevertheless stress that their efforts to pay attention to the lived experiences of staff and students and to the myriad small ways in which slights, insults and prejudices can act to mould experience with discriminatory results need to be supported and encouraged. While programmes whose effects are seemingly small and long-term may not make news headlines, it is important that institutions be encouraged to do that which is meaningful and based on sound analysis of the ways in which racism and sexism operate rather than feeling compelled to adopt grandiose plans that may in the end have less real impact.

With respect to governance, many of the institutional responses to the Report sound a cautionary note concerning the extent to which the Report at times seems to suggest firstly, a one-size-fits-all approach to solving governance challenges and secondly, advocates direct intervention in ways that might contravene the autonomy of institutions of higher learning. Here again, the judicious balancing of autonomy with accountability emerges as a recurring theme. For some, it is impossible for higher education institutions to fulfil their social responsibility to foster a critical citizenry unless they are deeply autonomous. For others, behind the call for autonomy to be recognised lies a hidden agenda for perpetuating discrimination and obstructing change. Every difference of emphasis and view expressed in the institutional responses, ultimately relates to this wider and often unvoiced tension.

Wide-ranging measures to foster transformation, the elimination of discrimination and the achievement of social cohesion have been adopted in multiple arenas across the sector. These include, for instance, the emergence of an anti-racism network which incorporates institutions across the country, a variety of awareness raising initiatives and diversity training interventions, institutional charters, seminars and workshops. Measures aimed at staff equity and development include interventions such as salary supplements, the creation of additional posts, the incorporation of equity targets into managers’ performance contracts, training programmes, career advice, research mentoring and assistance, buddy systems, job shadowing, ‘grow-your-own-timber’ projects and the more nuanced use of exit interviews to establish greater insight into the reasons why some of these programmes might not succeed in achieving the goal of retaining black staff. Measures such as student leadership training, mentoring projects and values charters are being employed at many institutions with a view to addressing transformation at the level of student living. A variety of measures aimed at language and epistemological transformation have been employed around the country including the use of regional African languages for marketing and administration purposes, African language courses for staff and students, the provision of materials in African languages, the emergence of African languages as credit bearing courses in professional degrees such as Pharmacy, the development of African language glossaries and text translations, the infusion of work-integrated learning and indigenous knowledge into formal curricula, as well as ongoing innovation and research into teaching and learning.

There is wide agreement across the sector concerning the inadequacy of existing measures to address the needs of students and staff with disabilities but there are instances of special units having been created at some institutions, such as resource centres for students whose hearing is impaired, and some have representative structures for students with disabilities. Student access and achievement is being addressed through wide-ranging measures aimed at improving access to higher education.
education for students from disadvantaged circumstances as well as improving their chances of success once access has been attained. These include for instance writing centres, supplemental instruction and a variety of retention projects. With respect to governance, institutions have pointed out that new positions have emerged on many campuses such as that of transformation manager, that institutional forums are indeed functioning well at some institutions, so the idea of universal malaise is inaccurate and transformation charters and frameworks have acted as a catalyst for debate and the generation of wider understanding at several institutions.

The institutional responses to the Report, on the whole, acknowledge that more can and should be done. However, as the Report itself points out, much of what needs to be done is inevitably resource intensive. Building facilities in residences and lecture theatres for disabled learners costs money. Research to enable institutions to proceed with curriculum and knowledge innovation in ways that are informed by empirical investigation into the impact of existing innovations as well as by theoretically rich and complex analysis of the underlying assumptions and implications of such programmes remains underfunded. The skills that are needed to build cultures of anti-racism in administrative structures, in residences, the sporting and cultural arena as well as in teaching and learning are not present in the degree to which they are required and again, the development of these skills and the capacity to train and educate others in meaningful ways, will take an injection of resources. The HEIs have been concerned then, in their responses to the Report to point to the need for a dynamic interaction with the Ministry concerning ways in which their transformation efforts can be supported and resourced as well as monitored and evaluated.
In March 2008, the then Minister of Education, Mrs Naledi Pandor MP announced that she was establishing a Ministerial Committee to “investigate discrimination in public higher education institutions, with particular focus on racism and to make appropriate recommendations to combat discrimination and to promote social cohesion.” The Committee, chaired by University of Cape Town academic, Prof Crain Soudien, not only had the authority of the Minister to undertake the investigation, it also was endowed with resources to undertake the probe, supported by expertise from the department, and constituted by some of the finest minds that our country could offer. The infamous Reitz Koshuis racism incident at the University of Free State roused the Minister to action in a bid to get to the bottom of racism and other forms of discrimination at university campuses across the country.

