

Insight

Higher Education South Africa

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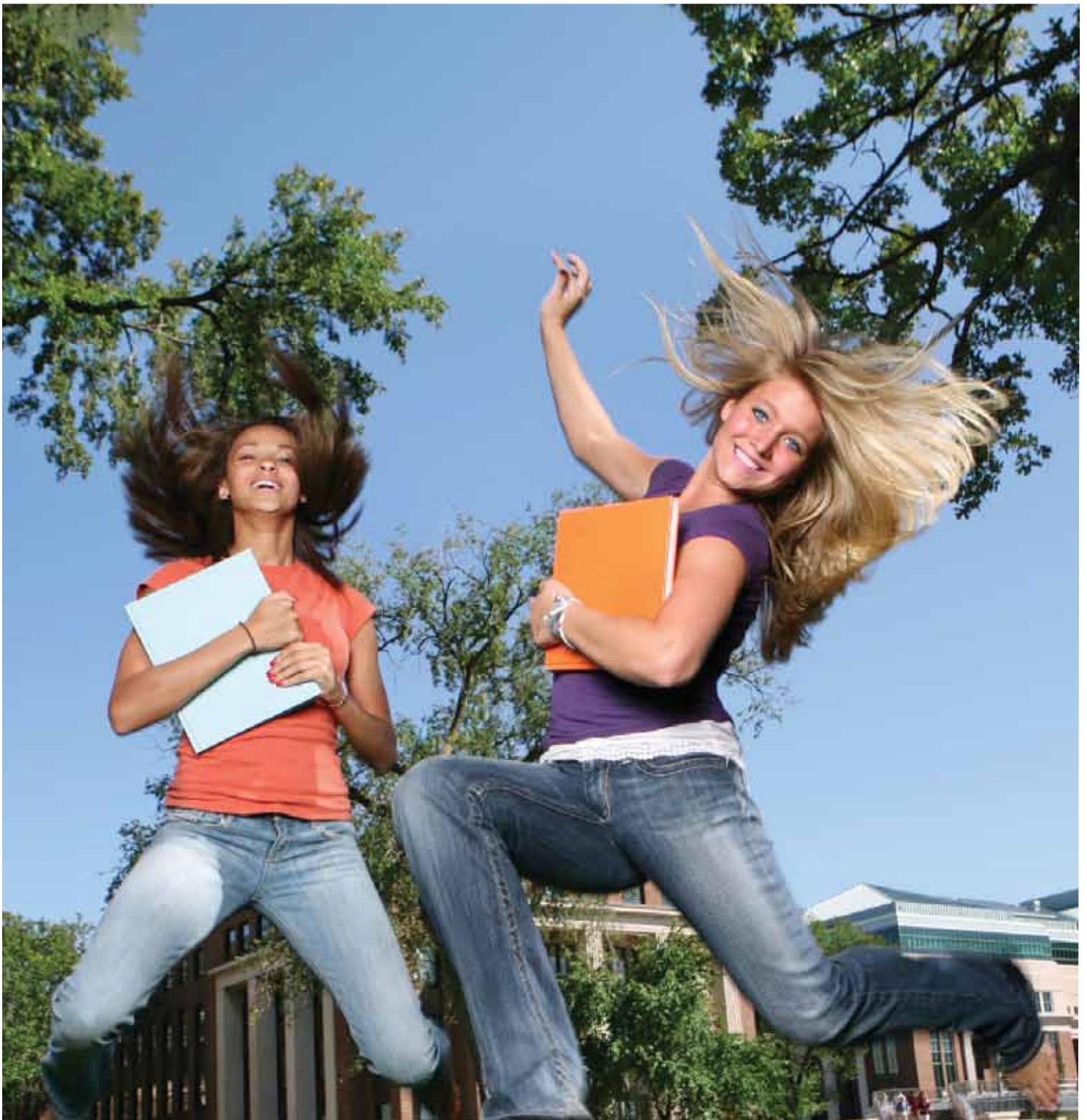
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Promoting student access into Higher Education remains a perennial challenge given the obvious limitation of places that the HEIs have to contend with, and budget allocations (block and earmarked grants) from the Department of Higher Education and Training that do not match increase in student numbers.

*Message from the
Chief Executive
Officer (CEO)*

Integrating the challenges relating to Higher Education, Access and Admissions

South African policy makers have spelt out bold priorities for the Higher Education sector in addressing the inequalities of the past in relation to access into Higher Education and improving graduation and throughput rates within the sector. The *Education White Paper 3 – A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education System* (DoE: 2007: 8) has identified as one of the deficiencies of the Higher Education system as follows:

“There is an inequitable distribution of access and opportunity for students and staff along lines of race, gender, class and geography. There are gross discrepancies in the participation rates of students from different population groups...”

In addition, the *National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa* (DoE: 2001: 6), amongst other objectives, intends to develop a system of Higher Education that will “... promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities.”

Seventeen years into our democracy, the noble policy intents have not always been matched by bold and decisive actions from our institutions



*Prof E Duma
Malaza*

CEO, Higher Education
South Africa

Promoting student access into Higher Education remains a perennial challenge given the obvious limitation of places that the HEIs have to contend with, and budget allocations (block and earmarked grants) from the Department of Higher Education and Training that do not match increase in student numbers. Linked to this, the sector is still grappling with the need to strike a balance between student access and student success evident in high-drop-out rates and low graduation rates. This challenge is compounded by the sudden increase of Grade 12 NSC passes meeting minimum entry requirements for Higher Education studies.

It has become very clear through public and media discourse and general public commentaries that not enough public understanding exists about

the challenges facing Higher Education in the regulation and management of access and admissions into higher education.

In this edition of the HESA newsletter, we interrogate the challenges relating to admissions and the historical and conjectural contexts that have given rise to these challenges. Dr Badat exposes the multi-dimensionality of the challenge and calls upon all the Higher Education Institutions to redouble their efforts in fulfilling the imperatives of equity and redress as espoused in the regulatory and policy framework for Higher Education. On the other hand, Dr Badat posits that there is a major distinction between eligibility and admission into Higher Education. The following contributors have gladly agreed to share their institutional practices in this edition:

- Dr Elmarie van Heerden, Director: Student Development and Support, Tshwane University of Technology
- Mr KC Nemadzivhanani, University Registrar, University of Venda
- Dr Lucas Stoop, University of Johannesburg
- Mr Tinus van Zyl, University of Johannesburg
- Mr Moloko Matlata, Executive Manager, South African College Principals Organisation (SACPO)

Lastly, HESA supports the creation of a post-school education and training system which should provide a greater set of study opportunities for school leavers and believes that a strengthened and expanded FET College sector could ease the pressure of high demand for access into higher education and enhance the prospects of fair and equitable access.

Admissions Office



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Of course, admission policy must be faithful to constitutional ideals and cannot discriminate unfairly.

University access and admissions

Each year our universities find themselves in the throes of conflict related to the admission of students. It is important to clarify certain issues and also identify key problems and challenges in the interests of better public understanding. This article is written in an attempt to provide such clarification.

ADMISSIONS POLICIES

New social imperatives, goals and policies have resulted in changes to admissions policies, criteria, processes and practices at universities. For example, the *Higher Education Act* requires each institution to 'publish the admission *policy* and make it available on request'.

It is important to note that a formal *admissions policy* is different from simply having *admissions criteria and procedures and practices*.

An *admissions policy* needs to reflect the engagement of the University with the apartheid legacy, the current social structure, constitutional, legislative and other social imperatives, and the institution's engagement with the concepts of social equity and redress.

It needs to indicate, in the light of its particular history, its vision and mission, and academic programmes, its admissions criteria, how it proposes to pursue equity and redress at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, including through which specific strategies and mechanisms.

The absence of a formal admissions policy hinders public scrutiny and critical analysis. It also leaves open whether a University has effectively engaged with important issues related to admissions.

Of course, admission policy must be faithful to constitutional ideals and cannot discriminate unfairly. The *Constitution* states that 'to promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.'¹ In similar vein, the *Higher Education White Paper* enunciates 'equity and redress'

as a fundamental principle. It states that 'the principle of equity requires *fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them*.'²

Although this is seldom the case, admissions policies may confine themselves to or privilege academic accomplishment alone. It stands to reason that academic accomplishment must be highly valued and promoted. Still, it is arguable whether academic results must always trump all other considerations when it comes to admissions. This is because where privilege and disadvantage is structured along lines of class, 'race', gender and the like, such an admissions policy could reproduce historical and prevailing social inequalities.

In general, therefore, admissions policies do not (and should not) reduce merit to academic accomplishments alone. A wider set of criteria may be deliberately employed to establish merit. It is legitimate to also take into account inherited legacies, constitutional and social imperatives, the specific vision and mission of a university, the needs of society, development objectives and the achievement of a particular kind of intellectual, learning and educational environment and process.

