



## Higher Education South Africa's Office<sup>i</sup> Response to the National Development Plan - Vision for 2030

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### 1. Introduction

This paper presents the position of the Higher Education South Africa (HESA) office in response to the National Development Plan released by Minister Trevor Manuel for public comment in November 2011.

The paper, prepared by Prof Johan Müller from the University of Cape Town, on behalf of the HESA office, was strengthened by insightful inputs from five public universities: Walter Sisulu University, Central University of Technology, North West University, University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University. It is expected that the other public universities will submit their own comments directly to the National Planning Commission secretariat.

The National Development Plan is a document produced on commission by the President of the Republic by 26 commissioners<sup>1</sup> also appointed by the President, with the mandate to advise on issues affecting 'long-term development'. This mandate extends for five years. The Plan does not take the form of a usual White or Green Paper in that it does not concentrate on the details of policy making for this or that sector. What it does is present a 'nation-building vision' for 2030, and to present high-level recommendations for how to get there in each sector. This nation-building vision is premised on a 'development paradigm', which targets **inequality reduction through growth**. This inequality reduction strategy is to roll out according to a fairly tight time scale:

- 2012: broad social compact on the vision and the strategy
- 2021: reduction in inequality of opportunity
- 2025: reduction in inequality of outcomes
- 2030: rising living standards, falling poverty and inequality (2011b, pg. 430)

As it is in the first place a 'vision' document, the Plan does not make detailed reference to other cognate pieces of government policies and programmes, like the New Growth Path (2010), The Industrial Policy Action Plan 2 (2011), the Human

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<sup>1</sup> The full time commissioner and Chairperson of the Commission is Minister Trevor Manuel. The part time commissioners are: Cyril Ramaphosa (deputy chairperson), Miriam Altman, Malusi Marcus Balintulo, Hoosen (Jerry) Coovadia, Anton Eberhard, Tasneem Essop, Bridgette Gasa, Trueman Thandabantu Goba, Robert Michael Godsell, Noluthando Primrose Gosa, Phillip Harison, Mohammed Karaan, Vuyokasi Felicity Mahlati, Malekgapura Makgoba, Christopher Malikane, Vincent Maphai, Elias Masilela, Pascal Moloï, Jennifer Balatedi Molwantwa, Michael Arnold Muller, Joel Netshitenzhe, Ihron Rensburg, Vivienne Taylor, Jerry Vilakazi, Karl von Holdt.

Resource Development Strategy for South Africa 2010 – 2030 (2009), the Ten-Year Innovation Plan (2007) nor of course to the recent Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2012), but there is internal evidence that it is acquainted with at least some of them. It acknowledges as its main precursor the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of 1994. The RDP, says the Plan, was overly optimistic about the capacity of the state to effect change, and it under-estimated the effect that external shocks would have on growth prospects, shocks like the Asian crisis of 1998, the debt crisis of 2008, and shifting patterns of trade and investment. Having taken stock of the strengths and weaknesses of achievements since 1994 as presented in an earlier Diagnostic Overview (2011a), the Plan announces itself with these bold words of co-Chair Minister Manuel, ‘Masupatsela!<sup>2</sup> We chart a new course, we write a new story’ (Preface). In this country of new beginnings, this is an emphatic attempt at a new ‘new beginning’.

The National Development Plan is a document of some 430 pages. It comprises 15 chapters, covering the following terrain:

1. Key drivers of change
2. Demographic trends
3. Economy & employment
4. Economic infrastructure
5. Transition to a low carbon economy
6. Inclusive rural economy
7. Positioning South Africa in the world
8. Human settlements
9. Improving education, innovation and training
10. Promoting health
11. Social protection
12. Building safer communities
13. Building a capable state
14. Promoting accountability and fighting corruption
15. Transforming society & uniting the country

Education thus comprises one chapter out of fifteen, 33 pages out of 430. Of this, the higher education sector specifically comprises no more than a quarter of the space. There is no room then for detailed policy stipulation. However, the Plan presents some specific diagnoses, none of which is particularly surprising to HESA, and some specific recommendations and targets, which are. There are also some general proposals, only some of which will be discussed below.