It was significant that the Minister of Education had not consulted with Vice Chancellors of higher education institutions, or with HESA, nor did she consult with Chairpersons of Council ahead of making the announcement. Neither did it appear that the Minister had envisaged a role for the executive heads of higher education institutions in which the probe was to be undertaken, save that of facilitating the work of the Committee in its visits, access to documentation and interested stakeholders within institutions.

Some of us found it curious that the Minister had not deemed it appropriate to refer the matter of the Reitz incident to the Chapter Nine constitutional institutions like the South African Human Rights Commission or the Public Protector jointly or severally, which were endowed with investigative powers and the possibility of the enforcement of their recommendations, to give effect to the Constitution. The Committee so established, not being a judicial or Presidential commission did not have the powers that would have been available to it under the Commissions Act. The result was that the Ministerial Committee had only limited capability to assess evidence and establish the facts.

There were therefore two major flaws of the Ministerial Committee: one, that it did not have authority in law to compel witnesses and assess evidence, and its findings could only be in the nature of “advice” to the Minister; and two, that it was not endowed with the means to pierce the veil of institutional autonomy and academic freedom that are constitutionally guaranteed.

Coincidentally to the Minister’s initiative, HESA addressed the Reitz Matter at its meeting of the Board of Directors held at Wits in March and resolved to establish a Task Team to advise Vice Chancellors and establish a strategy to deal with matters of discrimination and the imperatives of transformation at higher education institutions in South Africa.

The Task Team became immediately aware of the Minister’s initiative but proceeded on the understanding that ultimately, the Vice Chancellors bore executive responsibility for the establishment of a climate conducive to academic excellence, and for upholding and implementing public and Council policies. The HESA project was mindful of the delicate matter of institutional autonomy but proceeded on the understanding that HESA had committed itself to self-regulation as its founding objective. It was our view that the Vice Chancellors’ programme could only reinforce the Minister’s agenda and benefit higher education in general. A community of practice made up of transformation executives at higher education institutions was also established to accompany the process.

The Final Report of the Ministerial Committee (the Soudien Report) was released for public comment in November 2008.
Institutions were also requested to by the newly established Ministry of Higher Education and Training in 2009 to respond to the findings of the Soudien Report. HESA also undertook a study of the report and urged institutions to make appropriate responses. The responses were then refined into a comprehensive report that gives a sector-wide response to the findings of Soudien.

There are however a few matters that are essential to point out as we frame the Soudien Report. First, the report must be welcomed by all higher education practitioners. It attempts to give the first comprehensive overview of the challenges of discrimination and social cohesion at higher education institutions in our country. Viewed from the pronouncements of the new Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, MP it appears that the Report also serves to shape the policy of the new department of transformation in higher education. This is an important report.

Second, by its own admission, the report has glaring limitations. It does not purport to present the social science, social policies and higher education policy issues with any vigour. Sometimes its evidentiary value is suspect. It is therefore easy to take "potshots" at aspects of its analyses. But that would be to miss the point. It is surely not to paint a picture of endemic pathology and chronic disequilibrium at higher education institutions in the country.

The report should be the subject of discussion, debate and engagement in all our institutions. It could form the basis for exploring the character of race and gender discrimination at our universities, for understanding racism, and for seeking a common or shared value system and shaping an inclusive academic community.

