



UNIVERSITIES SOUTH AFRICA

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK, 2015 – 2019



Adopted by the HESA Board of Directors on 22 October 2014

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR Universities South Africa, 2015 – 2019

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities South Africa is the representative organisation for South Africa's public universities. It has 25 members, which collectively represent all public universities in South Africa. Its primary purpose is to create an environment in which universities can prosper and thrive in South Africa; thus enabling universities to contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of our country. It does so, mainly by:

- a. Lobbying for the interests of universities and policy development;
- b. Advocating and campaigning on behalf of South Africa's universities;
- c. Commissioning and disseminating research on key issues with implications for universities;
- d. Coordinating sector-wide engagement on major issues;
- e. Facilitating effective dialogue among universities and with government, the private sector; parliament; and other stakeholders on issues affecting universities and their well-being;
- f. Providing value-adding services to member institutions;
- g. Being the voice of universities;
- h. Providing opportunities for the development of higher education leadership and management capacity;
- i. Improving levels of operational effectiveness and efficiency through creating opportunities for the development of 'best practice' models;
- j. Strengthening the creation of a Higher Education Governance System based on the principles of cooperative governance, institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and institutional accountability; and
- k. Providing university leaders with a variety of forums for discussing and exchanging ideas on matters of common interest.

This Strategic Framework covers the five year period, **2015 to 2019**. In broad terms, the Framework articulates:

- How the interests of the public university sector will be promoted by continuing to position Universities South Africa as a highly respected and influential voice of universities in South Africa;
- The key goals and strategic objectives to be pursued by Universities South Africa with a view to giving effect to its broader mission; and
- The broad approaches and set of actions that Universities South Africa has to take in order to realise its goals and the strategic objectives.

2. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Universities play an important part in the intellectual life of the country and have a major impact on the social, economic and cultural development and well-being of our nation. Through lobbying and advocacy work, Universities South Africa aims to ensure that the public university sector has the optimum conditions in which to flourish and continue to produce and disseminate knowledge to advance national development and human civilisation. The organisation helps to ensure that:

- Quality undergraduate; post-graduate and post-doctoral teaching takes place in the 25 public institutions;
- Adequate resources are allocated to universities to produce knowledge and research that help solve our national, regional, continental and global challenges;
- Academically deserving students gain access to our universities regardless of their social, cultural or economic background;
- Universities contribute significantly to the socio-economic and cultural development of South Africa;
- Levels of institutional governance, and operational effectiveness and efficiency are continuously being improved;
- Our higher education policy is evidence-based, informed by research of the highest quality;
- The pool of higher education managers and leaders is enhanced and that the profile of higher education leadership is transformed in terms of the country's demographic realities;
- Our university sector is sufficiently internationalised to benefit from a mobile global student and academic talent pool, and attract and retain top academics and students to our universities; and
- The value of the universities to the economy of South Africa is understood and appreciated.

3. CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT

The post-apartheid era in South Africa has spawned much analysis and commentary about the challenges facing universities in a changing world. Some changes are social, economic, political and cultural, with a direct bearing on the performance of the university sector as a whole. Some of the challenges facing the university sector include the following:

3.1 *Access and Success:* Whilst emphasis was put on widening student participation within the university sector in the past years, universities should equally provide students with opportunities and experiences that will foster their success. It has been widely acknowledged that graduation rates in South Africa's public university system are too low in comparison to other systems elsewhere (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014: 25). The CHE Report: *A proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa* (2013) has concluded that "...despite there being a small intake that has good academic potential, performance in higher education is marked by high levels of failure and dropout." For example:

- "Only 35% of the total intake, and 48% of contact students, graduate within five years"; and
- "Access, success and completion rates continue to be racially skewed, with completion rates of white students being on average 50% higher than those of African students".

While acknowledging that such challenges tend to occur to a greater or lesser degree in all university systems when they "massify", the challenge for the higher education sector is to devise effective strategies to match

equity in student access by equity in student success. A related challenge is that graduating students produced by our universities need to be prepared for effective participation in a continuously changing world of work and be able to participate constructively in providing solutions to the many social and economic problems faced in our country and further afield.