## 2. Higher education in the National Development Plan

The Plan’s approach to a sector like higher education is to extrapolate from the general development approach to make specific suggestions for each sector. Higher education is not identified in the Diagnostic Overview (2011a) as being one of the ‘main’ or ‘central’ challenges, but ‘public services’ are, and under the general rubric of ‘developing and upgrading capabilities’ (2011b, pg. 5), ‘improving education and training’ (ibid) is

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<sup>2</sup> Masupatsela is also the name of the ANC pioneer movement.

regarded as one of the nine areas requiring concerted attention in order to achieve the 2030 vision.

From a broad developmental perspective the main problem that education presents to the achievement of sustained development and virtuous growth is one of **inefficiency** and, related to this, a **less than optimal rate of expansion**. The principal cause of inefficiencies is seen as weak **capacity**, and most of the recommendations and targets are directed at dealing with inferred weaknesses especially in the human capital of the education system. What the Plan has in mind here, and what it discusses at great length, is the poor capacity of teachers and principals, although poor capacity of higher education lecturing staff is given some attention, as we will see below.

In a major shift from earlier state pronouncements, as Nico Cloete (2012) has noted, the Plan acknowledges the pre-eminent role higher education has to play in development:

‘Higher education is the major driver of the information/knowledge system, linking it with economic development. However, higher education is much more than a simple instrument of economic development. Education is important for good citizenship and enriching and diversifying life’ (2011b, pg. 262).

The Plan goes on to outline the three key ‘functions’ higher education fulfils ‘to develop a nation’ (ibid):

- Provides people with indispensable **high-level skills**;
- Dominant producer of **new knowledge**;
- Provides **opportunities for social mobility**.

A little further on, 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, and despite recognising that funding for higher education as proportion of GDP has declined from 0.76% in 2000 to 0.69% in 2009 (2011b, pg. 292), it is disappointing that, in a report bristling with targets, the Plan refrains from setting a target for increased GDP funding for higher education, noting only that ‘additional funding will be needed’ (2011b, pg. 293) to fund the targeted expansion in enrolments and research. HESA recommends that the Plan set such a target. Without such a guaranteed increase in state revenue, attempts at expansion cannot succeed. The suspicion arises that the National Planning commissioners, along with others in the state, harbour the view that there is slack in the higher education system that could be more productively deployed. Nothing could be further from the truth.

With a nod to on-going work in the two departments of education (Basic Education and Higher Education and Training), the commissioners declare that the ‘(A)im of our proposals is to acknowledge and build on departmental plans and, where necessary, to *recommend a different way of approaching the problems*’ (our emphasis: 2011b, pg.274). In an interview with *Business Day* (14/11/2011) Commissioner Eberhard stated: ‘We wish to bring a sense of reality to the debate and highlight the tough trade-offs that will be needed’. The discussion that follows will endeavour to bring out this ‘sense of reality’,

highlight where the Plan proceeds on a well-trodden path and when it strikes out in a fresh direction.

The Plan arranges its proposals under four rubrics: 'Vision'; 'Challenge'; 'Quantifiable Targets'; & 'Policy Proposals'.

1. *Education and training **vision**: higher education*

The Plan lacks a vision for higher education and instead proceeds directly to the technical aspects and practical proposals without linking these to an inspiring vision for the sector. The South African higher education sector should lead the country, the region and the continent in developing high level skills, undertaking research and enhancing innovation, and in turning these into socio-economic benefits and opportunities.

The following four elements are projected for higher education by the Plan:

a. **Diversity/ differentiation.**

The higher education system should be diverse, because higher education must fulfil many functions and 'no one institution can serve all of societies needs' 2011b, pg. 268). To give this effect, all universities should develop a clear **mission** based on:

- the institution's unique contribution to **knowledge production** (research);
- the institution's unique contribution to **national** (*as well as regional and continental*) **development**;
- the institution's identified **areas of strength** and centres of excellence.

Historically disadvantaged universities that do not yet have such areas of strength and excellence should be given 'adequate support and incentives' (ibid) to develop these. This is in broad agreement with the proposal in the Green Paper, but adds more detail on what is required. As part of diversity, women and Africans should comprise more than 50% of the academic staff.