It is hoped that the report will not descend into a culture of homogenization. Diversity is the soul of the university. Universities have a variety of missions and they state their purposes differently. That is to be expected. Such visions are often shaped by their history, by ideology and by their respective academic merits. Some of these matters may never, and perhaps, should never be done away with. Perhaps, South Africa will get to the point where historically black universities are not simply distinguished by their historical disadvantage but by their determination to advance black people as rightful heirs of the intellectual heritage of our country. So also, Afrikaans universities do not cease to be Afrikaans in ethos simply by ceasing to teach and conduct social discourse in the language. The truth is that what is Afrikaans is more than mere language but a way of life and a manner of being and thought that has become ingrained into the very fabric of some of these institutions. Equally, academic merit should hardly ever be judged solely on the basis of rankings and tables but also on the caliber of the university's products in research, contributions to public policy, its graduates in public life, commerce and industry and in the extent of intellectual prowess. There should be nothing untoward about a university defining itself as the "academic home of the Left", or to become a university shaped by its commitment to rural development, or the advancement of science and technology etc.

And yet South Africa must never be unmindful of the challenges the country faces in ensuring the revitalization of the university. This is not only about the real threat facing the country with regard to the paucity of established scholars as many are set to retire in the foreseeable future; not only about the fact that universities are not producing, attracting and retaining a sufficient cadre of scholars devoted to academic life as a career. Besides, far too many students who enter university quit far too early, many without completing any qualification, and many more after the first degree. The human resource challenges facing higher education, it must surely be agreed, can never be met in an environment of perceived discriminatory treatment and alienation of any section of our population. The challenge we face therefore is to establish and remain good universities in the best meaning of that word: A call to a higher intellectual life; to a higher form of service to humanity.
Pathways to a Diverse and Effective South African Higher Education System

Strategic Framework
2010 | 2020

Pathways to a Diverse and Effective South African Higher Education System outlines HESA’s vision for higher education via five strategic focus areas that have been prioritised by HESA for the next decade. Download the full document at www.hesa.org.za
Transforming Transformation
A University of Fort Hare Perspective

The disjointed approach to transformation in higher education which is associated with discontinuities has led to a situation where, thirteen years after the White Paper on Transformation of Higher Education, and ten years after the National Plan on Higher Education, we are still engaged in debates about meeting the targets of transformation. These policies set a vision for transformation amidst a culture that militated against it. There lacks a coherent approach to this major priority in our reconstruction and development programme, leading to different interpretations as to what it actually means. The higher education summit in April 2010 will need to bring some sense of coherence to the process of transformation. This input will deal with the matter from the perspective of social cohesion and academic practices. In its introduction, The White Paper states clearly that the country “requires that all existing practices, institutions and values are viewed anew and rethought in terms of their fitness for the new era”. The transition has been too long and we now have to transform transformation.

The persistent challenges facing the higher education landscape, a space mandated to drive transformation, call for new ways of seeing. The picture of a space driven by academic freedom and the exuberance of learning and teaching, where knowledge generation permeates institutional capillaries, answering developmental questions and enriching our social and environmental justice vocabulary, can at times be as elusive as a mirage. This is true for universities in South Africa as elsewhere on the globe. In addition, the public discourse that should be guided by universities for social cohesion to be anchored in emerging national identities is almost non-existent. Instead, a fragmented landscape is reproducing fragmentation, inequalities and existing power relations that assign benefits unequally. We, therefore, need to look afresh at transformation and consider carefully how institutional practices and cultures are reproduced and what options are available to us to disrupt those cultures and practices that militate against transformation.

These disruptions need to be induced as a matter of urgency given the central role universities play in the national life of our society. The competing demands of ‘cultivating humanity’ and social cohesion on the one hand, whilst developing the necessary human skills for growth and development on the other, are tensions that require careful manoeuvring. Higher education, it seems, is best placed as the moderator between various sets of economic, political and social demands as it strives to achieve the development of a seamless post-school education and training system with particular emphasis on skills development and the development of a critical citizenry.

The University of Fort Hare experience is not only in consonance with the Soudien report, but goes beyond our conventional conception of transformation … it is about transforming transformation or, developing a new sense of what transformation may mean and how its associated activities can be implemented. Inclusive of leadership, governance, management and student and academic experience, what emerges from our university is that institutional practices and cultures are not simply deeply entrenched, but these practices lead to structuration of those who act upon it, reproducing existing patterns of institutional behaviours. This process of structuration needs to be disrupted through a process of interrupting practices to change those overarching structures.

