

WORKSHOP ON HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) – PRETORIA
30/31 MAY AND 1 JUNE 2016



Higher Education in South Africa

Briefing paper

for the Workshop on Higher Education



This paper outlines the higher education situation in South Africa giving attention to the European Commission's contribution. Drawn from publically-available documents, studies, research papers and information supplied by the EUD in Pretoria, it is aimed at supporting well-informed exchanges of ideas at the forthcoming Workshop for representatives of EUDs, Commission staff, educationalists and other participants.

1. Background

South Africa's apartheid legacy was a racially divided higher education sector of uneven quality beset by duplications and inefficiencies from pre-school through to further education and the universities. The challenge from 1994 – the year of democracy – onwards was to achieve greater equity, efficiency and effectiveness within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and across the system, recognising that growth in higher education participation and quality would be held back by an inadequate school system.

The incoming government accomplished a radical restructuring of higher education aimed at making it stronger, more focused and efficient, within a framework of policies and regulations including the 1996 National Commission on Higher Education, 1997 Higher Education Act, the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education and the 2004 White Paper on Higher Education.

The geographic and racial fragmentation, structural inefficiencies and duplication of services in South Africa's higher education system have been systematically addressed and HEIs are guaranteed academic freedom under the Constitution and institutional autonomy, subject to their public accountability. The binary divide was dismantled, and the number of institutions cut from 36 to 23 through mergers and campus incorporations: no campuses were closed. The new landscape comprised three types of institutions: 'traditional' research-focused universities, universities of technology, and 'comprehensive' universities that combined academic and vocationally oriented higher education.

Since the advent of democracy, teacher education in South Africa has been in a state of flux as government endeavoured to deal with the apartheid legacy of gross inequality, lack of uniformity and a structured absence of co-ordinated planning across racial lines. All this reflected the ideological practices and structures of 'separate development' and the post-apartheid government was well aware that the entire teacher education system, like the broader system of education and training as a whole, was in need of restructuring, with the higher education sector recognised as the rightful domain of teacher education as a national responsibility.

2. Current Situation



South Africa is categorised as an Upper-Middle Income country. However it also has extremely high levels of inequality (with a Gini coefficient of 0.7), poverty (about 40% of the population live below the poverty line) and unemployment, which is reflected in its Human Development Index ranking of 121st out of 186 countries. Poverty is concentrated amongst the African and broader black population, female-headed households and children. Whilst economic growth is taking place at around 2-3% per year, the pace has not been sufficient to reduce unemployment, which stands at 25% overall and 50% for youth, with young black people accounting for about two-thirds of the unemployed below the age of 35. In addition, South Africa is now facing increasing economic challenges: slow growth rate and manufacturing production decline; and political: incapacity to bring about reforms to tackle service delivery protests, unemployment and improve business climate.

Access to higher education has improved including seismic changes in terms of the composition of the entire student body and considerable improvements for historically disadvantaged parts of the population. However, the deceptively immense increase in participation rates of 60% over the years masks the woeful gross enrolment ratio for Africans sitting at around 15-18%, compared with the participation among whites of some 55-60% and around 50% among Indians. Over 20 years into democracy, with a progressive and pro-poor government, race is still a considerable differentiator in many spheres of life, including undergraduate participation rates. The participation rate for males is 6% behind females – who are at about 22%; students with disabilities are significantly under-represented.

The South African undergraduate system is taking in large numbers of students with about a 30% chance of completing in 5 years: fewer than half of students in contact universities graduate within 5 years and for distance education the figures are far worse. By the end of the regulation time, more students have been lost to failure and dropout than have graduated – more than twice as many in the case of African students and those in diploma courses. The universities have been able to maintain this unsustainable system through fee increases and a perverse incentive subsidy system: over the decade to 2013, the government subsidy decreased as a component of total university income from 49% to 40%, while the contribution from student fees has risen from 24% to 31%. A specific issue is the funding of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and its efficiency both within the Fund itself and within universities.

The postgraduate phase comprises about 16% of the total enrolment in higher education, while at certain universities, such as UCT, it is over 30%. In the rest of Africa, the postgraduate systems comprise less than 5% of the total higher education system. African doctoral graduates increased from 58 in 1996 to 821 in 2012, an increase of 706% in the post-1996 period. By contrast, white graduate numbers only grew by 71% (from 587 to 816). Some 6% of all undergraduate students and around 14% of all postgraduate students are from outside South Africa, mostly from other SADC countries.