The HESA office supports this proposal. Moreover, we envision a system characterised by high levels of institutional diversity based on institutional self-differentiation accomplished through a differentiated HE system that would be most suited to accommodate the variety of institutional visions and missions, as well as being best suited for a varied but comprehensive response to the different emphases contained in Government's national development priorities. Such differentiation should evolve dynamically and should not be fixed in advance in a structurally deterministic fashion.

However, the current funding regime must be revised in order to reward equally the different roles of higher education in the South African society, namely teaching and learning, community involvement, as well as research. The system needs to continue to support the strengths of the research intensive institutions, but should also recognise the other important functions of higher education institutions and should strongly support underperforming institutions. The HESA office recommends that the Plan should adopt the following key principles as pre-conditions for a differentiated Higher Education system:

- The country needs the entire spectrum of institutions for socio-economic development. As a country, we cannot afford to focus on one or two research-intensive universities at the expense of the further development of expertise and capacity at other institutions;
- The social justice and equity agendas need to be addressed by the whole system. HE institutions should not be pulling in different directions. There is now an opportunity for the development of an agreed upon approach and for steering to take place from within the sector;
- A national plan should be developed in tandem with the discussion on differentiation. Meaningful differentiation will need serious coordination;
- Clarity is needed on the unit of analysis. Differentiation cannot be viewed from the perspective of institutional differentiation only;
- Differentiation does not have to be a zero-sum game.

**b. Quality & efficiency**

The Plan notes that ‘inadequate capacity and quality of staff will constrain knowledge production and innovation unless effectively addressed’ (2011b). In order to achieve greater efficiency in knowledge production but also in participation, throughput and graduation rates, **75% of university academic staff should have a PhD** by 2030. Currently the figure is 34%. This is asking the higher education establishment to more than double its PhD complement in 18 years. Where the appropriate supervisors will come from is certainly a question to be asked. An out of the box solution could be to sponsor Master’s and Doctoral students to complete their studies in other higher education systems, which will also enable them to complete their studies sooner than the average time taken to finish locally. Japan and China for example, sent thousands of their students to the West and the apparent effect on that country’s economic and social development is clear for all to see.

The logic here can be related to the point made in Badsha & Cloete (2011, pg. 6), that academics with PhDs publish more than those who don’t. The Plan cites Badsha & Cloete’s graphic comparison with the University of Sao Paulo that, at 10% of the size of the South African system, and with 98% of

academics with PhDs, produces more scientific publications and almost twice as many PhDs per annum as the South African system does (2011b, pg. 272). This would be a valid comparison if all universities aspired to Sao Paulo productivity levels, but in the light of the strong point made about differentiation and diversity above, this bears re-consideration. It is not immediately obvious why staff in a predominantly undergraduate institution, say, should all have PhDs, which in turn, also highlights the current need to finalise the debate on the scope and extent of a diverse and differentiated higher education sector in South Africa. However, this is not to say that achieving PhDs in academia is not important. In some professional areas such as Law, Accounting, Technology, etc. there is likely to be less people with PhDs, but people working in the academy should be expected to push the frontiers of knowledge and innovation.

c. **Planning & coordination**

In order for diversity and efficiency to be systemically achieved and properly coordinated, a(nother?)<sup>3</sup> **coherent national plan** for higher education should be drawn up, this time with a far more inclusive remit. Badsha & Cloete (2011, pg. 18) note further that the HESA 2011 workshop report on institutional differentiation establishes that: 'Differentiation must be linked to the Government's long-term Human Resources Development (HRD) plan and its associated 30 year time horizon'. Necessary participants are listed in the Plan - universities, science councils, SOEs, private industry and research institutes - and the Plan notes later that this should be done 'with the involvement of the Departments of Higher Education, Science & Technology, Trade & Industry, Public Enterprises, Treasury and Economic Development' (2011b, pg. 289). It does not say who should lead the initiative. The need for better 'coordination' is repeatedly stressed throughout the Plan. In this regard, the HESA office suggests that given the non-executive powers of the National Planning Commission, a Ministerial Coordinating Committee reporting to Cabinet, under the leadership of the Deputy President, with the Ministers of Higher Education and Training and Science and Technology as deputy co-chairs, should be established to strengthen coordination in the design and implementation of all government initiatives relating to human capital development, research and innovation.

d. **Private higher education**

The Plan is of the view that private higher education institutions can play 'a greater and better defined role' (2011b, pg. 272) with more effective and enabling regulation. While the HESA office agrees that public and private education institutions should collaborate more closely, which was also proposed in the Green Paper, both the GP and the Plan are silent on the parameters for such collaboration. Further, the current regulatory environment within which private higher education sector finds itself is not the most enabling, which may inhibit meaningful partnerships.