On a governance and management level the processes of interruption have commenced, whilst deep curriculum renewal initiatives are taking shape. Coupled with strategies to enhance
student and academic experience, we are also implementing the Life, Knowledge, Action programme – the Grounding Programme (LKA/GP). This is a first year 16-credit semester programme that can be described as a transdisciplinary teaching and learning experience based on a just, humanising and collaborative pedagogy that builds on students’ knowledge as a way of developing compassionate, socially-engaged, critical and responsible citizens. Its genesis lies in the reflexive capacities and inclinations of the university. It is founded on the principles of Africanisation, ubuntu, dialogue, community service, critical thinking and social engagement. In order to recreate the university as a community of engagement and dialogue, the course operates on four pedagogical levels. The central unit of the course is a self-managed group of six students, called Umzi (home), supported by trained student facilitators called abakhwezeli (keepers of the fire). Five imizi (homesteads) make one ikhaya (home), supported by trained student facilitators called abakhwezeli (keepers of the fire). Four amakhaya (homes) make up a village. In these sessions, members of amakhaya do groupwork, watch video clips, read articles, present poems and raise core issues related to a theme and debate, whilst reflecting on the issues arising. The LKA/GP is charting new, transdisciplinary curriculum and pedagogical constructions that can respond to a wide range of societal problems inclusive of scientific, environmental, political and social challenges. Ultimately, the emergence of a socially-engaged youth, capable of constituting a critical citizenry and competent and confident enough to authentically generate, engage with and apply knowledge across disciplinary boundaries, is the primary objective of the LKA/GP.

In essence, by focussing on “disrupting practices”, the processes whereby structures construct behaviour is counterbalanced, and human agency is advanced. This allows individuals and groups to find their own sovereign operational space to take the mandate of universities and the imperatives of transformation forward. We have, as recommended in the Soudien Report, commenced to “revisit transformation issues in higher education and to move from its cruder and simplistic manifestations to a far deeper understanding which straddle pedagogy and curriculum, institutional cultures, democratisation of higher education and its role in development”. Of course, we still have a long way to go as well.
Nurturing the New Society and Building 21st Century South African Universities

I have puzzled for some time now over the question of how we respond to the call of the Constitution to nurture the New Society whilst building a higher education institution of the 21st Century. The simple answer may well be, by becoming responsive to the society within which you are located and by advancing universal values. The latter is, among others, about academic freedom, institutional democracy, ideological plurality, human solidarity, and a cosmopolitan identity. The former, in the South Africa of today, is about delivering on the human resource needs of the country, enhancing research, in terms of numerical output and relevance for addressing the problems of the society, and by nurturing a non-racial cosmopolitan environment so as to facilitate a common national citizenship. And this has to be undertaken within a sustainable financial model otherwise the resultant crisis of failing to do so will compromise the institution’s ability to deliver on these goals.

In my institution, the University of Johannesburg (UJ), we have tried with some success, and even setbacks, to advance on all of these fronts. Obviously this has been challenging given the fact that we are a new institution which has had to deal with all of the administrative and managerial burdens that come with any merger. But UJ’s academic community, and my colleagues and I, decided very early on that we would not allow these necessary administrative and managerial burdens to detract from our fundamental responsibility to become responsive to our location and to deliver on our obligations on the teaching, research and identity fronts. In this regard, we have continued in our first five years to produce, annually, about 10,000 graduates for the South African economy. Our research has increased by about 30% in the last four years, and our footprint in international journals has grown significantly. We anticipate further advances on these fronts in coming years.

And so today, the University of Johannesburg reflects the polyglot nature of the new South Africa through its coming together of diverse ethnic groups, cultures, traditions and academic legacies. In many respects the university now symbolises the ambitions of our society for a more inclusive than elite university, a next generation than a Middle Ages university, a reflexive than frozen university, a critical than obedient university; one that, as Colin Bundy puts it, serves the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy and that plays a major role in nurturing a democratic, just, civilised and inclusive society.