A more inclusive admissions policy along these lines could have greater prospects of eroding social inequalities.

ADMISSIONS CRITERIA

Admissions criteria, on the other hand, set out clearly and in detail what it is students need to be able to demonstrate in order to be considered for admission to a particular institution (and within that institution, to a particular programme of study).



Dr Saleem Badat

Vice-Chancellor,
Rhodes University

1. Republic of South Africa (1996) Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108. Pretoria: Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, section 9.2

2. Department of Education (1997) Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education. Pretoria: Department of Education, section 1.18

Each university has the legal authority to decide which students it will admit, but needs to do so on the basis of a published and transparent 'set of criteria the university will employ in making a decision on which students' will be admitted.³

These criteria typically include academic results, as suggested above, but can also include the school attended, geographic origins, 'race', gender, income levels, home languages, civic involvement, special talents and abilities, nationality and hardships overcome.

ELIGIBILITY FOR ADMISSIONS

When it comes to access to universities, there is misunderstanding about 'eligibility' and 'admission'.

The 'first step in the admissions process is determining the *eligibility* of applicants.'⁴ Each institution sets out the minimum requirements that a student must meet to be considered for admission to university – in other words, to be *eligible*. This is usually a National Senior Certificate (NSC) with a university entrance pass.

Of course, there is considerable debate about the efficacy of the NSC results as a predictor of preparedness for university study, and the rather low level of performance that is required for students to obtain a university entrance pass (and, indeed, about what is meant by 'Bachelors', 'Diploma' and 'Certificate' passes in relation to admissions).

Being eligible to enter a university does not, however, *entitle* a student to be admitted to any university; or, to a specific university programme, such as medicine, engineering or performing arts.

NATIONAL ENROLMENT PLANNING AND ADMISSIONS

University admissions for good reasons today occur within a framework of national enrolment planning. Unless the total university enrolment is linked to the funding that is made available by the National Treasury to the Department of Higher Education and Training, unregulated enrolment will mean a diminishing of the amount of state subsidy per student that is provided to universities. This will in all likelihood over time result in larger student to staff numbers, running down of facilities and equipment and the diminution of quality of provision.

Each university agrees with the state to a three-year enrolment plan with annual enrolments *targets* that cover a variety of variables – undergraduate and postgraduate numbers, enrolments by faculties and academic programmes (medicine, architecture, fine arts, etc.) and by 'race' and gender.

University subsidies are in part linked to agreed enrolments, and while there are currently no penalties for going beyond an enrolment target there is also no state subsidy for the over-enrolment of students.

Further, public subsidy is also linked (to a limited extent), as part of a redress factor, to African and coloured students enrolments. A university's National Student Financial Aid Scheme subsidy is linked to the numbers of African and coloured students enrolled.

Thus, the number of first-time entering students that are admitted in any year, and overall student enrolments, are shaped by agreed enrolment plans. These enrolment plans are linked to and in turn also shape a university's academic planning – the balance between undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, current programmes and introduction of new programmes and so on.

EQUITY OF ACCESS AND EQUITY OF OPPORTUNITY AND OUTCOMES

It is important to distinguish between equity of *access* and equity of *opportunity* and *outcomes* for those social groups that were historically disadvantaged or continue to be disadvantaged – black and women South Africans, those of working class and rural poor social origins, and those with special needs.

While access may be secured through various mechanisms, equity of opportunity and outcomes critically depend on supportive institutional environments and cultures, curriculum innovation, appropriate learning and teaching strategies and techniques, appropriate induction and support, and effective academic mentoring.

These are all vital if students are to succeed and graduate with the relevant knowledge, competencies, skills and attributes that are required for any occupation and profession, are to be life-long learners and function as critical and tolerant citizens.

The challenge of *opportunity* is '**part of a wider project of democratising access to knowledge.**'⁵ This means that beyond providing students formal access, they must also be ensured '**epistemological access.**'⁶ This '**epistemological access**' is 'central not only to issues such as throughput and graduation rates but also to the very institution of the university itself and to the role it can play in a new democracy such as South Africa.'⁷

THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

The pursuit and achievement of social equity and redress has great value for diversity within universities, as well as for quality. This is because diversity and difference, whether social, geographic, national, cultural or linguistic in nature, are powerful well-springs of institutional vitality and personal, intellectual and institutional development.

Diversity in higher education, as former Harvard president Neil Rudenstine argues, is a necessary condition for 'human learning, understanding and wisdom', and a powerful means of 'creating the intellectual energy and robustness that lead to greater knowledge.'⁸

3. Moore, J. (2005) *Race and College Admissions: A Case for affirmative Action*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, page 16

4. *Ibid.*, page 15

5. Morrow, W. (1993) 'Epistemological access in the University,' in *AD Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 1. Belville: Academic Development Programme, University of the Western Cape, page 3

6. *Ibid.*, page 3

7. Boughey, C. (2008) Private communication

8. Moore (2005), page 8

Further, 'diversity enriches the educational experience', in that students 'learn from those whose experiences, beliefs and perspectives are different from' their own, 'and these lessons can be taught best in a richly diverse intellectual and social environment.'⁹

Conversely, the quality of education is diminished by an absence of diversity and 'educational opportunities are drastically limited without diversity, and that compromises an institution's ability to maintain its own missions and goals.'¹⁰

Diversity facilitates 'critical examination of oneself and one's traditions', knowledge and understanding of different cultures, 'of differences of gender, race, and sexuality', and democratic citizenship, and 'the cultivation of humanity.'¹¹ It is also vital to forging, through higher education, greater social cohesion in our deeply fractured society.

Opportunity, outcomes and quality are hugely important issues in higher education but as the focus here is on access and admissions there will be no further commentary on these issues.

STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING REDRESS AND EQUITY

Active *recruitment* by universities at schools, the provision of information on careers and subject choices, on possible sources of funds for bursaries and scholarships, and facilitating applications and registration by prospective students are all critical for equitable access to universities.

As much as it is important for universities to continue to nurture their relationships with their traditional feeder schools, it is vital to also identify and build relationships with potential new feeder schools.

Thus, at many universities there are initiatives to forge partnerships with local schools in the vicinity of the university to enhance the quality of education at these schools and enhance the admission prospects of local students.

One of the most controversial strategies used by higher education institutions to assist in achieving equity in admissions is that of affirmative action. Both the Constitution and laws provide for the use of *affirmative* action as a strategy for enhancing redress and social equity. As Albie Sachs notes, pervasive inequities 'cannot be wished away by invoking constitutional idealism.'¹²

A simple notion of 'equal opportunity' or 'equality of treatment' in the face of historical (and contemporary) disadvantage will not 'reduce disadvantage (but) merely maintain it.'¹³ No great reliance either can also be placed on the 'free market' or 'natural processes' to promote equity and redress. This means that specific measures and strategies such as affirmative action are necessary.

Affirmative action is undeniably contentious. Some committed to social justice argue that it primarily benefits a growing black capitalist class and middle class and reinforces class privileges. They also question the efficacy of the use of 'race' as a proxy for disadvantage and warn about 'race' categories becoming ossified rather than eroded and dissolved, and the continued use of 'race' in the construction of identities.¹⁴

Indeed, we find ourselves in the grip of a *profound paradox*: the use of 'race' to promote redress and to advance social equity. In Sachs' words, we are making 'conscious use of racial distinctions in order to create a non-racial society.'

Kapur and Crowley note that affirmative action raises 'a number of complex questions.' These include the goals of affirmative action: are they 'redress for past injury to a group, compensation for ongoing disadvantage, or increased diversity in a learning environment?'¹⁵

Should affirmative action 'be class-based, rather than identity-based? How are group rights balanced against individual rights?' Given that disadvantage takes myriad forms 'how should an institution weigh different forms of disadvantage?' Finally, "what criteria (or sunset clauses) should be used to phase out affirmative action?"¹⁶

A number of additional mechanisms have been developed and are being used to advance equity and redress in university enrolments. Alternative admissions tests have been devised to complement the NSC exam for admission to universities. Provision has been made for the recognition of prior learning to facilitate access for mature students. Where students do not meet the eligibility requirements, mature age exemption has been used. Finally, University senates usually have the discretion to admit students on special grounds.

THE NECESSITY FOR EQUITY AND REDRESS

A number of contemporary conditions make equity and redress, and affirmative action, necessary.

One is the *schooling system*.

