

**Revisiting the Equity/Equality – Development/Quality Goals
Paradox and Tension in South African Higher Education**

**Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) Discussion Forum
on *Equity and Transformation in Higher Education***

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Saleem Badat

Introduction

The presentation by the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) on “the key lessons learned in the recent review of initiatives focused on equity and transformation at three South African universities supported by the Carnegie Corporation” is an opportunity to revisit and comment twenty years later on the Equity/Equality – Development/Quality paradox and tension in South African Higher Education. This is so because CHEC states that the lessons will “be presented in the wider context of...reflections on the ways in which universities manage the tensions between equity and development”. More generally, given how central the values and social goals of equity, equality, development and quality are in higher education, it is worthwhile to critically reflect and assess how key actors during the past twenty years have engaged with the these values and social goals, addressed the paradox and tensions related to their pursuit and achievement simultaneously, and with what results.

Arguments on equity/equality – development/quality in South African higher education and how they should be approached were first advanced in the early 1990s as part of policy propositions and contestations on the reform/development/transformation of South African higher education. These arguments were inextricably tied up with explicit or implicit views on the social purposes and roles of universities, the kind of (differentiated) higher education landscape that should prevail after 1994, access to universities, and the quality and standards of different universities and their academic programmes.

In this paper I

- Sketch the initial engagements with the values and social goals of equity, equality, development and quality in higher education, which irreducibly privileged either development/quality or equity/equality
- Set out the critique of the privileging of development/quality and of equity/equality
- Highlight the key proposition that emerged from the genius of the late Harold Wolpe
- Briefly reflect on how the paradox and tensions related to the values and social goals of equity, equality, development and quality and their simultaneous pursuit have played out in South African higher education over the past twenty years.
- Propose a critical research agenda related to the values and social goals of equity, equality, development and quality and the paradox and tensions related to their concurrent pursuit and achievement.

Act 1: Privileging of development/quality

Early 1990s contributions on equity, equality, development and quality emphasized the ‘high quality’ of the historically white universities (HWUs) as opposed to the historically black universities (HBUs), and their importance for the economic and wider development needs of a democratic South Africa; and the need to uphold ‘quality’ and ‘standards’ in the face of the spectre of large numbers of ‘underprepared’ (read ‘black’) students seeking enrolment at the HWUs (van Onselen, 1991; Charlton, 1992; Saunders, 1992; Steele, 1992). In various ways it was argued that the HWUs alone had the institutional capacities to produce the knowledgeable, competent and skilled graduates and professionals and the knowledge that would “be required by a complex economy which will have to become competitive on international markets and simultaneously meet the basic needs of the people in a democratic South Africa” (Wolpe and Barends, 1993:2). The message was that “whatever policy (was) pursued to advance the black universities, the capacities of the white universities must not be endangered” – meaning that “resources should not be redistributed to the black universities in a way and to a degree which would impair the maintenance and development” of the HWUs (ibid.: 2). This was “the triumph of development over equity, so to speak” (Badat, Wolpe and Barends, 1994:4).

Concomitantly, there was considerable anxiety about the implications, in the light of the impending outlawing of racial and other kinds of discrimination and adoption of the values of social equity/redress, of the greater entry of ‘underprepared’ students at the HWUs for ‘quality’ and ‘standards’. It was contended that avoiding a diminution of ‘quality’ and ‘standards’ necessitated that the existing admission criteria and standards had to be maintained. The HWUs had dealt with under-preparedness as a minority problem (which it was then, given the Ministerial permission that was required by black students to enter the HWUs and their own admission criteria). In referring to the ‘under-preparedness’ of students for higher learning, there is “the danger of labeling, and thus pathologising, the students as underprepared”, avoiding any “focus on the ‘underpreparedness’” of universities and academics.ⁱ Yet, under-preparedness on the part of students occurs “within an epistemic context that is in some way or another opaque or inaccessible to” them. It “is not some abstracted psychological condition” that students possess, “but is a relation between a familiar cultural context, which (they have) internalised, and the unfamiliar cultural and institutional context (a university environment), which (they have) not yet internalised. *All* students experience disadvantage when they enter into university learning practices, but some struggle more with it as a consequence of their specific learning histories” (Moll, 2005:11; emphasis in original).