3.2 *Decline in state funding for universities:* Since 1994, government's support for higher education has been significant in nominal terms. The funding of universities has been on an upward trend, from **R11 billion** in 2006 to **R26 billion** in 2013. While the increase in funding are welcomed, it should be noted that higher education expenditure has been declining alarmingly in student per capita terms. It is also declining as a percentage of the Government's budget and of gross domestic product (GDP) to the extent that South Africa's proportion of higher education spending of GDP is now more or less equal to that of sub-Saharan countries as a whole. This decline in Government subsidies has put pressure on the other two sources of income available to universities, i.e. tuition fee income and third stream income (typically research grants, contract income, donations etc). While universities have increased levels of third stream income to some degree these increases by no means compensate for the significant increase in student numbers and the proportional declines in Government subsidies, leaving universities in increasingly worsening financial positions. Although the allocation to the NSFAS is set to increase from R5.1 billion in 2013 to R6.6 billion in 2016/17, the annual student protests at some universities highlight the inescapable fact that the allocation is not adequate to meet the funding needs of all the students eligible for National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) loans and bursaries. Apart from the inability of NSFAS to fund the increasing number of eligible students already in the system, three other factors are likely to compound the funding challenge of universities in the medium to long-term:

- a. The *White Paper on Higher Education and Training* (ibid) sets a target of university participation rate of 25% by 2030 (representing an enrolment of around 1.6 million students) through planned growth. It also reaffirms the principle of cost recovery of loans as the basis for a sustainable national student financial aid model despite the fact that historically loan recovery rates have been very low indeed. It further makes a commitment to progressively introduce "free education for the poor in South Africa as resources become available".
- b. The *National Development Plan* (2012) also proposes an increase of gross enrolments from 950,000 in 2010 to 1 620,000 in 2030. The Plan admits that a 'greater understanding within government is required to acknowledge the importance of science and technology and higher education in leading and shaping the future of modern nations' (ibid). Given this acknowledgement, it is becoming self-evident that without such a guaranteed increase in state revenue, attempts at expansion cannot succeed without seriously jeopardising the quality of teaching and learning and research in particular.
- c. The Grade 12 class of 2013 achieved a National Senior Certificate (NSC) pass rate of 78%, the highest since 1994. The number of NSC passes meeting entrance requirements for degree study increased by 60%, and the number of overall passes increased by 32% (DBE, 2014). It is projected that this number of passes will increase in the coming years; the lack of suitable study alternatives for school leavers will result in significant pressure on universities to admit even greater numbers of students.

Sustainable ways through which the projected student enrolment growth in universities will be funded and ensuring that NSFAS support is sustained over time should be found in order to make possible increased participation in higher education to meet both equity, growth and quality targets.

- 3.3 *Building the next generation of academics:* About one fifth of academics in South African universities are due to retire in less than a decade, including nearly half of the professoriate. A major concern is that there are insufficient numbers and poor advancement and succession planning in the existing academic and post-graduate pipelines to replace them (HESA, 2011: 1). A plan which can lay the foundation for the building of the next generation of academics in the system is required urgently.
- 3.4 *Transformation within the university sector:* A transformed university sector is in the best interest of South Africa. Such a sector should evince the four main pillars of transformation -- equity, democracy, efficiency and responsiveness. This is in line with the central goal of the policy framework for the transformation of the higher education system, as outlined in the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (DoE, 1997: 1:14) which underscores producing "...graduates who are not just capable professionals, but also conscious and sensitive intellectuals and critical citizens". The academic programmes of our universities together with their institutional culture and practices must therefore ensure that universities keep ethical questions in sharp focus, and advance a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights (HESA Differentiation Document, 2012).
- 3.5 *Contributing to national and regional development imperatives:* HESA believes that the successful implementation of South Africa's National Development Plan depends significantly on the active participation of universities. Given South Africa's history and context, universities have a multiplicity of goals as set out in the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (ibid). Informed by the priorities of the National Development Plan (2011), universities are called upon to address the development needs of society. Universities also provide the labour market, with ever changing high level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy, while contributing to high level research for development in its broadest sense.
- 3.6 *A differentiated university sector:* For the South African university sector to effectively meet the varied social, economic and cultural development needs of South Africa and the African continent, which range on a continuum from the global to the local, it must evince *diversity* 'in the institutional landscape' and 'its organisational form' and in the universities' institutional missions and mandates. There is no virtue in entirely homogenous universities, or the pursuit of absolute homogeneity, where every university seeks to be the same and to undertake exactly the same functions and has the same purposes. Nor is there any value in universities in a developing country such as South Africa all aspiring to become 'traditional universities' or towards the supposed 'gold standards' of the 'world class' or 'research university.' We believe that a diversity of missions, strengths, and specialisations is what will strengthen the South African university sector as a whole. In order to achieve this, Universities South Africa would engage constructively with the DHET on its draft differentiation policy framework and any subsequent differentiation policy.
- 3.7 *A fluid policy and operating environment for universities:* Since 2009, the legislative, policy and regulatory environment within which universities operate has witnessed unprecedented changes. The Higher Education Act, 1997 has been amended numerous times progressively giving the person of the Minister of Higher Education and Training additional powers to intervene in the affairs of the universities in the name of public accountability. A new set of reporting regulations were introduced for implementation in January 2015 increasing reporting and accountability requirements of the universities to the DHET; and creating an onerous additional administrative burden on universities. A Transformation Oversight Committee was also established to advise the Minister on "policy and strategies for the promotion of transformation" and "produce an annual report on policies and practices impacting on transformation within universities, including both achievements and challenges." Parallel to these developments; the establishment of a post-school system comprising