The costs of international study opportunities and academic exchange programmes are generally prohibitive for South African universities, even for the more established and better-resourced universities – especially given the present exchange rates. The process of internationalisation at universities in South Africa has been taking place in a



broader context whereby all of them have been forced over the past two or three decades to change quite dramatically, in response to a whole new set of major national and international changes and challenges. All this change had been done at the same time that universities in South Africa faced a range of major challenges relating to the transformation of their institutions. In addition, reforms included the highly complex mergers of higher education institutions that took place during the early 2000s.

The three types of universities together offer a full range of courses leading to internationally recognised qualifications. There is world-class research generated in many fields but concentrated in the country's top universities. Universities received funding from government to refurbish buildings, construct new facilities, upgrade equipment and libraries, improve outputs and produce more science, engineering and technology graduates. Nevertheless, finance is a major problem for both HEIs and students, while fee-free higher education and capping tuition fees has created more demands from students. With higher education both a private and a public good, a country with a limited taxpayer base could not solely fund the sector [overall, education represents around 20% of the government's consolidated expenditure].

Currently, South Africa has a 'have or have not' structure, meaning high returns for degrees (both in wages per hour but especially in employment probability) or, for 'no degree', unemployment. Access to higher education is regarded by the haves as a means to maintaining privilege and by the have-nots as a means of getting out of poverty. The South African problem is exacerbated by a low participation rate. It is only after matriculation, and particularly at the level of degrees, that returns are extremely high. The honours degree is a major stumbling block – particularly for black students – because there is limited postgraduate funding for the honours qualification. South Africa attempts to maintain a high level of quality, with very high rates of return for a completed undergraduate degree, but then also expects higher education to be a mechanism for reducing inequality.

Campus protests remain a feature of the system, some involving student arrests, the destruction of property, deferred examinations, and problematic registration processes. Some grievances are legitimate however and it is noteworthy that many students are increasingly standing up to pose critical questions about the colonial histories and persistent legacies within our universities and the public good role of the university as a basis for advocating for deeper change within the sector and society more generally.

Confronting the developmental challenges requires a single integrated though diverse post-school education and training system that facilitates articulation between its different components. In addition, the entire system needed massive expansion and a radical improvement in the quality of education and training in order to contribute to the lives of individuals, the developmental needs of the economy and to the broader society. The possibility of achieving these aims was enhanced by the establishment of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in 2009.

3. Plans, Strategies and Priorities



The National Development Plan provides the overarching framework for policy development and implementation and identifies the ‘triple challenge’ of poverty, unemployment and inequality as being at the heart of South Africa's development challenge, along with thirteen areas of intervention including, for present purposes, “employment; education, training and innovation; and building a capable and developmental state”. NDP declares that “A strong educational system spanning early childhood education, primary, secondary, secondary, tertiary and further education is crucial for addressing poverty and inequality” and that “teachers are central to education and teaching should be a valued profession”.

The NDP includes targets for increased outputs in terms of honours, research masters and doctoral graduates, the provision of increased support to industry-university partnerships, and increased investment in research and development, especially in the science, engineering and technology sector. The goal is that, by 2030, enrolments should reach 1.6 million in public universities, 2.5 million in TVET colleges and 1.0 million in community colleges. The goal for higher education cohort participation was set at 20%, with growth to be achieved by recruiting more non-traditional and women students, and students from the Southern African Development Community. NDP aims to produce by 2030 more than 100 doctoral graduates per million per year, and to increase the percentage of PhD qualified staff within the higher education sector from the current level of approximately 35% to over 75%.

A well-established and well-functioning 2015-19 Medium Term Strategic Framework is in place containing a clear description and analysis of the developmental situation, weaknesses and challenges and guides planning and resource allocation across government's three spheres (national, provincial and local government). The MTSF focuses specifically on five high priority aspects: (i) decent work and sustainable livelihoods; (ii) education; (iii) health; (iv) rural development, food security and land reform; and (v) the fight against crime and corruption, and a key Outcome is “A skilled and capable workforce to support an inclusive growth path”

The 2014 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training focusses on improving the quality and building appropriate diversity, with a view to provide a range of high-quality options, articulation between the higher education institutions, and between HEIs and other post-school institutions such as the Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges. The White Paper pays attention to the need for universities to build partnerships with employers to promote workplace training opportunities and better match skills to labour market demand, especially in areas that depend on them for qualifications or professional registration purposes. Attention is also paid to creating a post-school distance education landscape based on open learning principles, including for vocationally oriented programmes.