Despite almost universal formal participation in schooling, South Africa's schools evince significant problems related to drop outs, retention, progression and successful completion. As has been noted, 'the simple reality is that enrolment is not the same as attendance and attendance does not imply learning.'¹⁷

South African school students perform extremely poorly on a range of international assessment tests, in terms of which '65% of school leavers...are functionally illiterate.'¹⁸

9. Ibid., 2005:9

10. Ibid., pages 2, 9

11. Nussbaum, M. (2006) Education for Democratic Citizenship. Institute of Social Studies Public Lecture Series 2006, No. 1. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, page 5, 6

12. Sachs, A. (2006) Foreword in Kennedy-Dubourdieu, E (2006) Race and Inequality: World Perspectives on Affirmative Action. Hampshire: Ashgate, page x

13. Sikkosana, M. (1993) "Affirmative Action: Its Possibilities and Limitations". EPU Working Paper No. 1. Education Policy Unit, University of Natal, May, page 10

14. Alexander, N. (2007) "Affirmative Action and the Perpetuation of Racial Identities in Post-Apartheid South Africa". Transformation, No. 63

15. Kapur, D. and Crowley, M. (2008) Beyond the ABCs: Higher Education and Developing Countries. Working Paper Number 139. Washington DC: Center for Global Development, February, page 59

16. Ibid., pages 59-60

17. Sayed, Y. (2007) 'Education and poverty reduction - eradication: Omissions, fashions and promises'. Unpublished mimeo, page 8

18. Ibid., page 6

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

One measure of the formidable challenge is that currently 10% of some 7 000 secondary schools – independent schools and public schools previously reserved for white students – produce 60% of all senior certificate endorsements (the entrance requirement to higher education).

Another 10% of mainly historically black schools produce a further 20% of all senior certificate endorsements. Thus, 80% of senior certificate endorsements are generated by 20% of secondary schools, while the remaining 80% of secondary schools produce a paltry 20% of senior certificate endorsements. It is clear that a fundamental challenge is to improve the quality of education in schools.

Another condition is the extent of *participation* of black students.

In 1993 black students constituted only 52% of the student body of 473 000. 43% of students were women. In 2009, of 837 000 university students, almost 78% of students were black and 57% were women. Clearly, there has been a great advance in social equity in higher education.

Yet, while black student enrolments have increased since 1993, the gross participation rate of black, and especially African and Coloured South Africans, continues to be considerably lower than for white South Africans.

For whites, the participation rate in 1993 was 70%; now it is about 60%. The participation rate of Indians has increased from 40% in 1993 to 51%. The participation rate of Africans has only marginally increased (from 9% to 12%), while that of Coloureds has fallen from 13% to 12%.¹⁹

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 2011/2016.²⁰ Clearly, given that it is now about 17% there has been only a minimal improvement in the overall gross participation rate and severe inequities continue to exist in the participation rates of African and Coloured South Africans relative to white and Indian South Africans.

Indeed, 'given that the participation is expressed as gross rates and includes appreciable numbers of mature students – well under 12% of the (African) and coloured 20-24 age groups are participating in higher education (it) must be a cause of concern, for political, social and economic reasons, if the sector is not able to accommodate a higher and more equitable proportion' of those social groups that have been historically disadvantaged and under-represented in higher education.²¹

The lower participation rates of African and coloured youth is almost certainly strongly shaped by the ongoing problems related to schooling, the availability of funding and issues of social class.

A third condition is the differential representation of *black and women students*.

While the increased enrolment of both black, and especially African, and women students is significant, it masks inequities in their distribution across qualification levels and academic programmes. Large numbers of African students continue to be concentrated in distance education, and both African and women students continue to be under-represented in science, engineering and technology and business and commerce programmes. Post-graduate enrolments across most fields are also low.

Historical patterns of distribution across institutions continue. Enrolments at historically white institutions (HWIs) continue to reflect lower representation of black students than their overall representation within higher education. Thus, even though there has been a significant deracialisation of HWIs, white students continue to be concentrated at them. Conversely, there has been little or no entry of white students into the historically black institutions (HBIs), which means that they remain almost exclusively black.

There is an important social class factor at play here. Students from the capitalist and middle classes are concentrated at HWIs, while those from the working class and rural poor are concentrated at HBIs. Given the better pass and graduation rates of HWIs, if equity of opportunity and outcomes were previously influenced by 'race' they are now also impacted by social class.

Finally, there is the problem of *inadequate funding*

The introduction of a means-tested National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has been critical in promoting equity and redress for working class and rural poor students.

19. Council on Higher Education (2004) *Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education, page 62; Scott, I., Yeld, N. & Hendry, J. (200). *A Case for Improving Teaching and Learning in South African Higher Education: Higher Education Monitor No. 6*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education., page 10

20. Ministry of Education (2001) *National Plan for Higher Education*. Pretoria

21. Scott, et al (2007), page 11

Yet, the overall funds available for effectively supporting all those in need are inadequate, and this has compromised increased participation, access and admissions, as well as equity of opportunity and outcomes, for disadvantaged social classes and groups.

One reason for the very high rate of drop-outs among students, especially those from disadvantaged social classes and groups is almost certainly inadequate state funding in the forms of scholarships, bursaries and loans.

CONCLUSION

The seriousness of the challenges facing admissions is partly due to the need for clarity on 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.

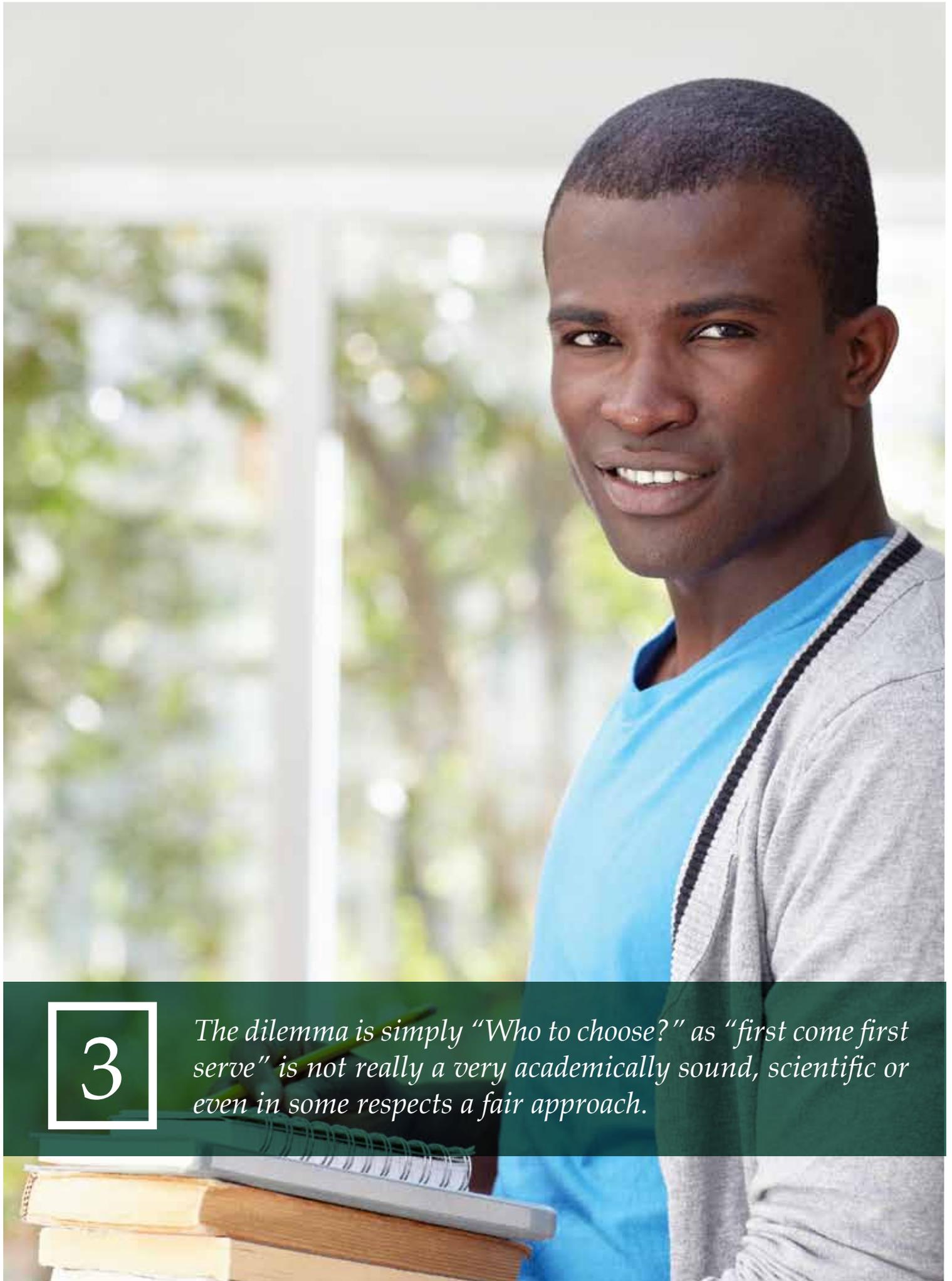
There is a growing demand for higher education, in part because of the lack of availability of other high quality postsecondary education institutions. This demand will severely stretch the current capacities of public universities.