But perhaps most importantly we have done this within the institutional framework of building a non-racial university: our demographics increasingly reflect our society, our academic recruitment and behaviour transcends the racial and ideological identities of our past, and our policies while directed at achieving demographic representivity nevertheless is targeted at all of our population, sending important institutional signals that all of our citizens have a place in our institution’s future. So too our programme of renewal and development of our historically black Soweto campus, as well as our ambitious New Generation Scholars Programme are examples that demonstrate that it is possible to simultaneously achieve these multiple goals: advance teaching and build research within the framework of a non-racial cosmopolitan institutional identity.

Yet many institutions in our society including our universities, both in the recent past and in the present, implicitly believe that this cannot be done. Or we take the easier path of undertaking our roles within the institutional framework of the racialised constructs of our past. Thus, race prejudice continues to live on because we allow race to be a determining factor in our decision-making and behaviour. For example, how is it that racialised residences
could be in place so many years after our democratic transition? Our answer will obviously be that it was easier not to ruffle feathers, and that students from all sides seemed to have preferred the situation. But even if this were true, it is the equivalent of allowing the “morbid remains” of the Old Society and the antithesis of the New Society to continue because it was simpler than challenging it. Yet if we are blind to the long-term consequences of flaws such as these, the case for justice is abandoned.

But racialised residences were not the exception and should therefore not be singled out. There are many other instances of racialised teaching arrangements where language is the veil, and even of racialised campuses where separate but equal appears to reign, and where we have forgotten or refuse to recognize that not only is this impossible to sustain, but also that this undermines the emergence of a cosmopolitan non-racial citizenship.

Bluntly put, racialised universities produce racially oriented or racist citizens.

If we are serious about our Constitution and the obligations it imposes on us, then, we must respond to, and be held accountable to, the call to nurture the New Society, while advancing teaching, learning and research.
Input from Vice-Chancellor and Principal
Prof Errol Mandla Tyobeka
Tshwane University of Technology

Transformation: From Technikon to University of Technology

It’s been twelve years since the Higher Education Act and the White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation came into effect. Its intention was to “overcome the fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency which are the legacy of the past, and create a learning society which releases the creative and intellectual energies of all our people towards meeting the goals of reconstruction and development.”

It’s also been nine years since the National Plan for Higher Education was rolled out to give effect to the vision for the transformation of the higher education system as outlined in the Education White Paper 3. The intention was to provide “an implementation framework” and “the strategic interventions and levers necessary for the transformation of the higher education system.”

One of these levers was the mergers. The mergers were intended to “reduce duplication and overlap in programme and service provision”; “to enhance responsiveness to regional and national needs for academic programmes, research and community service” and to “help build academic and administrative capacity”.

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

It’s been six years since Tshwane University of Technology emerged from the merger of apartheid legacy institutions (Pretoria Technikon, Technikon Northern Gauteng and Technikon North West) with a promise for “fundamental change” leading to the “formation of new organisation forms and structures” as well as the establishment “of new visions and missions”. Universities of Technology (UoTs) were formerly known as Technikons and they evolved through a different historical route to universities. With the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 bringing all higher education institutions under one umbrella, the then Committee for Technikon Principals argued not only for the change of name but for the different role played by technikons to continue and to be strengthened as part of the transformation agenda.

CHALLENGES

The transformation of Technikons to UoTs has occurred. But this transformation also required the UoTs to transform their academic programmes, research and community service, without mission drift; and to assist in ensuring that the ideals of the White Paper 3 and the National Plan for Higher Education are achieved. These institutions have, however, found themselves faced with a barrage of challenges:

Infrastructure

The infrastructure mostly acquired by the UoTs has not been consumerate with the new role they have had to play. While the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has made substantial efforts to improve and revitalise the infrastructure through Institutional Operating Plan funding and Efficiency and Infrastructure Funding, more is required to ensure that the ideal of producing quality graduates is achieved.