The participation rate in universities is expected to grow to 25% by 2030. Groups whose race, gender or disability status had previously disadvantaged them are receiving particular attention in terms of improvement of access and success, being described as a priority for national policy as well as for higher education institutions. Focus is also on



increasing research and innovation, improving the quality of that research, and building areas of strength as important for national development, in a context where the concern regarding the staffing of universities will require policy attention.

The Department of Higher Education and Training Strategic Plan: 2015 to 2020 is informed by the vision espoused in the National Development Plan, the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and the imperatives of the White Paper. Over that period DHET will:

- Develop and review legislative frameworks aimed at steering the post-school education and training system in line with the imperatives of the White Paper;
- Strive to expand and improve the quality of post-school education and training by introducing appropriate teaching and learning support interventions for Universities and TVET Colleges, as well as artisan development;
- Establish, develop and expand a new institutional type – the Community Colleges – primarily to promote education and training opportunities for those young people who cannot access the universities or the TVET colleges;
- Improve the capacity of the system through infrastructure development for technical and vocational education and training;
- Maintain good stakeholder relations in support of an effectual post-school education and training system; and
- Ensure good corporate governance including effectual resource management within the Department and its entities.

South Africa's policy directions and commitments with respect to teacher education and development are set out in a series of aligned and nested policy documents which together are represented in the DHET's Teaching and Learning Development Capacity Improvement Programme to which they will contribute.

Budget Support criteria are met in respect of the Education Sector and South Africa is assessed to have had adequate fiscal and monetary policies, allowing absorption of shocks as well as the appropriate policy mix, considering the continued risks in advanced economies. There is a credible stability-oriented macroeconomic policy and a credible and relevant programme and strategy to improve public financial management. With regard to the political dimension, since the post-apartheid period SA's institutional set-up has been dominated by continuous emphasis on reconciliation, plurality and progressive realisation of constitutional rights. The use of Budget Support as a modality was evaluated in 2012 and assessed as "a positive experience that should be continued". Indeed, sector budget support has led to the achievement of objectives and importantly fostered an environment for meaningful dialogue.

4. EU support

Although for different reasons and with a different historic background, South Africa and the EU face similar challenges, in terms of attainment rates in higher education



institutions, dropout rates in education, match between the skills of graduates and the demand on the labour market and proportion, and of graduates from secondary education succeeding in Higher Education. South Africa and the EU enjoy a reinforced and special relationship following their agreement to a Strategic Partnership in 2007 aimed at strengthening political dialogue and pursuing strategic cooperation and shared objectives with regard to regional, African and global issues, and entailing annual EU-SA Summits.

Senior EU and DHET officials meeting in Brussels in 2013 in the context of the Higher Education and Training dialogue shared information on the 'rethinking education' strategy of the European Commission and South Africa's vision for post-school education, discussed how to address youth that are not in employment or education in South Africa and how the EU is addressing youth employment, learning and skills and exchanged ideas with regards to their mutual cooperation in higher education and in areas such as college lecturer training, the articulation and dynamics between higher education, Vocational Education and Training (VET), research and industry and multilingualism.

South Africa is a beneficiary of the 2014-2020 Development Cooperation Instrument which sets out a primary objective for 'the reduction and in the long term the eradication of poverty'. The DCI commitment for Sector 2: Education, training and innovation (including Erasmus+) under the 2014-20 Multiannual Indicative Programme is around €96 million of which 25% is to be delivered under the present TLD SRC (see below). Although EU's development aid is a small fraction of SA's budget (below 1%), it remains highly valued by the authorities related to the 'value added' it brings through focusing on innovation, creativity, piloting, and risk taking.