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<sup>3</sup> There is already a National Plan for Higher Education (2001).

However, the HESA office welcomes this development and herewith acknowledges that partnerships between public and private universities would be important for the realisation of many of the bold targets set by the Plan.

### **Distance and open education**

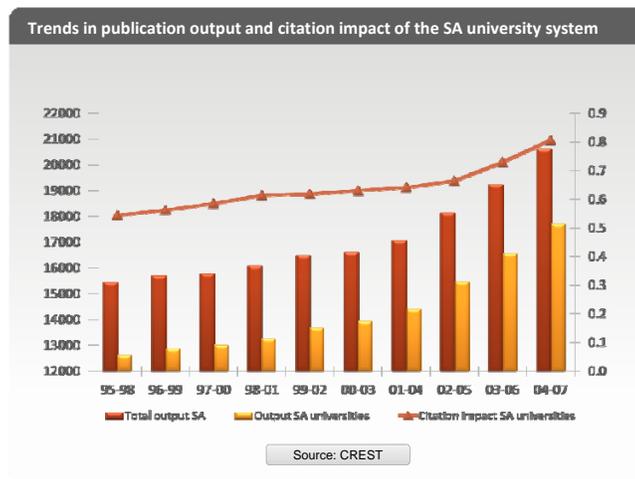
In contrast to the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training in which the matter of distance and open education is portrayed as flexible and innovative, the NDP makes no mention of the benefits of this mode of delivery. In concurrence with the Green Paper, the HESA office acknowledges the important role that open and distance education – in particular as offered by traditionally residential universities – could play in creating a conducive environment for the full implementation of the development paradigm.

## *2. The challenge: higher education*

If differentiation and efficiency were the main focus of the Vision part of the Plan, then **knowledge production** is the main, though not exclusive focus, of the Challenge part. The World Bank assesses South Africa as a ‘mid-level performer’, which puts her at the 57<sup>th</sup> rank just ahead of Brazil on the Global Competitiveness rankings, Sao Paulo notwithstanding (2011b, pg. 272). Knowledge production capacity is depicted as unevenly distributed, but it is unclear whether this is regarded as a problem, given the requirements of diversity and equity. At any rate, knowledge production does not only take place in higher education institutions as acknowledged earlier in the Plan: ‘learning, innovation and process improvements often take place in incremental steps on the shop-floor if there is a conducive environment’ (p110). Likewise, this is also true for different higher education institutions. Mouton (in HESA, 2012, unpublished report) notes for example that

‘South African universities vary hugely in terms of the shape of their knowledge production. The big differences in scientific field profiles of the different universities is clearly a function of institutions’ histories (e.g. having a medical school or faculty of theology) and institutional missions (research-intensive universities versus teaching-focused universities and former technikons). These differences mean that the same benchmarks cannot be realistically set for all faculties [and all institutions].

It does seem that it might be better to discuss issues such as research output in the light of decisions about mission. At present, to discuss the entire higher education system in terms of outputs that might pertain only to a smaller sub-set runs the risk of creating confusion. What the Plan does not say is that research output has increased steadily (cf graph below), despite a low R & D spend against GDP, and declining state funding for research. It is unlikely that this upward trend can be sustained without an increase in funding for research.



### 3. *Quantifiable targets for 2030: higher education, science & technology*

There are four specific targets set for the system in 2030:

#### a. **Increase participation rate to more than 30%.**

This would entail an increase of gross enrolments from 950,000 in 2010 to 1 620,000 in 2030, a 70% increase<sup>4</sup>. Apart from the fact that this sounds rather steep, especially in light of the fact that the current rate of increase is just short of 5%, it should be borne in mind that virtually all universities in South Africa already run on full capacity. Moreover, the mere addition of two more universities and a medical school to the current higher education infrastructure, would not facilitate a 70% increase. A true substantial and large-scale investment in infrastructure, as well as an enabling environment for open and distance learning would be needed.