At the HWUs it was assumed that under-preparedness could be ‘fixed’ by academic support programmes (ASP) and did not require serious institutional and systemic attention needing to be given to issues of admissions policies, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment or major organisational changes. Yet, in as much as quality and standards are not invariant, the “educational process in higher education – including curriculum frameworks, the assumptions on which these are based, course design, and approaches to delivery and assessment” (Scott et al, 2007:73) - is also neither immutable nor a technical or neutral issue. Instead, it is “historically constructed” and “constitutes a significant variable affecting performance and

determining who gains access and who succeeds". However, there is frequently opposition to critical engagement on "the educational process as a variable, at least partly because changing embedded structures and practices is seen as eroding standards" (ibid.:73). According to James Moulder, the ASP had "to see that these students learn how to cope with what the university demands of them. They (the students) have to change so that it (the university) does not have to change" (1991:117-118; cited in Wolpe and Barends, 1993:4). Here then, was the triumph of 'quality' over equity/equality. However, one can also discern here the possible foreclosure of the institutional *development* of the HWUs in ways more appropriate to a democracy.

These early engagements of the HWUs with equity/equality – development/quality were characterized by a number of key assumptions. First, "the meaning attached to 'quality' proceeds on the assumption that 'quality' attaches to a single, ahistorical and, therefore, universal model of the university; and therefore, any departure from this model entails the loss of 'quality'..... That is to say, the notion of 'quality' is employed in an entirely undifferentiated and unproblematic manner" (Wolpe and Barends, 1993:5; emphasis in original). It is also abstracted from any clear and explicit conception of the purposes and goals of universities that is historically and contextually grounded in the real conditions of South Africa and its imminent transition to democracy. Moreover, there was little appreciation that 'quality' did "not perfectly coincide with the categories of 'black' and 'white' institutions" (ibid.: 9).

Second, there was seemingly little recognition that the critical challenge was not a 'minority' requiring access to and success in higher education but a *majority* – which required radical and substantive institutional transformations rather than minor organisational tinkering: how institutions could "be reconstructed to teach the majority of students who come from a specific historical and socio-economic milieu (Wolpe and Barends, 1993: 4). Third, the contention of the HWUs was that "that there is an inescapable *contradiction* between equality (or equity) and quality" (ibid.:1; emphasis added). There was little attempt to think outside of this conventional wisdom and imaginatively and creatively address how equality/equity and quality and standards, appropriately defined, could be pursued simultaneously.

Fourth, as Stan Ridge has argued it was erroneous and wishful thinking that only the HBUs were "scarred by apartheid" (1991:1). The thrust of his argument was that both HWUs and HBUs were profoundly shaped by apartheid planning and by the respective functions assigned to them in relation to the reproduction of the apartheid social order. He pointed to "the phenomenal growth in Afrikaans university graduate programmes...and the growth of the white universities to accommodate the burgeoning numbers of white" secondary school graduates (Ridge, 1991:1-2). Here, he was possibly alluding to what Moulder had voiced: "The dilution of the matriculation requirements paved the way from elite to mass universities for whites....But the gap between school and university is too big. That is why many white matriculants fail to graduate, or fail to graduate in the required time..."(Moulder, 1991:1; cited in Wolpe and Barends, 1993:4). It was the fundamental differences in allocated roles, whatever the differences among the HWUs and however diverse the origins and development of the HBUs, that distinguished these two sets of institutions and constituted the key differentiation and the principal basis of inequalities between them.

The USAID Tertiary Education Sector Assessment observed that “the requirements of apartheid and the historical competition between white English and Afrikaans speakers had led to distortions in planning for the higher education needs of the country and to considerable duplication of institutions and programs, particularly in the urban areas”, as well, in certain respects, between HWUs and HBUs (USAID, 1992:6-21). It was noted that the HWUs were not necessarily appropriately geared in all respects to the ‘modern core’ of the economy, noting that “even at the leading institutions, research (was) unevenly concentrated in certain faculties and disciplines” (ibid.: 6.5). Despite the HWUs being the major research institutions in Africa, with international reputations in fields such as engineering, medicine and the sciences, there were “significant areas of weakness even in the fields of science and technology” (ibid.: Appendix J, 51-2). There was a strong dependence of “South African manufacturing...on imported technology, and...little commitment to local innovation” (ibid.: 51-2). There was also “the lack of co-ordination between the objectives of research and socio-economic goals’, pointing to the low proportion of academic research funding expended on engineering, technology, math, and computer science...” (ibid.: 51-2).

Given the realities of South African higher education and the HWUs tepid engagement with them, Wolpe and Barends were moved to write that “bold declarations about transformation are so often accompanied by modest policy proposals whose modesty is almost always justified by the existence of the very structures of apartheid which any meaningful reform must find a way of surpassing” (1993:1). The fact was that both the HWUs and the HBUs were part of a racially structured and differentiated higher education ‘system’, which manifested a set of conditions, pertaining to funding, geographical location, staff qualifications, student access, opportunities and quality and so forth which further disadvantaged the HBUS with respect even to the narrow range of teaching and research functions they were designed to carry out. In the building of a new society and democracy, all universities would need to be liberated from this past to enable them to serve new societal goals.