The National Development Policy Support Programme (NDPSP) helped create or save some 55,000 job opportunities, supported 17,250 artisan learners, 1,430 students in science, technology and engineering, helped provide water to 95% of households, and reached 2.4 million households with access to roads. In the area of employment, the Employment Creation SPS Programme has supported the creation of more than 22,000 job opportunities since its inception. Other interventions have included:

- EDULINK: €5 million allocated from the South Africa DCI;
- The intra-ACP (Nyerere) academic mobility scheme: €5 million allocated from South Africa DCI;
- The 2 phases of EU-ACP Cooperation Programme on Science & Technology: €8 million allocated from South Africa DCI; and
- Higher Education HIV-AIDS: €20 million from 2005-10; HEAIDS is now continuing and sustainable, through national resources from the HEIs and TVET colleges are now included.

The EU is currently financing two major programmes in the education sector: the Primary Education Sector Policy Support Programme and the Teaching and Learning Development Sector Reform Contract which was signed in August 2015 for €26 million:



€20 million for budget support and €6 million for complementary support and Call for Proposals. The expected results of TLD SRC are as follows:

- Capabilities of universities to do research for, to design and offer professional qualifications for the education and development of Early Childhood Education educators and practitioners, primary school teachers, special needs teachers and TVET and Community Education and Training (CET) colleges are strengthened.
- College lecturer development is supported via open and distance education, including at university level.
- Information and knowledge systems to enable and support enhanced planning in the TVET sector are improved.
- Partnerships between DHET, Universities, TVET Colleges, CET Colleges and relevant Civil Society Organisations are enhanced.

The TDL SRC will support the following specific areas:

- Early childhood education and development – birth to 4 years (ECD);
- School teachers
- Special needs teachers
- Lecturers and educators for the TVET and ACET
- Open learning opportunities
- University lecturers and research supervisors
- Transformation in higher education
- Global and cross cutting challenges, with a specific focus on gender

The TLD SRC Call for Proposals aims at financing grants in these sectors:

Lot 1: Support the development of quality teacher education programmes and appropriate teacher education materials for the development of practitioners and educators in ECD (birth-4 years).

Lot 2: Support the teacher education system in the training of inclusive and special needs teachers.

Lot 3: Support emerging university-based centres focussed on developing teachers that can address the specialized educational needs of children with profound visual, hearing and intellectual disabilities.

TLD SRC Technical Assistance will cover the Community of Practice: Maths and Science Symposium and launching of the programme; and the Audit of TVET Infrastructure project and establishment of a TVET Infrastructure Management Information System in South Africa

TLD SRC Dialogue and support to DHET will cover:

1. Formal dialogue on education and training



2. Dialogue on employment (and skills development)
3. Support programmes and support to dialogue initiatives with DHET

TLD SRC Dialogue projects under the Dialogue Facility:

- o National Skills Planning Project (finished in December 2015)
- o New Skills for New Jobs in Infrastructure (will finish in May 2016)
- o Quality Management in Higher Education
- o Vocational Education and training; and
- o Framework for Internationalisation Policy of Higher Education in South Africa

Under the Bridging Phase of the TLD SRC Dialogue Facility, four projects related to Education and Training have been selected by the Programme Steering Committee in February 2016:

- o Curriculum Development Social Dialogue ;
- o Public Entities Specialised Training Needs;
- o Towards the development of a framework to produce more professional graduates; and
- o Improving the effectiveness of university teaching through assessment and accreditation of academics as teachers.

Erasmus Mundus involved some €22.6 million over 2011-15. Around 800 South African beneficiaries (students and staff) at Masters, PhD and Post-Doc levels. Specific attention was paid to historically disadvantaged universities, gender and people from disadvantaged backgrounds, based on partnerships between SA universities and European universities.

Erasmus+ should involve about €36.7 million over 2014-20. €8 million is for credit mobility and degree/master mobility and €13 million for HEI capacity building projects (13m EUR during the previous programming).

The former may cover (from SA to EU – 2/3 and from EU to SA – 1/3) about 300 persons per year. The latter (full Masters) will benefit to 15-25 persons per year. 4 Capacity Building projects were selected in 2015 involving consortia of universities from South Africa, from Europe and beyond:

- Entrepreneurship, Modernization and Innovation in South Africa;
- Enhancing Postgraduate Environments;
- Internationalisation and Modernisation Programme for Academics, Leaders and Administrators; and
- The international Learning Network of networks on Sustainability.

The 2016 selection will be made soon.