Research capacity development

In South Africa, and the world, research is recognised as playing a key role in the production, advancement and dissemination of knowledge and the development of high-level human resources. The White Paper also argues that “research is the principal tool for creating new knowledge” and that the “dissemination of knowledge through teaching and collaboration in research tasks” are the principal tools for developing academic and research staff through postgraduate study and training”. 
Research engenders the values of inquiry, critical thinking, creativity and open-mindedness, which are fundamental to building a strong, democratic ethos in society. It creates communities of scholars, who build networks across geographic and disciplinary boundaries. It makes possible the growth of an innovation culture in which new ideas, approaches and applications increase the adaptive and responsive capacity of our society, thereby enhancing both our industrial competitiveness and our ability to solve our most pressing social challenges.

UoTs, as universities, are no longer immune from this and have a challenge to build this capacity considering that, as Technikons, it was never their mandate. It is no surprise then that UoTs continue to maintain their mandate to be the catalysts in career-focused programmes but are also developing their research capacity in certain niche areas. While UoTs are setting aside their own resources and, with support from the DHET, there is need to develop a concerted effort or a research development plan with additional funding from DHET.

To some extent, UoTs have dramatically improved their research capacity by embarking on a massive recruitment drive both locally and internationally for staff with doctorate or extensive research experience. This poses another challenge whereby the possibility of mission drift is likely to occur. Hence, UoTs have to find ways and means of balancing their core function: delivering career-focused programmes and supporting that function with research.

Staff qualification

The apartheid legacy has created super higher education institutions that boast well-qualified academics at the expense of the overall higher education system. Hence there is a need both to improve the qualification profile of academics while developing the next generation of academics and researchers. It is however, not surprising to note that only 32% of academics in higher education have doctoral degrees and of those who are research active, the majority are aging.

For UoTs the situation is even worse taking given that teaching at a former Technikon favoured industry experience over higher qualifications. To complicate matters, a substantial number were even promoted to professors as a way of retaining them in the system. Now that the role of UoTs has been defined not only to focus on teaching but research as well, there is high demand for staff to acquire qualifications such as Master and Doctorate degrees.

UoTs have to strategically respond to this challenge by developing intervention strategies that ensure staff meet, at least, the minimum requirements while at the same time making provision for continuous development. The investments required to implement these strategies, and the time required to complete them, are onerous to say the least.

Quality of students

The emphasis on diversity in the White Paper is based on the implicit recognition that it is a precondition for achieving the two key policy goals for the transformation of the higher education system: (i) increased and broadened participation to “accommodate a larger and more diverse student population”; and (ii) responsiveness to societal needs in terms of knowledge and human resource development.

While increasing the participation rate is important, there is a need also to focus on the composition of the student body. This is one of the central goals of the White Paper in order to transform the higher education system. This is also linked to the imperative to address the inequalities of the past and to eradicate all forms of unfair discrimination in relation to access and equality of opportunity within higher education for historically and socially disadvantaged groups.

We are also concerned about the significant decline of retention and graduate rates given the need for our system to produce more skilled individuals. This poses another problem for the sector to ensure that growth in enrolments is in line with growth in graduates. We are then required to ensure that we minimize drop-out rates by developing strategies to retain students. Our failure to contain these will contribute to a huge waste of resources, both financial and human.

Public perception

While UoTs have been in existence for more than six years, the public has not yet fully understood their value and significance. At the beginning of each year, UoTs are faced with long queues of prospective students who have not been accepted at their institutions of choice: traditional universities. Obviously there are those who have career-focused programmes as their first choice, but overall it does indicate that according to public perception UoTs are perceived as secondary to traditional universities. It is necessary for the sector and the DHET to work together to ensure that the different types of institutions have a role to play in the development of human resources of South Africa.

CONCLUSION

With the establishment of a separate DHET, there is a tremendous amount of relief in the sector, especially from the UoTs, because it suggests that more attention will be devoted to the sector. However, it remains a challenge to find resources considering the competing mandates of our Government to ensure service delivery.
Every age adopts an image of itself - a certain horizon, however blurred and imprecise, which somehow unifies its whole experience” (Laclau, 1990:3)

The Education White Paper of 1997 paved the way for “transformation” of South African Higher Education. This entailed the establishment of a South African tertiary sector that keeps on re-viewing and re-thinking all its existing practices, institutions and values in terms of its fitness for purpose as per its mandate towards contributing towards the social, cultural and economic development of the country. In particular, the White Paper called for the “development of a learning society which can stimulate, direct and mobilise the creative and intellectual energies of all the people towards meeting the challenge of reconstruction and development”.