At the same time, there is a pressing need for improving the quality of and increasing the output of high quality graduates. All these issues mean that urgent attention has to be given to the landscape of higher education and postsecondary education in relation to economic and social development needs.

Finally, it is clear that post-1994, there has been a significant expansion in the enrolment of black and women South African students. However, there has been a minimal increase in the participation rate of Africans and the participation rate of Coloureds has declined.

Measured in terms of participation rates, and given the intersection of race, class, gender and geography and schooling in South Africa, it is clear that a significant advance in social equity and redress for those of working class and rural poor social origins remains to be achieved.

(My thanks to Prof. Chrissie Boughey, Dean of Learning and Teaching and Director of the Centre for Higher Education, Research, Teaching and Learning at Rhodes University and Prof. Nan Yeld, Dean of the Centre for Higher Education Development at the University of Cape Town for their valuable comments and support).



3

The dilemma is simply “Who to choose?” as “first come first serve” is not really a very academically sound, scientific or even in some respects a fair approach.

Reflection on the challenges in managing access with success.

The Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) was established through the merger of three former Technikons. A complex macro-university was formed with six official learning sites across three provinces. Some of these learning sites are spread over multiple campuses with the ultimate reality of teaching and learning in contact mode across nine campuses.

The background on the physical structuring should already provide the reader a first clue as to the extreme complexity of constructing efficient and consistent admission, selection and intervention practices throughout the University. This article reflects on current procedures as well as experiences and indicates the importance of a well considered strategy for student success.

THE CASE OF TUT - APPLICATION AND ADMISSION STATS

Based on the University student-enrolment plan the total annual (2009 and 2011) enrolment is approx 60 000 students on all academic levels. The University typically receives up to 20 000+ new applications per annum and is funded to accommodate 13 000 first-time entering students (TUT-Student Enrolment Plan 2010).

This requires careful and well considered admissions and selection procedures.

The cycle of admission however already starts in the preceding year with a strategic and operational review of admission requirements.

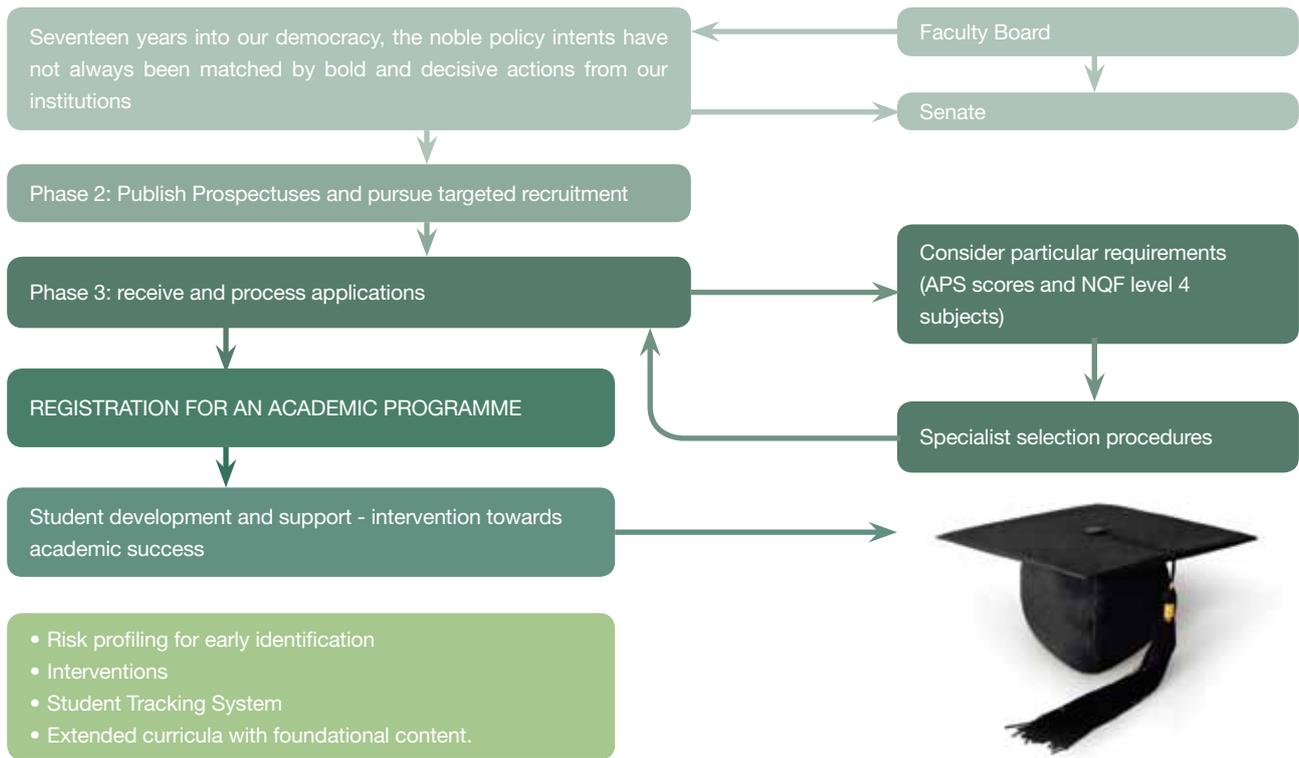
This article will reflect on those practices and the particular challenges it poses to TUT. The chain of action from recruitment to admission to registration to intervention can be best understood if explained in a phased sequential manner as depicted in Figure 1:



Dr E van Heerden

Tshwane University
of Technology

FIGURE 1: PHASES OF THE ADMISSION PROCESS AT TUT



The figure indicates a multi-phased process starting with the annual review of admission criteria and specifications scrutinised by Faculty Boards and Senate through final admission and registration with the TUT-strategy of student risk identification and early intervention following.

The following section provides a reflection on this process.

CHALLENGES IN ADMISSION:

Systematic analysis of the phases and particular challenges reveals many issues that could even be generic for the higher education institutions in South Africa.

REFLECTION ON PHASE 1:

TUT has a principle-approach to remain as accessible as possible and therefore makes every attempt to keep admission requirements (admission points score/ APS and required subjects) at a minimum. However certain programmes and professions (external bodies) often have very specific requirements. Practical examples would be the requirements set by the Engineering Council of SA (ECSA) and the Health Professional Councils of SA (HPCSA). Within the context of these realities it is imperative for TUT to pursue continuous research and analysis of admission profiles and correlation studies allow for an evidence-based approach towards setting requirements. A further complication is the ever changing profile of students entering the institution with different levels of preparedness. TUT for example, recently embarked on an extensive analysis of the actual performance of engineering students in comparison to the schooling grades and based on specific evidence acquired determined more refined and specific requirements for admission. The research was lead by the Dean of the Faculty and formed a basis for review and refined planning for the next admissions cycle.

This kind of analysis also has the further benefit that it informs the curriculum planning process and provided a factual basis for implementing refined extended programmes or appropriate skills modules.

PHASE 1:	CHALLENGES
Reviewing admission requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing specific requirements with accessibility. • Determining accurate predictors of academic success (continuous research) • Setting objective and evidence-based selection criteria and procedures.

REFLECTION ON PHASE 2:

Whereas the publication of results is mere routine, the challenge lies in communicating the information effectively to all potential students and communities. This action may nevertheless be considered an essential component in being an accessible institution of higher learning in South Africa. Because of its spread of learning sites TUT recruits students from diverse areas and communities.

The University has embarked on creative and often even unconventional ways to reach its geographically and socio-economically diverse target audience while at the same time pursue targeted recruitment in particular fields as determined by the national skills needs and science, engineering and technology focus areas.

A factor that has however been most difficult to overcome in attracting the best possible candidates is the reputational damage caused by recent events and negative media coverage. This carries serious consequences that will impact heavily on TUT for an extended period.

PHASE 2:	CHALLENGES
Targeted recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching all prospective students. • Targeted recruitment in science, engineering and technology fields and addressing labour and skills needs. • Highly competitive recruitment by all Universities. • Reputational factors.

REFLECTION ON PHASE 3:

Upon receiving and processing applications intricate sub-procedures come into play. The last number of years posed challenges in that University-systems had to accommodate both the former matriculation Grade 12 certification system as well as the new National Senior Certificate System with different subjects (learning areas) and differentiated scoring matrixes. It has also become essential for TUT - mostly due to over-application/ over-subscription and the application profiles of candidates to craft careful procedures to ensure that those with the best possible potential for academic success be given opportunities for study. The dilemma is simply "Who to choose?" as "first come first serve" is not really a very academically sound, scientific or even in some respects a fair approach.