A recent Tracer and Impact Study of Erasmus and South African HEIs confirmed earlier investigations in terms of the positive "effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of HEIs" and indicated that overall satisfaction levels are very high. There was consensus that the Erasmus Mundus programme has really broadened access to international scholarships for post-graduate students and staff exchanges, across many disciplines; and where these had never existed before.

A relevant intervention is the Public service training and capacity building programme with an Indicative budget of €10 million that focusses on capacity and institutional strengthening of the recently established National School of Government. NSG will contribute to the overall objective 3 of the 2014-2020 Multi-annual Indicative Programme between South Africa and the European Union, and more particularly, its specific objective 3: 'The authority, experience, competence and support provided to public service staff to do their jobs is enhanced'. In the context of the National Development Plan: Vision 2030 and the 2014 Public Administration Act, the NSG is to define and implement new and more effective ways of learning and teaching to bring substantial change in public service performance from national to local levels.

5. Challenges

Despite many achievements in higher education in South Africa since 1994, major challenges remain. The demand for education and training opportunities cannot be met and linguistic diversity, and the education needs of persons with disabilities are insufficiently addressed. There are management and leadership weaknesses within HEIs and links with the workplace are weak. There are unacceptable imbalances in the ratios of black and female staff compared to whites and males, and equally untenable disparities between historically black and historically white institutions in terms of facilities and capacities. Below are some suggested and inter-related foci for constructive discussion, aspects of which are already being covered in the Dialogues:

I. Given the roles that HEIs are required to play in contemporary South Africa, along with the rising costs and falling Rand, how may sufficient financing be achieved and sustained?

II. Related to this is the debate regarding free education for all. Access to higher education is critical but access without affordability has no meaning. Many families – perhaps over half the population – cannot make any contribution to HE expenses. But can the community afford free HE for more and more students or, if not, what of the equity and administrative issues?

III. Undergraduate students in South Africa have high dropout and low graduation rates, which result in their remaining registered for long periods, well beyond the normal times required for the completion of their qualifications, and eventual completion rates are still low. This is an issue of institutional efficiency but also of individual frustration: how may it be rectified?



IV. Accredited certification in relevant skills is the gateway to employment and an escape from poverty. This requires a radical rethinking of South Africa's current notion of a community college as well as a TVET college. The key issue is that the students have to leave higher education with some recognised qualification that signal to prospective employers the reliable cognitive gains. Is part of the answer moving towards a 4-year university programme with the possibility of a diploma or associate degree exit after two years?

V. More than 60% of South African PhD students study part-time. Reaching the NDP target of 100 doctoral graduates per million of the population by 2030 might involve 60% of such students being full-time: is that feasible?

VI. Being employable is not just about learning content but also involves having high level analytical and communication skills, the ability to solve problems, to be innovative, and adaptable, and also about developing flexible talent, and making the most of those skills in new and challenging circumstances... learning, and then graduating, with knowledge and values that prepare students to be successful and confident world citizens. South Africa's future depends on being part of a wider world in which countries are generating new ideas, applications, and economies that are the foundation of our own national survival – and of the world. How may this recognition become widespread across the HE sector?

VII. Successful HEIs have sound and relevant curricula. Some students, staff and commentators are concerned that South Africa still has a 'colonial' higher education curriculum. The inclusion of relevant indigenous knowledge in the curriculum is of great importance; how may that, effectively and realistically, be achieved?

VIII. Successful HEIs have effective teaching and learning. There is demonstrable need for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning as evidenced in the annual assessments of learning outcomes. A paramount challenges is the availability of suitably qualified, competent and committed educators and professionals to teach, lead and manage in education and training institutions. Will actions currently being taken remedy the situation?

IX. Successful universities have high-quality applicable research, recognised as such, not just across Africa but in Europe and the USA and indeed in India, China and Brazil. Will actions currently being taken remedy the situation?

X. What of that 'public good role' of the university as raised by students recently? Not only in terms of the purpose of higher education in contemporary South Africa but such issues as: 'What knowledge is produced? How has it been produced? Whose interests does it serve? And how does it serve society?'



XI. Specifically, in addition to the doctorate's role in building the knowledge economy and contributing to economic development, what part could or should it play in addressing broader social development imperatives of the country.

XII. How best may EU support and expertise be applied in support of South Africa's higher educational – and national – objectives?