Furthermore, the continued under-performance of the schooling system remains a major challenge in terms of eligible candidates. Another out of the box solution could be to link underperforming schools with universities, as feeder schools. With ring-fenced grants, the university could help to improve the quality of education. This would be in the university's interest as the best of the students from these schools would then enrol at that institution. This could be coupled with Saturday and Winter/Summer schools, opened more broadly to all schools in the region.

Nevertheless, the HESA office is concerned that in the drive to increase participation, including increasing the number of students in science and mathematics, the sector is held to account for poor schooling, which is beyond the purview of higher education.

<sup>4</sup> The Green Paper (2012) sets the figure at a comparable 1 500,000, following the Human Resource Development Strategy (2009).

### Head count enrolments by race, 2000-2009 ('000)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Growth pa
<b>African</b>	318	353	377	403	454	447	451	477	515	548	6.2%
<b>Coloured</b>	30	33	38	42	46	46	49	49	52	55	6.9%
<b>Indian</b>	40	43	48	52	54	55	55	53	52	54	3.4%
<b>White</b>	163	173	179	185	189	186	185	180	178	179	1.1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>682</b>	<b>743</b>	<b>734</b>	<b>739</b>	<b>759</b>	<b>797</b>	<b>836</b>	<b>4.7%</b>

Source: Charles Sheppard, CHET

#### b. Increase university science and mathematics entrants to 450,000

The Plan simply notes that numbers 'should be' at least three times the current levels, but no concrete figures are given, although it is notable that this would make up 25% of all enrolments if the target enrolment figure for 2030 is met. The suggestion above regarding linking schools to universities could go some way in addressing poor performance in science and mathematics.

#### c. Increase graduation rates to more than 25%

This would increase the total number of graduates from 167,469 to 425,000 by 2030, including private institution graduations.

### Graduates as a percentage of headcount enrolments

Qualification type	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Total undergraduate</b>	14%	13%	13%	14%	14%	15%	15%	15%	15%	16%
<b>Postgraduate to masters level</b>	34%	35%	35%	35%	35%	38%	38%	37%	36%	36%
<b>Masters</b>	19%	19%	18%	17%	17%	18%	18%	18%	18%	19%
<b>Doctors</b>	15%	13%	13%	13%	12%	13%	11%	13%	12%	13%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>17%</b>

Source: Charles Sheppard, CHET

As can be seen from the table, the graduation rate has changed very slowly over the last decade. In addition, a major brake on the national graduation rate is the low graduation rate of the University of South Africa, the large distance education provider, which had a graduation rate of 9% in 2008 (Badsha & Cloete, 2011, pg. 11). In calculating the national graduation rate excluding UNISA from the equation, it becomes clear that this target is indeed achievable. (It may also be worthwhile to include figures of distance education graduation rates at residential universities offering distance and open education).

#### d. Produce more than 100 doctoral graduates per million of the population

In line with the international benchmark of 100 doctoral graduates per million of the population, the system would need to increase the annual production of doctoral graduates from 1,420 per annum (in 2010) to 5,000 per annum in 2030. The doctoral graduation rate has been all but static over the last decade, so this will require a major policy and financial intervention to get

even close to this target. Something dramatic and extraordinary – like extending the retirement age for certain academics as recommended by the Green Paper, or re-hiring retirees on contract, will have to be considered. It is highly probable that with the current 34% of academics with PhDs that the system simply does not currently possess the supervisory capacity to produce the rate of increase that would be required. Given the small size and undergraduate nature of our system of higher education, reaching this target will also require a deliberate strategy for internationalising our system. A concerted effort must be made to also take advantage of the many bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements and accords concluded, such as the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA), the BRICS grouping and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IOR-ARC), to name but a few, all of which are keen to exchange students and staff and to cooperate in respect of research. As the World Bank report states, ‘in most cases, universities [need] students and [academics] who are not exclusively from the country where the university operates. This will enable them to attract the most talented people, no matter where they come from, and open themselves to new ideas and approaches’ (Salmi, 2009).

In light of the above argument, the HESA office proposes that more realistic targets would entail a moderate growth on undergraduate level and more focus on research outputs and the delivery of PhDs.