Applicants are drawn from extremely diverse backgrounds and unequal schooling environments. It was recognised very early on that mechanisms had to be devised to also provide opportunities for those from poor and inadequate secondary schooling contexts. TUT had to establish methods and procedures to evaluate and rank applicants.

Apart from humane and ethical considerations it should also be acknowledged that there is a clear financial imperative for carefully considered admissions due to the funding framework for higher education that determines input and output subsidy components. This framework makes it essential to plan for success even during the admission phase (Department of Education South Africa, 2001) to ensure financial sustainability of the institution.

Implementing unique and customised processes (even down to programme level) are challenging and were initially met with much resistance. It soon became apparent though that the additional assessments and other mechanisms are essential and remains the most objective and fair means of selecting students.

PHASE 3:	CHALLENGES
Applications and selections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parallel certification systems • Assessment and ranking of candidates • Conducting continuous research on predictive validity of variables (including NSC results and institutional assessments) • Fiscal considerations and planning (funding framework)

INTERVENTION FOR PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS:

TUT has strategically aligned and synchronised a comprehensive strategy in teaching and learning development and support. A first phase follows admissions in a formalised and systematic manner. Upon reflection it was a matter of visionary leadership turned into good practice by pragmatic management.

It is the firm conviction of the author that this is a relevant and innovative approach and early research indicators show clear impact and institutional benefits in terms of addressing student performance. All first-time entering students are exposed to this system of academic risk-profiling followed by compulsory interventions and the continuous monitoring of student academic progress. There has been endorsement of the strategy at all academic management levels with a clear purpose to engineer access with success while the accommodation of diversity and transformation goals remain embedded (Pavlich and Orkin, 1993; Bargh, Scott and Smith, 1996). The interventions are however not limited to a focus on student learning but places high emphases on teaching and facilitation development and curriculum analysis and review as well as complimentary teaching modes and materials.

In summary of most prominent of the TUT success rate strategies:

- Early **risk-profiling** for all first time entering students.
- Implementation of a **student tracking system** for monitoring individual progress.
- A comprehensive portfolio of **student development and support interventions** available on every learning site.
- Optimising **financial support** through financial-aid schemes.
- A **Success Rate sub-committee** as a standing committee of the Academic Board to monitor and subject success rates and establish relevant interventions.
- Extensive **mentorship and tutoring** programmes.
- Establishment of **extended curriculum** (foundational) options.
- Optimal application of **e-learning, support platforms and learning media**.
- **Academic staff development** through an academic leadership and empowerment programme.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above presents a mere cryptic reflection of a complex and multi-faceted process. However it suggests a number of critical challenges that may be general to the greater higher education sector in South Africa and perhaps very prominent within the newly established University of Technology sub-sector. It clearly suggests engagement with deep philosophic issues regarding the exact purpose and focus of a University of Technology, the appropriate managerial approach within the higher education sector and the particular emerging relationship between higher education and labour.

Acute awareness of the changing relationship between higher education and labour and the partnership between government and higher education is of critical importance (Buchanan,1993). Centre for Higher Education and Transformation, 2004. Chapman and Austin, 2002 and also Cloete, Fehnel, Maasen, Moja, Perold. and Gibbon, 2002).

What remains as the most dominant challenge within the sector is to outgrow the “student under-preparedness paradigm” and move towards becoming a prepared university.

In setting up this required level of accessibility with preparedness a few actions become imperative for collective pursuit:

- Improvement of cooperation and consistency within the higher education sector on approaches to and mechanisms of admission including the potential sharing of resources and proven strategies.
- Finalise the debate and generate clarity on the purpose and particular role of a UoT (including synergising the roles of HESA and SATN).
- Formulate a clear collective position in HESA to drive the access with success-agenda for higher education (including the DHET in this partnership) and the generic approaches required.
- Creative and innovative but purposeful planning for student success.

- Collective protection of academic credibility at all cost.
- Improved partnership with The Department of Basic Education regarding matters pertaining to national curricula, certification, preparedness of students for higher education and related matters.
- Increased interaction and participation in conversations with the Department of Higher Education and Training re the review of the funding framework and continued financial support for student support strategies, teaching and development grants and foundational funding.
- Maximum support from HE to the FET Colleges to fill the gap in skills training in vocational fields.

Tshwane University of Technology has made progress and achieved measurable successes in moving beyond the quagmire of student under-preparedness towards being a prepared University through structured admissions and curricularised and continuous post-registration interventions.

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4

Institutional benchmarking indicated that centralisation was the best practice when it comes to servicing application needs and managing enrolments.

From merger to academic administration unity

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) was created in January 2005 when the former RAU (Rand Afrikaans University) and TWR (Technikon Witwatersrand) merged. RAU also incorporated two former Vista University campuses the previous year. This not only gave rise to a University with a rich diverse history and knowledge, but also a University that needed clear governance re-alignment between three distinct academic administration legacy practices.

Prof Marie Muller was appointed in 2006 as the Registrar. She was tasked to standardise Academic Administration processes, unify diverse departments, improve service delivery through the use of technology and ultimately to instil a solid governance culture. After the tedious task of cloning and merging the three student databases, the focus shifted to the establishment of policy and procedural stability and consolidation.

Project initiatives included the implementation of self-service student administration modules (e.g. online applications and registrations), the establishment of a central enrolment centre (following a benchmarking exercise with Wits University) and an institution wide electronic document management system which integrates and facilitates the application / selection process.

The online registration process was developed in 2008 and piloted in 2009. UJ had to re-think the way we registered students through campus contact sessions because we had a complex mixture of old TWR, RAU and Vista legacy practices and the process was resource intense. Three faculties volunteered to pilot the online registration process in 2009 at which point a 65% online registration was achieved. The development and refinement of the system focused on user friendliness, incorporating registration checks and validations (e.g. pre- and co-requisites, grade 12 endorsements and timetable clashes) and sustainability with flexibility. The process was refined in 2009, subsequently an 86% online registration was achieved by the institution in 2010.

The target for 2011 was 90% and a 95% online registration was achieved with a student population of almost 50 000. The online registration system has significantly enhanced academic administration governance and service delivery. This year registrations has definitely been one of the most stable and unproblematic registrations in UJ's history.

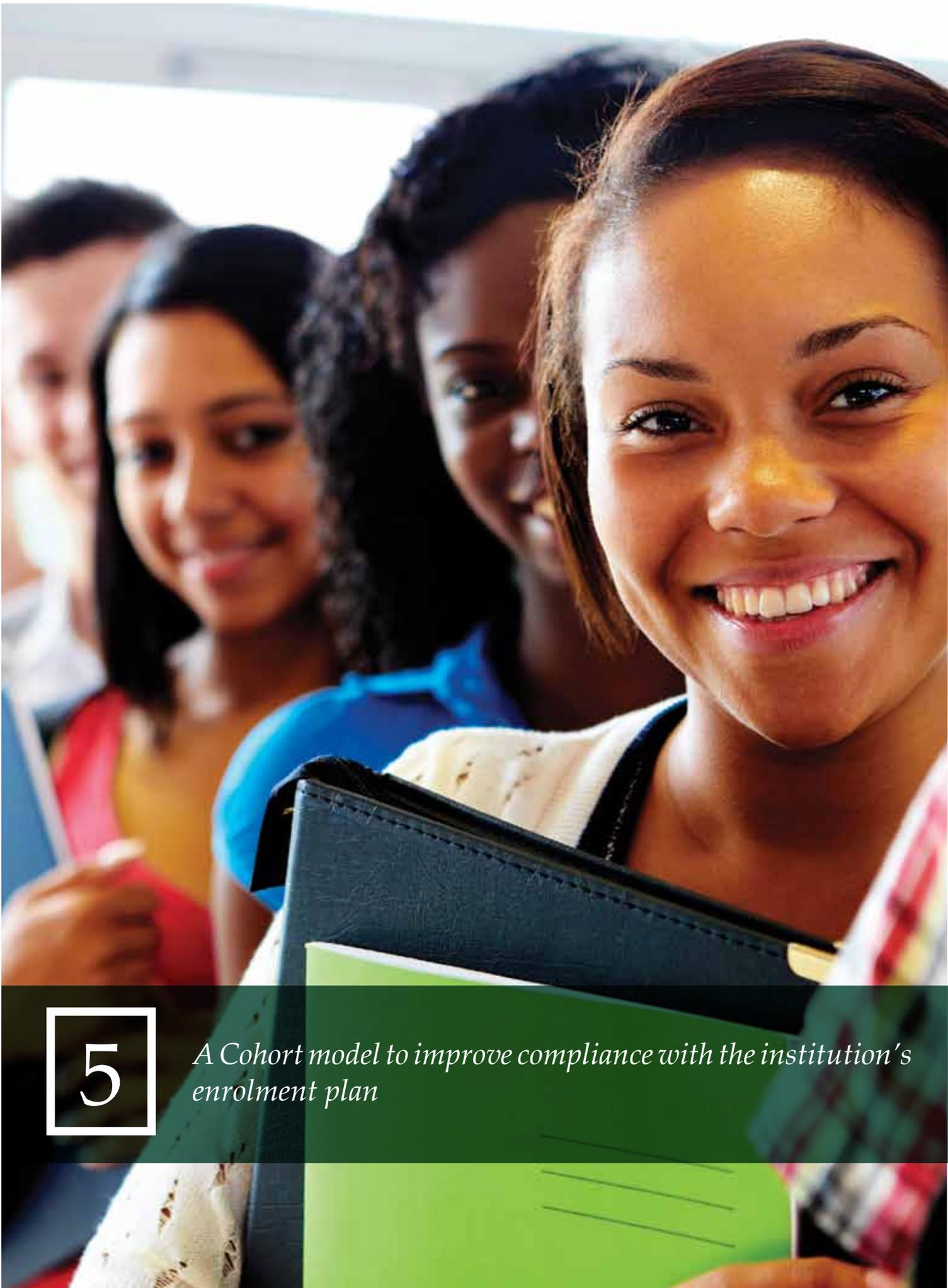
Institutional benchmarking indicated that centralisation was the best practice when it comes to servicing application needs and managing enrolments. Student enrolments within the context of resourcing have always been an important part of university planning, and therefore the centralised Student Enrolment Centre (SEC) was established in 2009. SEC focused on the centralisation of applications and managing selections effectively through the use of an electronic document management and routing system. This new way of electronically sending and routing applications within the wider community of UJ drastically improved the turnaround time and quality of service because applications could no longer "get lost" in the system or be "forgotten" on a desk. Quality controls include the distribution of weekly management reports of selection queues and early warning systems for unprocessed applications after a certain period of time.