Universities; Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges; and Community Colleges is anticipated. As the Government's term of office gets into full swing; a tone for the next phase of University policy has seemingly been set for even bigger changes to come as part of "a radical socio-economic transformation" agenda. It can be expected that the current interventionist policy trajectory will continue between 2015 and 2019, creating a possibility for the legislative, policy and regulatory environment to significantly change with far-reaching implications for universities.

Flowing from the above challenges, Universities South Africa should foster a range of capabilities within the sector to respond adequately to these challenges.

4. GOALS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The following goals will be pursued:

Goal 1: Inform and influence the future policy agenda to foster the continued development and strengthening of the South African universities:

- a. Influence the national university policy framework in which South Africa's universities operate in ways that enable them to fulfil their diverse purposes;
- b. Secure a regulatory framework that encourages effective state steering and predictability in reporting and compliance obligations; and
- c. Respond and contribute to the policy debate on the appropriate level of investment required for a long-term, sustainable and internationally competitive higher education system

Goal 2: Develop, and contribute to, policy positions on higher education matters to strengthen teaching and learning, research and community engagement activities:

- a. Develop policy responses that are evidence-based to promote teaching and learning, research, scholarship and community engagement;
- b. Proactively take steps to influence the policy agenda in support of universities and provide compelling arguments that represent the university sector's collective interests;
- c. Develop viable and alternative policy options for potential future consideration by the state informed by emerging priorities and the interests of member institutions and their various stakeholders; and
- d. Communicate the alternative policy options to the broader public on university sector matters.

Goal 3: Support South Africa's universities to effectively perform their core functions of teaching and learning; research and community engagement:

- a. Review and increase the implementation of projects through strategy groups to strengthen sector initiatives in the areas of financing of universities; transformation; research and innovation; teaching and learning; HIV and AIDS; and other emerging issues of relevance to universities.

Goal 4: Provide value-adding services to member institutions:

- a. Initiate and implement projects and programmes that create appropriate conditions for the sustainability of universities including but not limited to: broadband connectivity; graduate destination studies; national site licensing for scholarly journals and other electronic material; building the next generation of academics, strengthening university management and leadership capacity, etc.
- b. Develop best practice guides (to be customised by individual member institutions to their environment) on a range of new policy and regulatory issues including but not limited to consumer protection; protection of personal information; reporting regulations; etc.

Goal 5: Build and strengthen collaboration between Universities South Africa and key stakeholders, including government, parliament, business, the science community and international partners for the pursuance of Universities South Africa's objectives:

- a. Encourage productive, mutually beneficial collaborations between Universities South Africa and Government with respect to policy development;
- b. Facilitate productive; mutually beneficial collaborations between Universities South Africa and Parliament;
- c. Build productive, mutually beneficial collaborations between Universities South Africa and the Business Sector to encourage collaborative research and innovation;
- d. Build productive and mutually beneficial collaborations with the CHE, ASSAf, NRF and other key sector bodies; and
- e. Scale up productive and mutually beneficial collaborations between Universities South Africa and university associations in the rest of Africa and the world.

Goal 6: Support the internationalisation agenda of South Africa's universities:

- a. Actively participate in policy development for the internationalisation of higher education;
- b. Support the South African Government and solicit support from the Government in the implementation of international academic cooperation agreements on a case by case basis; and
- c. Monitor the impact of internationalisation on universities.

5. PRIORITIES

Over the period 2015-2019, Universities South Africa will focus on the following priority areas:

5.1 Lobbying and policy development

In addition to other on-going lobbying and policy development work, the key priorities in this area include: (i) supporting the Government to develop and implement a National Higher Education Plan – a subset of an envisaged Post-school Education and Training Plan; (ii) creating a Higher Education-Government Forum; (iii) facilitating the finalisation of a policy framework on differentiation; (iv) contributing to the effective functioning of the Central Application Service; (v) ensuring productive and regular engagement with Parliament on higher education issues.