#### **4. Policy proposals**

Some of these are pointed and clear; others are couched as general exhortations, where it is not always clear who is supposed to do what.

##### **a. Build a strong and streamlined quality assurance and qualification system**

This proposal deals principally with two aspects of higher education quality assurance, both important and both also dealt with in the Green Paper.

- The Plan proposes a ‘**streamlined**’ **quality assurance** institutional environment, but stops short of recommending the amalgamation of bodies as the Green Paper does. It is also concerned that all national qualifications be externally assessed, and urges that individual assessors or moderators not be accredited or registered.
- The Plan recommends the **dropping of National Qualification Framework ‘levels’** in agreement with the Green Paper. Since HESA’s response to the Green Paper urges ‘caution’ with respect to this proposal, it is worth quoting the Plan: ‘The levels on the National Qualifications Framework cause ongoing confusion. They could be simplified by replacing the framework’s levels with clearly designated qualifications’ (2011b, pg. 288). The **purpose** of the qualification is what matters, rather than the level; and levels incontestably do cause confusion. The European Higher Education Qualifications Framework operates perfectly well without levels.

The HESA office wishes to sound a caution in this regard. While we endorse the principle of a highly efficient, well articulated and differentiated education and training system, support efforts to facilitate articulation across the different parts of the system and appreciate the rationale for the proposal to remove 'NQF levels and level descriptors, while maintaining a hierarchy of qualifications' (DHET, 2011: 74), we believe a more nuanced approach should be considered for the following reasons:

Firstly, experience has shown that within the general academic pathway the level descriptors serve an educational purpose. They provide a basis for thinking about degrees of complexity in constructing programmes and thinking about exit level outcomes for each level in the hierarchy of qualifications. In addition, the use of levels and level descriptors are key features of qualification frameworks in other parts of the world, such as the generic descriptors for each of the cycles in the Bologna Framework, the levels in the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning adopted by the European Union and the Australian Qualifications Framework which in our view facilitates understanding and recognition across systems.

Second, we do not believe that we should remove levels in the qualification framework simply because of demarcation disputes between the Quality Councils. Given the nature of the issues dealt with by the councils, demarcation disputes are inevitable, and the system should not be changed before all other avenues to resolve such differences have been explored.

Third, for pragmatic reasons, we caution against introducing any major changes to the NQF for a few years to come. We need to allow time for the policy changes to bed down. The higher education sector has just been involved in a major exercise to align their offerings with the requirements of the HEQF, including aligning these to appropriate levels of the NQF. In time it may be possible to entertain other options, but not before the system has been tested and all efforts have been made to ease articulation between the sub-sectors. If the assumption of equivalence is removed the rationale for a set of universal levels may very well become superfluous, but at this stage more work needs to be done in specifying the properties of curricula in different pathways to clarify articulation possibilities, which we believe is what is required to facilitate mobility. In the meantime it would be better to explicitly acknowledge that qualifications in the three pathways are structured differently in accordance of the purposes of such qualifications, and that movement from one type to another is not automatic or simple.

A further cautionary note deals with articulation itself – there are other barriers to articulation apart from the structural arrangement of a system which include attitudinal barriers, especially with regard to articulation between higher education institutions and colleges. This is compounded

by curricular barriers, institutional typologies and structural/financial regimes which place a variety of obstacles in the way articulation. Articulation will be greatly enabled when the interfaces between institutions, curricula and funding regimes are clarified and simplified.

**b. Enhance the innovative capacity of the nation**

There are two specific proposals made under this rubric:

- Consider the introduction of a **4 year degree** pattern for science based programmes. The Green Paper had been similarly tentative, but with regard to all Bachelors programmes, not just science ones. The Plan is initially bold: 'Higher education institutions should extend the length of their science, technology, engineering and mathematics degrees to four years ...'(2011b, pg. 289) but in the 'Overview of actions' expresses the view more tentatively, with reservations added: '(Higher education institutions should) *consider* extending the length of first degrees to four years on a *voluntary* basis for historically *disadvantaged* students' (emphasis added: *ibid*, pg. 35). This is already in place in some institutions, but perhaps the formulation should be "... for *under-prepared students*" rather the historically disadvantaged students.