These three initiatives (SEC, electronic selection process and online registrations) were presented to the registrars at their annual Registrars' Imbizo in March 2011.



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5

A Cohort model to improve compliance with the institution's enrolment plan

Enrolment planning at Higher Education Institutions

The planning of student enrolments within the context of resourcing has always been an important part of university planning. Since 2005, the Department of Higher Education and Training has introduced annual targets for each university regarding its size and shape by study level and main field of study. Despite the fact that these targets have been pursued for more than six years by now, it is generally found that the process of unbundling university total enrolment targets into targets for individual qualifications is to say the least a challenge.

These processes in general need to be firmed up. Secondly, once an enrolment target for an individual qualification has theoretically been set by a faculty for the next year, it is often found that these targets are difficult to achieve. This most of the time happens when faculties do not properly account for the enrolment dynamics of students who have already been in the system for some years now, especially in the case of qualifications with strongly growing or declining student numbers. In general more sophistication in terms of proper models and calculations is required to move beyond the level of intuition as a basic planning skill.

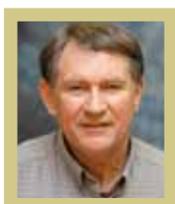
The planning of student enrolments for any qualification rests on the understanding of the complex interplay between the annual intake of new students F (first-time entering, transfer, and entering students within the HEMIS terminology) as independent variable, and the students already studying for this qualification N (non-entering students within the HEMIS terminology) as dependent variable. Clearly, the value of N as dependent variable depends on the size of new student intakes during previous years, the quality of these student intakes, the curriculum as an academic challenge and changes to the curriculum, and many other factors.

The University of Johannesburg has recently developed a cohort enrolment model, to predict the value of N per qualification for given future student intakes F . The model records specific student information for all student cohorts (enrolled for a qualification) with age eight years and less, and uses this as basis for future predictions. The model is used with good result to check the feasibility of enrolment targets set by faculties and to model the future consequences of accepting such targets.

The model can be applied at faculty and university level, and not only produces information about student registrations, but also about student headcounts as actual targets, students expected to graduate and student drop-outs.

It also provides a new way of calculating graduation and drop-out rates, and serves as a check on the efficiency of a qualification at any point in time. The model indeed provides for further sophistication going beyond the level of intuition of seasoned enrolment planning practitioners.

This model was presented to the registrars at their annual Registrars' Imbizo in March 2010.



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FIGURE 1 – DEFINING A COHORT

Defining a Cohort

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
100%	60%	40%	20%	10%	4%	2%	1%

Constitute the cohort for a particular year for a qualification as a list of students (by name) registered at the beginning of the year if the students are either F + T + E but not N.

The cohort model is a simple model focussing on the relationship between F+T+E and N.

FIGURE 2 – BASIC ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT PROBLEM

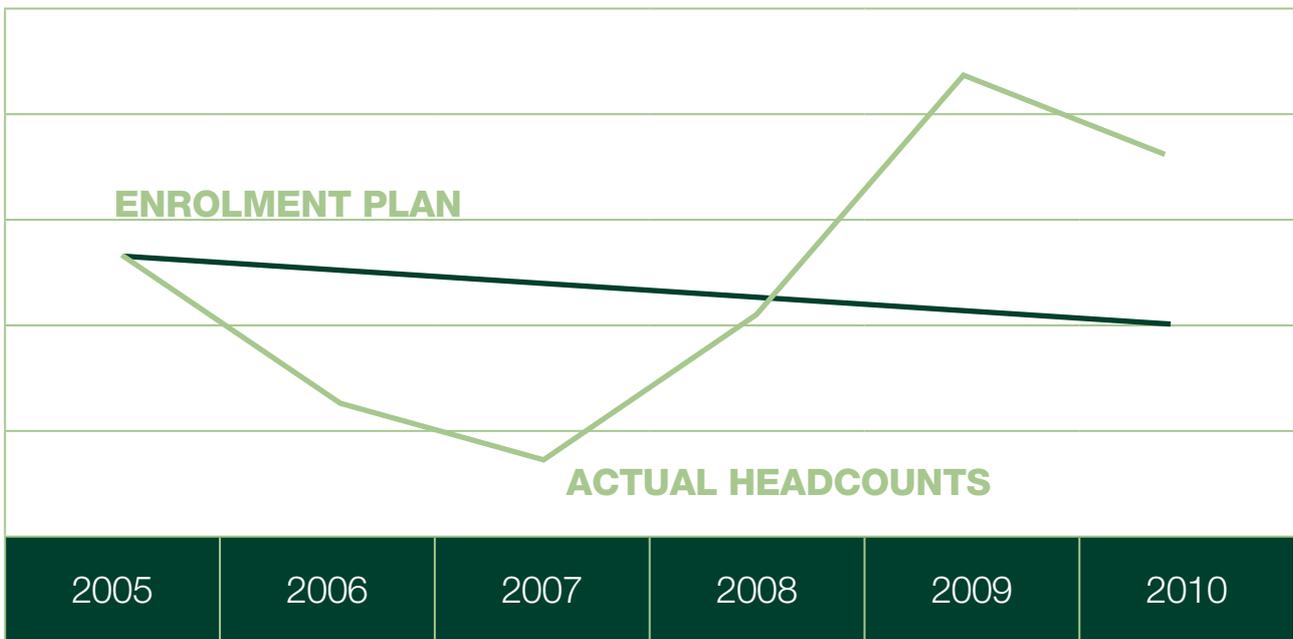
Basic enrolment management problem

2012	SET	Bus	Ed	Hum	Total
UG diplomas					39%
UG degrees					45%
PG below M					11%
M&D					5%
Total	32%	37%	9%	22%	45 000

	2011	2012
BSc	300	400

FIGURE 3 – ENROLMENT DYNAMICS UNDERSTOOD

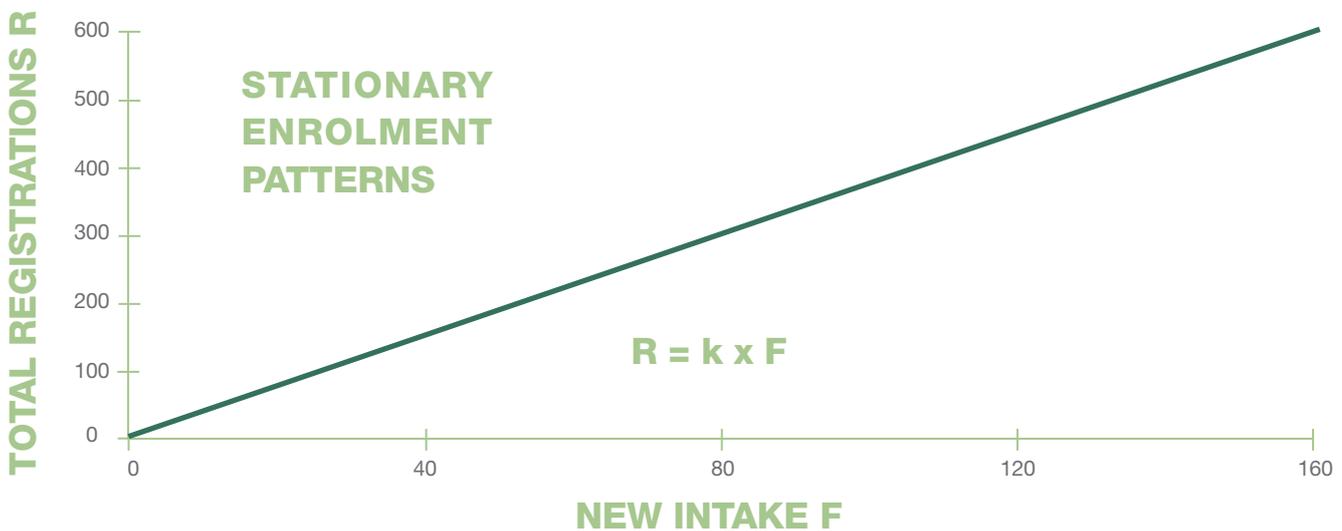
How to avoid this?