5.1.1 Support the government to develop and implement a National Higher Education Plan:

Universities South Africa will support the efforts by Government to develop and implement a National Higher Education Plan during 2015 and 2016 as part of a process to develop a macro plan for Post-school Education and Training System. Such a plan should help shape a compact between universities and the state to address the following:

- Strategies to improve student access, opportunity and success;
- Building the next and creating a new generation of academics;
- Strategies to mobilise state funding for universities (including block grant allocations; NSFAS funding, and other forms of earmarked funding);
- Strategies to improve postgraduate student outputs (increasing the quantity and quality of the outputs) and research outputs broadly;
- Ways to improve academic infrastructure (including research equipment and buildings);
- Transformation within the higher education sector; and
- Differentiation and diversity within the university system.

5.1.2 Create a Higher Education – Government Forum

Universities South Africa should champion the setting up of a high-level forum between universities and Government chaired by either the Deputy President or the Minister of Higher Education and Training; to facilitate an unmediated communication between the Government leadership and the leadership of universities. Such a Forum could:

- Fashion a social contract between universities, the state and society;
- Identify joint catalytic initiatives and develop a targeted state-funded programmes for research and development; and
- Create a platform for universities and the state to engage robustly around the knowledge and graduate needs of our country and continent.

The form, size and shape of the Forum will be discussed with the Ministry of Higher Education and Training.

5.1.3 Facilitate consensus within universities and between universities and the State on a differentiation policy framework

The association adopted a set of principles to underpin a future differentiation policy framework at its meeting in 2012 (HESA 2012). Most of the principles have been included in the DHET's White Paper on Post-school Education and Training (ibid); and the draft policy framework on differentiation (2014) released for public comments. Universities South Africa will play an active role by providing strategic advice to the DHET when finalising the policy framework for implementation.

5.1.4 Influence the establishment of Central Application Service (CAS)

Whilst Universities South Africa supports the establishment of CAS in principle, it will work closely with the DHET to clarify both at conceptual and practical levels, key foundational principles for the system. Universities South Africa will provide strategic advice and support to the DHET throughout the establishment processes, and in particular on matters relating to CAS ownership; an appropriate legal and governance structure; funding model; and operating and delivery model.

5.1.5 Sharpen Universities South Africa's engagements with Parliament

Pro-active engagements with Parliament's Portfolio Committees on a range of matters with implications for the university sector will take priority during this period. An annual seminar with the Higher Education and Training Portfolio Committee will be organised to share perspectives on emerging higher education trends locally and internationally, and the resultant implications for our university sector. This will be followed by a series of round-table discussion with other portfolio committees including the Portfolio Committees on Finance; Standing Committee on Appropriations; on Science and Technology, and on Trade and Industry.

5.2 Campaign for an adequately funded university sector in South Africa

Universities South Africa will campaign for an adequately funded university system in South Africa through a three-pronged strategy, i.e. advocate for a recapitalised NSFAS; actively participate in the development of a revised funding policy framework for universities; and (iii) engage with other Government departments to set aside financial resources to promote research excellence in our universities.

5.2.1 Lobbying for a financially sustainable NSFAS

The challenges facing NSFAS in the short to medium term will undoubtedly have adverse effects on universities in the foreseeable future. Universities South Africa will facilitate engagements between various role players with a view to addressing the multiplicity of challenges facing NSFAS. To this end, Universities South Africa intends to engage the Ministry of Higher Education and Training; National Treasury, NSFAS Board on ways of assisting in overcoming these challenges with a view to finding sustainable solutions to the ongoing student funding crisis.

5.2.2 Contributing to the finalisation of the funding policy for universities

The Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Funding of Universities (2014) lays a basis for the development of a new funding policy to be implemented from 1 April 2019. The DHET will release the draft policy in March/April 2015 for comments, and hopes to finalise the new funding policy in 2016. Given the implications of the new funding policy for universities, Universities South Africa will work to ensure that adequate public funding for universities is maintained, and the current and future challenges of student funding (including NSFAS) are taken into account when finalising the policy framework.

5.2.3 Engaging other Government departments to unlock financial resources for research and related activities

With regard to funding from the Department of Science and Technology to promote research excellence, Universities South Africa will advocate through evidence-based research, the need for the post-graduate funding quantum to be increased in line with the full cost of study at this level. Engagements with other Government departments such as Trade and Industry; Health, Energy; Water Affairs and Environmental Affairs will be prioritised to unlock more resources for the university sector for research and scholarships and bursaries for post-graduate students.