There has been much discussion of this issue and little progress for a number of years. In the Green Paper the issue is raised equally tentatively and ambiguously: 'Universities should be supported in offering and mainstreaming four-year undergraduate degree programmes *where necessary* (our emphasis) (DHET, 2011, p. 40). Does the 'where necessary' apply to the support of the offering of the programmes? All universities would require support for this change, and there would be some danger if four-year programmes were to be the norm in some institutions and not in others. All undergraduate degrees in our view could be 4 year degrees, but could be offered in conjunction with flexible curricula that allow students to fast-track on the basis of high performance (HESA response to the Green Paper). However, there are financial implications regarding the introduction of 4 year degrees, and the Plan does not indicate how this will be dealt with.

- Grant **7 year work permits to all graduates from foreign countries**, as a way of temporarily alleviating the shortage of high-level skills.

This is possibly the most innovative proposal for higher education in the Plan, but is sure to meet with stiff opposition from other sectors of society. However, without this, it may not be possible to achieve the target of more than 50% African and women academics. In addition, other policy decisions outside of education and training could be either enabling or restricting – the current policies on immigration and naturalisation currently inhibits the mobility of foreign students and staff who could be contributing towards achieving these ideals. Nevertheless, should restrictive practices be lifted, the HESA office strongly supports this proposal.

c. **Funding an enabling, high quality differentiated system**

The Plan reminds the *Ministerial Committee for the Review of Funding of Universities* that revisions should be based on the needs of a differentiated system, including a greater emphasis on **output-based funding**. Again, a caution has to be sounded: as long as we have large numbers of underprepared students and poor alternatives to higher education (e.g. post-school institutions), more input-based funding than output-based funding will be required. This should therefore be introduced incrementally over time.

The most specific recommendation made here has to do with student funding:

- The HESA office agrees that students qualifying for National Student Financial Aid Scheme funding should be **fully funded** through bursaries and loans; and that students not qualifying should have access to bank loans backed by state sureties. There should be service-linked scholarships for teaching and social work. Private students should enjoy the same access.
- Institutions in chronic crisis should receive **performance-based improvement grants**. The Plan issues a stern warning to discourage institutions from failing and hence perversely continuing to qualify for such funding: 'If measurable progress towards achieving the objectives is not evident after five years, consideration should be given to reviewing the status of the institution' (2011b, pg. 293). By making the grants conditional on performance, the Plan extends the accountability of the redress grants proposed in the Green Paper.

The HESA office agrees with this proposal. In addition, interventions should include a strong development programme with clear performance targets that will be monitored. This is a nuance change which suggests a forward-looking intervention working towards desirable future outcomes and not only addressing past wrongs.

As noted above, the Plan makes no specific proposal about increasing the allocation to higher education from the fiscus, which has been shrinking. While the total research output funding has been increasing every year in keeping with inflation, it has not kept pace with the increase in the national research output, thus leaving universities with a declining amount per publication produced. Moreover, a rapid improvement in one institution's productivity negatively affects all other institutions even though their own output may also have increased, but more slowly. Much more discussion is needed about a stable funding model. Without a deliberate increase in funding, the HESA office remains convinced that expansion, let alone envisaged efficiencies and more research will be much harder to attain.

### 3. Summary

There are a number of other general recommendations made, including: doubling the number of scientists; providing support for the Humanities; offering courses to encourage entrepreneurship; consideration of professional doctorates; developing a cohort of young scholars; developing African languages; and incorporating indigenous knowledge systems. However the Plan does not stipulate whose responsibility these are, or how they are to be achieved, so they remain at the level of 'good ideas'. A reliable guide to the **core priorities** of the Plan is to be found in the section 'Key targets and implementable actions of the plan' (2011b, pg. 27ff):

#### 'Education, training & innovation'

##### Targets

1. Increase the higher education participation rate from 17% to 30%. Enrolments in the higher education sector including private higher education will need to increase to 1 620,000 from 950,000 in 2010;
2. Increase the number of students eligible to study mathematics and science at university to 450,000 per year. The department has set a target to increase the number of learners eligible for bachelors programme(s) to 300,000 by 2024, 350,000 learners who pass mathematics, and 350,000 learners who pass physical science;
3. By 2030, 75% of academic staff at universities should have PhDs. The present figure is 34%;
4. Produce 100 doctoral graduates per million per year. That implies an increase from 1,420 a year in 2010 to 5,000 a year