In enrolment planning ordinary intuition should make way for calculations. This is not rocket science, however.

FIGURE 4 – ENROLMENT DYNAMICS UNDERSTOOD

Enrolment dynamics understood



Streamlining of admission and registration processes has brought major improvements in handling this important part of the life of a new and old student at tertiary institutions.



Streamlining of admission and registration processes

This article gives an overview of the application, admission and registration process at the University of Venda, a comprehensive rural based university in the scenic Vhembe Region of Limpopo Province, South Africa. A step-by-step process on the three areas, involvement of other stakeholders and an assessment of current state of affairs will be identified as one of the deficiencies of the Higher Education system as follows:

APPLICATION PROCESS

Each year prior to registration year, the University publishes information on programmes on offer through the media, both print and electronic, targeting catchment areas like Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Limpopo and the North West. This is augmented by visits to schools in the catchment area by our School Liaison Officer as well as information shared at relevant schools. Once a year, the University runs a career exhibition day to share information on the University academic programmes on offer. This is usually well attended by majority of neighbouring schools in the district. Information is also distributed through brochures within SADC, especially Zimbabwe.

2.1. SELECTION OF STUDENTS BY DEANS OF SCHOOL

Based on enrolment planning guided by the institutional cap, quotas are allocated to Schools and qualifications. Admissions are based on these quotas. An allowance is also given to cater for offers that may not be taken. Applicants who are not admitted to their first choice qualifications are then transferred to their next choices for selection.

Upon receipt of completed applications, the forms are scrutinized for completeness and required documents and sent to Schools of applicant's first choice. Deans of Schools, assisted by School Administrators, who offer administrative support services, select students who meet the minimum admission requirements based on decisions taken at planning meetings and approved by Council as the highest governing body of the University. New students intake per school are also taken into account. Such figures are determined by the student enrolment process that is guided by the University enrolment cap that currently stands at 10500.

2.2. HANDLING OF "WALK INS" APPLICATIONS

Due to high demand for tertiary education, lack of confidence in learners matric results, and lack of awareness in some of our learners, it has always been a case that some people would consider the University of Venda while they would not have applied before closing date. This has been a challenge for the University of Venda and in order to contribute to access to higher education, management has always made room for such people to come to apply upon receipt of their results. The practice at the University of Venda has been that in areas where there would still be some vacancies, walk-ins would be allowed to present themselves with their results for assessment. Only applicants who meet admission requirements would be given an opportunity to submit application forms so as to avoid collecting application forms from non-qualifying learners.

The concession given to "walk ins" has given an opportunity to many learners who were not sure of their quality of their matric results but ended up having good results, to pursue their studies at our University. The consideration was also fully used in the current academic year after the Ministerial plea to consider increasing intake of new students. Upon completion of the selection process, admission is finalised together with other students who would have submitted their results.

2.3. DEVIATIONS

In the selection process, Deans of School do find cases where the required scores may not have been attained, but looking at good performance in the key subjects related to the qualifications learners would like to enrol for, they would use their discretion to select applicants with slightly lesser scores. This is usually documented for future references and audit purposes.

Case Study by University Of Venda

3. REGISTRATION PROCESS – STEP BY STEP PROCESS

The University of Venda arranged for an inclusive workshop to address application, admission and registration. The process entails support staff dealing with applications and admissions together with academic Heads of Schools (Deans) and IT staff. Staff from the Finance form part of the process in order to advise on Financial Aid, verification of students, and to deal with other finance issues related to registration.

Before finalising the process a consultant, two peers from Universities with challenges similar to ours were involved, and the process led to a revised process aimed at handling applications before start of academic year. Unlike in previous years, some due dates had to be put in place so that the selection process could follow soon thereafter as opposed to dealing with “walk ins” applications in large numbers.

Coming up with an enrolment process brought about changes in that students were grouped according to Schools with days of the week allocated to particular Schools. This reduced the long queues of students and created a user-friendly environment. The process of registration involved a process that was communicated to all students indicating what ought to be done before registration, such as payment of fees three working days before the set date of registration and ensuring that students adhere to set deadlines. To cater for isolated cases, a day was set aside at the end of registration to sort out a few cases that could not be finalised on a set date. The staggered registration system brought improvement in that groups of students could be assisted in a day reserved. Students commended the distribution of students per School and levels of study.

Starting 2011, the University introduced on a pilot basis, on-line registration that would see UNIVEN's students doing their registration and accessing their records from anywhere depending on availability of internet. This new system was welcomed by students who reflected that in questionnaires issued upon completion of the process. Being at pilot phase, the system was run concurrently with the old manual system.

Registration at UNIVEN involves students having to pay the minimum required amount by set date, then obtain from the registration venue, an enrolment package that includes university rules and regulations, timetabling information,

registration forms and any other material that may be of information at that stage. Students are required to complete enrolment forms and have them approved by Heads of Department and Deans before they proceed to a computer terminal to have their data captured. Once this step is done, a proof of registration showing all modules registered for and a student's account is printed for the student. The final stage will be to have a student card printed.

When registration closed, a total of 10168 students had registered. An overall total of registered students, all told, will be evident after the closing date for Masters and PhD which is 15 April 2011. The process of student enrolment is also done with the involvement of student leaders who are of great help to new students in terms of guiding them through the selection form completion. These senior students also serve as ushers and information officers for the new comers.

4. CONCLUSION

To date, the University of Venda has been experiencing problems with large numbers of applicants some of whom will not meet the minimum requirements. These applicants often hang around with no place to go. It has been the practice to advise such applicants to consider other options like FET colleges. The demand for higher education however seems higher than the supply.

Admission for first-time-entering students is usually well managed when such students have the required funding for higher education.

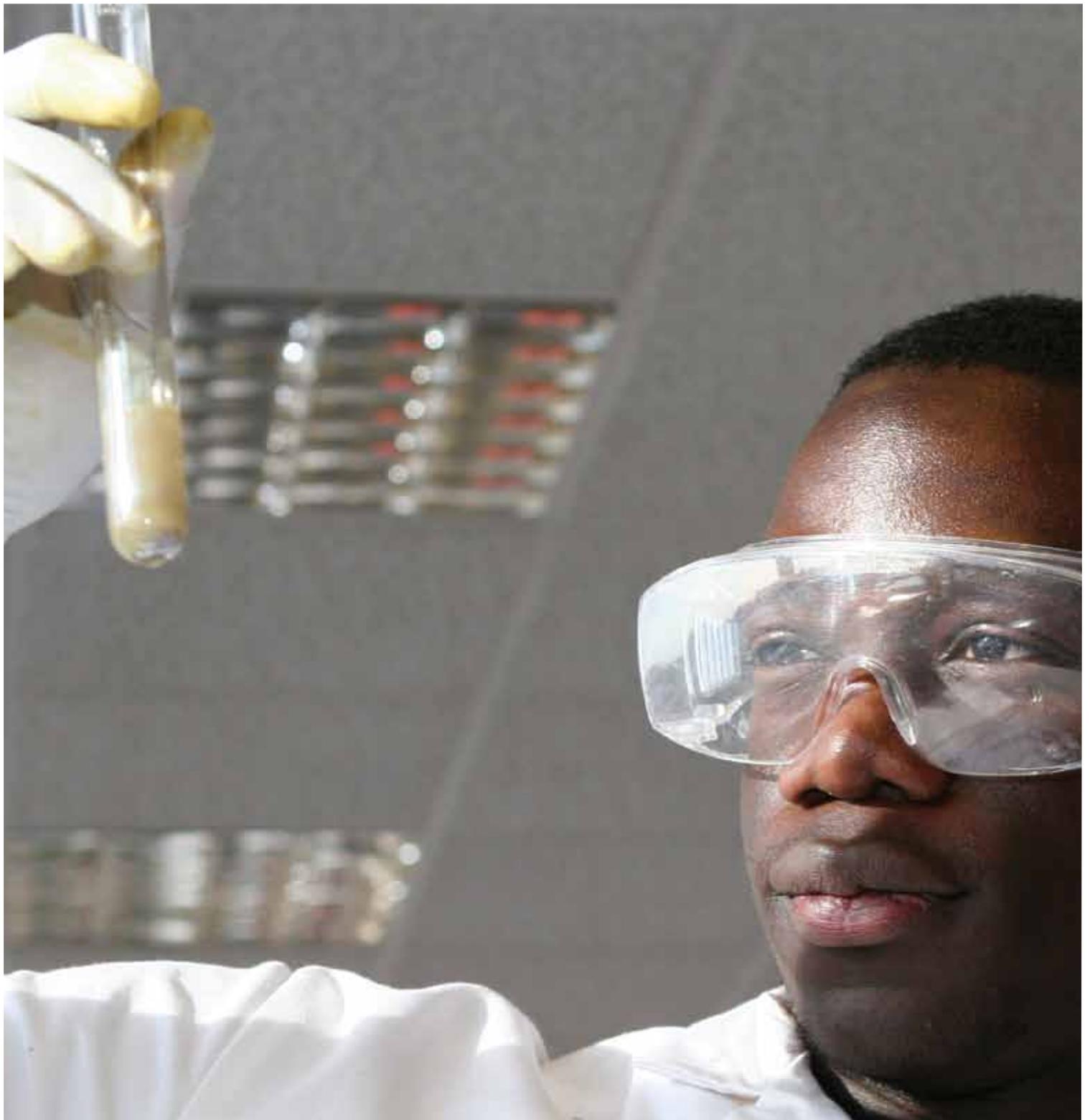
It has been realised that uncertainty on funding and poor financial background of students in the area, impacts on the admission and registration of new students. Processing of funds such as NSFAS prior to students admissions to tertiary institutions could reduce problems faced by new University entrants.