In reflecting on progress in the last decade, it is clear that the definition given to transformation and its implementation by and large still focus mainly on its socio-political aspects. In popular speak, transformation is equity and access. And although these concepts are very important, they have not moved the sector forward in terms of its qualitative and quantitative outputs. The more difficult aspects of transformation, such as quality, success, accountability and efficiency, have not received the attention they and the country deserve.

The North-West University (NWU), coming into existence in 2004 as the result of the merger process, decided to view and implement transformation in a comprehensive way. In this, the NWU strived to meet the goals of the White Paper and achieve the aims of the merger. The NWU therefore adopted a tailor-made business model to optimise its core business. The university is managed by means of a unitary multi-campus structure, with three campuses and an institutional office as business units. From the outset, the university Council interpreted transformation as a healthy balance between accountability, efficiency and quality on the one hand and equity, development and social cohesion on the other hand.

In practical terms, this approach extends transformation to the following:

- The core business of the university (teaching-learning, research and implementation of expertise – the latter both community directed and commercial), including adopting a more responsive programme qualification mix to address the skills needs of the country and aligning the programmes offered on the various campuses.

- The demographic composition of staff through realistic employment equity targets.

- The composition of the student body, by improving not only access but also success and quality.

- The funding of the university, to be less dependent on government funding and generating more “own” funds (research, patents and commercialisation).

- Management and employment philosophy and practices (including tender and acquisition procedures).

- Being more locally relevant and globally competitive, including internationally accepted financial and management procedures and strategies.

Input from Vice-Chancellor
Dr Theuns Eloff
North-West University

Perspectives on Transformation in Higher Education

• Continuous and flexible adaptation of especially procedures and “organisational culture” to adapt to fast-changing national and global circumstances.

The overall objective of this approach was to accelerate the momentum of the merger-integration process towards increased unity, quality and equity. It is, however, acknowledged that this will only be attained if the minds and behaviour of the NWU stakeholders have been transformed and aligned with the vision, values and mission of the university. In this regard, strong emphasis was put on values, a Human Rights Committee is operating and a Transformation Oversight Subcommittee of Council was established. Council also established an ad-hoc Transformation Task Team to engage with the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions.

As a result, the NWU will hold a two-day internal Transformation Colloquium on 19 and 20 April 2010 attended by 150 internal stakeholders. The objectives of this colloquium are to assess how far we have progressed on the transformation path, to align our model in the light of this assessment, to develop a transformation compact for the short to medium-term and to promote diversity awareness among key internal stakeholders at the NWU.

While not completed, this approach to transformation has already yielded positive results. In terms of the NWU’s contribution to South African society, it is currently delivering the 3rd most graduates and diplomates in South Africa with almost 13 000 degrees and diplomas awarded each year (including 7 000 off campus). The undergraduate success rate for 2009 was more than 83%, and the graduation rate stood at 26% (as percentage of total heads). With regard to research, the publication outputs have grown by 82.5% from 275 in 2004 to 502 in 2008. The NWU is attracting more and more quality students: in 2010, the Mafikeng Campus had 8 000 first year applicants, of which we accepted a record 2 000.

In conclusion: the ideologically narrow view of transformation has not served the country or its universities well. We need to broaden this urgently, and also address the more difficult issues of success, quality and excellence as part of the transformation agenda. In this, a balanced approach is necessary: access and success, excellence and development, equity and efficiency. Otherwise, “transformation” will be shown by history as yet another socio-political slogan, instead of taking us as a sector and a country forward.
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- Best practice in Internationalisation
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- Growing & Retaining Talent

IMPORTANT DATES:
Early bird Registration - 1 May to 30 June
Late Registration - 1 July to 15 August

PROGRAMME OUTLINE
28 August 2010 : Excursions
29 August 2010 : Pre-conference workshops and Student Conference
30 & 31 August 2010 : Conference days
1 September 2010 : Visits to South African Institutions

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