##### Actions

1. Build new universities, one each in Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape;
2. Build a new medical school in Limpopo and a number of new academic hospitals;
3. Consider extending the length of first degrees to four years on a voluntary basis for historically disadvantaged students;
4. Providing full funding assistance covering tuition, books, accommodation and living allowance (in the form of loans and bursaries) to all students who qualify for the National Students Financial Aid Scheme. Students who do not qualify should have access to bank loans, backed by state sureties and recovered through arrangements with the South African Revenue Service;
5. Grant seven-year work permits to foreign students who graduate from public higher education institution' (2011b, pgs. 35 – 37).

The National Development Plan has, in a few bold strokes, carved out a future development course for South Africa. It deserves to receive every consideration from the higher education community. A major challenge for the sector in the last few years has not been the absence of bold and innovative policy ideas, but rather the lack of capacities and capabilities within the state to drive and implement them. The HESA office hopes

that the boldness with which policy proposals are made in the National Development Plan will translate into the vigorous implementation of these innovative policy proposals. Above all, achieving the vision spelt out in the National Development Plan will require government to avail more resources to higher education to create advanced knowledge.

#### 4. Support, concerns, proposals

There is much to support in the Plan, but there are some concerns. In addition, in the spirit of contributing to the Plan, some proposals are made below:

- i. The National Development Plan lacks a vision for higher education in South Africa, the region and the continent. The HESA office proposes that such a vision is developed by the sector, including public and private institutions.
- ii. The HESA office supports the funding of historically disadvantaged institutions as outlined in this paper, including monitoring of their performance. We also agree that existing capacities and centres of excellence should be supported and strengthened.
- iii. The principle of an evolving self-differentiation system along the lines of institutional visions and mission is supported as long as the rewards are concomitant with all the roles assigned to higher education namely, teaching and learning, community engagement and research.
- iv. Out of the box solutions for growing the next generation of academics should be considered. These solutions include sponsoring South African students to complete their post-graduate degrees in other education systems and extending 7-year residency to foreign students and staff to alleviate the immediate shortage of academics. It should also be noted that HESA has initiated a programme of growing the South African cohort of academics (for more information, the publication entitled 'A Generation of Growth – Proposal for a National Programme to develop the Next Generation of Academics for South African Higher Education' (HESA, 2011) is attached for ease of reference).
- v. There is a danger that many of the proposals will remain at the level of 'good ideas' unless responsibility is assigned to take the idea to the level of implementation. In this regard a Ministerial Coordinating Committee to deal with coordination across departments in respect of research and innovation is strongly recommended.
- vi. The HESA office supports the acknowledgement that private higher education can and should play a major role in achieving the bold ideals reflected in the Plan, within the bounds of enabling state regulation.
- vii. The HESA office is concerned about the silence on the role that open and distance education can play in the expansion trajectory.
- viii. HESA would like to see a set target for research and development expenditure as a proportion of the GDP. A target of **1.5% and 2%** by 2030 will put South Africa on a path for the production of high-level skills and innovation.
- ix. Furthermore, the HESA office is concerned about expansion without a mention, on the one hand, of the necessary infrastructure required to accommodate many more students; and, on the other hand, the general under-preparedness of students enrolling for higher education programmes,

- without mentioning that the schooling pipeline needs serious interventions – something for which higher education is not directly responsible.
- x. The HESA office does not believe that any changes should be made to the National Qualifications Framework. The recent policy changes need to settle before we decide on further changes.
  - xi. A stable, equitable funding model is crucial for the achievement of many of the proposals contained in the National Development Plan.

In conclusion, the HESA office remains concerned about the apparent lack of a mention of implementation strategies and viability plans by means of which the NDP is to be realised. Implementation plans need serious attention going forward.

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<sup>i</sup> **Disclaimer:** *The views expressed in the document are views of the Office of HESA led by the CEO, rather than HESA itself, as it is not possible for HESA to reach absolute consensus on all of the proposals made in relation to Higher Education.*