Streamlining of admission and registration processes has brought major improvements in handling this important part of the life of a new and old student at tertiary institutions. Transparency brought about by information dissemination has made things change for the better. There is however still room for improvement based on the University's improvement plans.



KC
Nemadzihanani

University Registrar,
University Of Venda



7

FET college programmes develop the values and attitude of students, problem-solving skills, thus well preparing students for life-long learning.

Post school opportunities in further education and training colleges

The creation of the new Department of Higher Education and Training and the launching of the National Skills Development Strategy III have enhanced the public Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in responding to local, regional, and national skills needs, and to give meaning to its contribution towards the demands of the economy, society, and the individual.

We have 50 public FET colleges across the country in all the nine provinces with current enrolment figures of approximately 250 000 students. Through the recapitalisation process which started in 2007, 152 technical colleges were merged to 50 public FET colleges with 227 campuses. Some of the colleges/campuses offer residence for students who are located far from the college/campus. The recapitalisation of FET colleges and the introduction of the National Certificate Vocational NC(V) in 2007 is seen as key in realising FET colleges as institutions of choice.

- Meet the critical needs for highly skilled artisans and technicians;
- Expand technical-vocational education and training programmes consistent with employment potential and national income needs; and
- Provide training or re-training of workers whose skills and technical knowledge must be updated.

FET colleges offer quite a range of programmes that provides transferability of skills and the mobility of graduates. These programmes enable students to integrate academic and vocational knowledge as they learn many aspects of the occupation. The integration of academic and vocational, and the integration of academic and occupational subjects in programmes offered by FET colleges allows students exiting to have a smooth transition into the world of work, and accumulation of a range of skills which include life skills, problem solving skills, entrepreneurial skills, and innovative skills.

The integration of generic or academic subjects enables the programmes offered to provide flexible abilities and competencies that grow, and self-adapting in any set of circumstances, and enables graduates to cope with changing and complex responsibilities. The integration of academic subjects builds students' competence in mathematics, science, and communications. In addition to the general academic knowledge and occupation specific competence, FET college programmes develop the values and attitude of students, problem-solving skills, thus well preparing students for life-long learning.

The numbers of full-time and part-time learners registering for Grade 12 has been increasing each year, in 2008 we had 589 759 learners, in 2009 the number increased to 620 192, and reached 642 000 in 2010.

The number of learners passing grade 12 each year cannot all be accommodated in universities and universities of technology. There are approximately 3 million youth aged between the ages of 18 and 24 who are not employed and not in education or training. The majority of these learners are poorly prepared to undertake further learning at universities and universities of technology. This cohort of learners and learners exiting grade 12 each year could be placed in different programmes offered at public FET colleges.

FET colleges are meant to:

- Offer education and training opportunities to the millions of youth and adults who are not in education and not in employment including learners who recently passed grade 12;



Moloko Matlala

Executive Manager (SACPO)

Programmes offered at FET colleges prepares students for the world of work, articulation into programmes offered at Universities of Technology and certain programmes offered at Universities, depending on pass requirements as laid down by the different higher education institutions.

In summary, programmes offered at FET colleges aims to provide the following:

- Responsiveness to the changing contexts and requirements for work that will occur throughout individuals' working lives by providing generic occupational skills rather than those which meet the needs of only one specific occupational group;
- Students emerging not just with knowledge and competences of immediate use, but with values, attitudes and skills which serve them well in the future, meeting the personal development needs of the individual student;
- Opportunities for all students regardless of gender, race, and age; ability to establish and develop a recognised competence base of knowledge, skills and experience, sufficient to facilitate progression into employment and further education in higher education institutions; and
- A basis for students to increase their self-awareness to appraise realistically their potential and prospects, and to become progressively responsible for negotiating their own personal development.

As the importance of innovation has increased globally, the rate of change has speeded up significantly in the past decades. This is reflected to a large extent in the area of competence and skills required. To keep up to date with the technological developments and global market trends, programmes offered at FET colleges are reviewed and updated when the need arises.

FET colleges offer vocational programmes in the form of NC(V) programmes, technical programmes in the form of NATED/Report 191 programmes, a range of SETA accredited occupational programmes, and a wide variety of skills and community based programmes. The practical component is offered at a workplace, in a simulated workplace environment, or in workshops.

National Certificate Vocational (NC(V) Level 2 – Level 4

The following programmes are offered in 13 different sub-fields:

- Engineering & Related Design
- Electrical Infrastructure Construction
- Civil Engineering and Building Construction
- Finance, Economics and Accounting
- Hospitality
- Information Technology & Computer Science
- Management
- Marketing
- Office Administration
- Primary Agriculture
- Tourism
- Safety and Security
- Education and Development
- Mechatronics

NATED/REPORT 191 PROGRAMMES

NATED programmes are offered in business studies, utility studies, and engineering studies from N1 to N6. NATED programmes in levels 2-4 of the NQF (N1 – N3) are currently only offered in critical and scarce skills engineering related programmes. Students who acquire N6 qualify for a National Diploma (NND) after serving 18 months work-based training in business and utilities, or 2 years work-based training in engineering discipline. Specific choices of subjects in N1 – N6 engineering programmes with specific pass requirements allows students who hold a NND with additional 2 years work experience to sit for a National Certificate of Competency for Engineers (mining or industry) thus allowing students to become certified and nationally recognized engineers.

OCCUPATIONAL PROGRAMMES

These are SETA accredited programmes for students or employees in learnerships and apprenticeship programmes. Most of these programmes will in future be quality assured and certified by the Quality Council of Trades and Occupations (QCTO).

SKILLS PROGRAMMES

These are normally short accredited courses that prepare students for employment opportunities or for self employment opportunities. Skills programmes are offered depending on the need.

COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMMES

Any programme due to the need of the community that the college serve.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO STUDENTS: NSFAS BURSARIES

The Department of Higher Education and Training Bursary Scheme assist students enrolled or who intend to enrol at public FET colleges and not able to fund their studies. Applications forms for bursaries are available at all 50 public FET colleges. You are eligible to apply for a bursary if you are:

- A South African citizen;
- Enrolled or intend to enrol for NC(V) or NATED programmes at any of the 50 public FET colleges;
- In need of financial assistance and meeting the criteria stipulated by the "means test" with specific reference to a joint income; and
- Able to demonstrate potential for academic success.

More information regarding the programmes offered at public FET colleges can be obtained from the SACPO website at www.sacpo.co.za. Linkages to the FET colleges websites is obtained through the SACPO website. Some of this information is also obtainable from the Department of Higher Education and Training, www.dhet.co.za.

QUOTATIONS FOR THOUGHT:

'You cannot use yesterday's tool for today's job and expect to be in business tomorrow'

– Professor Fafunwa.

'Nothing is as practical as a good theory'

– KURT LEWIS.