5.3 Transformation within the university sector

Universities South Africa will champion the transformation of the sector. A particular focus will be given to the finalisation of a transformation barometer for the sector to be used as an instrument for gauging the sector's progress in relation to transformation. Related to this, a concerted effort will be made to engage the DHET and DST on the development and implementation of a targeted plan to increase the number of black and female professors in the system. Regular sector-wide engagement platforms will be organised to tackle difficult issues and share promising practices across the sector with a view to promoting inter-institutional collaboration.

5.4 Inform and influence the future agenda of big business to the advantage of universities

The collective research strength of South Africa's universities is an enormous national asset. Such strength enables them to assume a leadership role in facilitating economic growth through research and innovation. In order to build on their research and innovation capacity and expertise, and strong links with leading companies in South Africa's economy, Universities South Africa would consider establishing a Higher Education-Business Forum. Although such a Forum will not be a policy-making body, it could offer a framework and process where leaders from business and universities can engage in a dialogue to improve their mutual understanding and address broad issues such as:

- The changing nature and requirements of the world of work;

- The perceived movement off-shore of Research and Development spend by South companies with dual listing (primary listing offshore and secondary listing in South Africa) and implications for universities;
- The role of higher education and business in combating social exclusion and widening opportunities for all;
- How business and higher education can together tackle some of the major social as well as economic issues of the day; and
- The development of a culture that encourages and rewards enterprise, innovation and life-long learning.

5.5 Support universities in their core missions of teaching, research and community engagements

Through its strategy groups (funding; research and innovation; teaching and learning and transformation) and other initiatives, Universities South Africa will undertake a series of projects and programmes under this broad priority to support the core mission of universities. To this end, the strategy groups will develop and facilitate the implementation of strategies to improve:

- Research and innovation outputs across the sector;
- Teaching and learning and increase throughput rates at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels;
- Mobilisation of resources both from the state and private sector to support the universities;
- The levels and pool of leadership and management capacity within universities;
- Transformation within the higher education sector in line with the goals set in the Education White Paper 3: A Programme of Transformation of Higher Education in South Africa; and.
- The sector's response to HIV and AIDS and related health challenges.

Where appropriate, Universities South Africa will also commission and disseminate research on the issues above to support universities' activities.

5.6 Provide services to Universities South Africa and the university sector

Among services rendered, Universities South Africa will develop and offer sector support and capacity development initiatives to universities; including but not limited to the following areas: HIV and AIDS education, prevention and treatment; Higher Education Leadership and Management; Rural Campuses Connection Project etc. It will endeavour to become a trusted source of information on South African universities and will publish up-to-date information on a wide range of subjects relating to higher education. Universities South Africa will provide accurate and timely briefings to members on developments in the legislative and regulatory environment and where desirable, develop best practice guidelines for universities to better respond to proposed changes.

Related to the above, Universities South Africa will coordinate and support communities of practice in the sector to strengthen cooperation amongst member institutions; and implement sector-wide capacity development initiatives to improve capabilities within the university sector.

5.7 Support the internationalisation agenda of South Africa's universities

The size of our higher education system and continuous and rapid developments and trends in the global higher education landscape today present greater challenges and opportunities for our institutions, policy makers, academics and students. Although South Africa's universities are internationalising to improve their scholarship, research and innovation efforts; the absence of a national macro policy framework limits their growth potential in this regard. Working closely with the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA), Universities South Africa will lobby government to develop and implement an internationalisation policy framework with a view to facilitating the cooperation of our universities and their counterparts in other parts of the world to award joint degrees and engage in joint research projects. A Universities South Africa strategy group on internationalisation will be established.

6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

In order to monitor the implementation of the Strategic Framework, the CEO, in consultation with the Universities South Africa Executive Committee (EXCO), will:

- Develop and implement an annual operational plan to give effect to the priorities in the this Strategic Framework;
- Develop a resource mobilisation plan for the Strategic Framework including an annual budget for the next five years;
- Facilitate the development and Board-sign-off of annual Performance Agreements for each of the Strategy Groups;
- Develop a measurement instrument with clear performance indicators, by which Universities South Africa will on an annual basis assess its own performance over the identified priority areas;
- Report annually on the implementation of the Strategic Framework to the Universities South Africa EXCO and the Board for discussion.

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