It is important to note that Wolpe and Barends argued that “the possibility of different types of universities should not be ruled out because the form in which that proposal has so far been advanced (by HWU leaders) has remained caught within a framework which permits the reproduction of apartheid inequalities” (1993:8) – the privileging of development over equity/equality. They pointed to the possibility of a landscape and spectrum of specialist research, technological and teaching universities that “is not necessarily locked to the reproduction of inequalities” (ibid.:8). They held out the possibility of “a different model (or models) of the university” that could “provide not only for a variety of levels and functions of good quality which will be consonant with the socio-economic conditions of the present and the path of development which is opening out before us, but will also open the way to a redress of historical institutional imbalances and racial and gender inequalities within the universities” (ibid.: 8). It was their view that the issue of the roles and functions of the current universities, their future developmental trajectories and possible new universities depended “in the first place, on an analysis of the needs of the political, economic, social and cultural policies which are to be facilitated by the work of the universities. Only once this has been determined can we begin to engage with the crucial issues of how the inequalities between existing institutions can

be abolished or, at least, radically reduced and how new institutions can be developed so as to preclude the reproduction of apartheid institutional inequalities” (ibid.: 8).

Act 2: Privileging of equity/equality

The equality pole, grounded in conceptions of equal social rights and redress, found strong expression among black students and parents, the broad liberation movement and historically black universities. The right to education has been, and remains, a powerful claim in South Africa and nowhere is this claim stated more explicitly than in the Freedom Charter: “The doors of learning and culture shall be opened! Higher education...shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit” (Suttner and Cronin, 1986:265). Similar generalised views stem from the people’s education movement with its emphasis, echoing the Freedom Charter, on the right of people to have access to education and training (NECC, 1989). There is no shortage of propositions which emphasise the global need for, or right to, education; yet in these proposals virtually no explicit attempt is made to propose which educational needs should be given priority. Perhaps this is because arguments based on education as a human right do not lend themselves easily to a hierarchical ordering.

In higher education there is necessarily a strong challenge to the status quo in respect of the ‘race’, class, and gender inequalities related to access to and success at universities, the composition of academic and senior support staff and the distribution of public resources to universities. The demand is for both the enrolments and staffing of universities to reflect increasingly the social composition of the broader society; for resources to be made available to historically disadvantaged social groups, and for the increased funding and qualitative development of the historically black universities.

Act 3: The genius of Wolpe

Towards the close of the early 1990s National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), Harold Wolpe drew attention to the fact that the NEPI investigation, of which he was an integral part, had posed higher educational transformation purely in relation to equity/equality. The effect, he argued, was a failure to pose adequately the transformation of higher education in relation to economic, social and political development in a new democracy. Concomitantly, there was limited appreciation on the part of the democratic movement of the difficult social and political dilemmas, choices and trade-offs that would be entailed by any process of higher education change that sought to advance simultaneously equity/equality and development/quality (appropriately defined).

These ideas were further developed in response to an article ‘Equity policy: A framework of questions’ (Ramphela, 1994; see Badat, Wolpe and Barends, 1994). While we agreed that “there are difficult choices to be made in developing a national policy framework to ensure that prosperity is not compromised in the quest for equity”, we took strong issue with the terms in which the issue of “equity – prosperity” was posed (Ramphela, 1994:19). First, we observed that while the statement “to ensure that prosperity is not compromised in the quest for equity”

distinguished between the needs of equality and the needs of development (albeit somewhat narrowly conceived), it unwittingly contributed to irreducibly privileging development over equality. We expressed the concern that bold declarations about equality and transformation could be accompanied by ultimately modest policy proposals; and that this modesty, if previously justified by the structural outcomes of apartheid, could now be legitimated by appeals to not compromising prosperity, growth, development and so forth (Badat, Wolpe and Barends, 1994:4). Second, we endorsed the need for “a coherent national policy...which will inform the transformation process towards greater equity and prosperity” (Ramphela, 1994:16). We noted, however, that while equality and development were now conjoined, there appeared to be no recognition of the fact that a fundamental tension existed in the simultaneous pursuit of these equally desirable values and social goals (Badat, Wolpe and Barends, 1994: 5).

Our argument was that when there was broad consensus on the importance of particular values and social goals, there was a tendency to overlook that these goals could stand in an uneasy relationship to one another, and that their simultaneous pursuit could necessitate that we either *prioritize* amongst them, or find a way of *balancing* them. We suggested that commonly in practice a particular goal was eliminated in favour of another, and sought instead to provide an alternative approach that had significant implications for policy formulation (Badat, Wolpe and Barends, 1994:1). In a nutshell, predicated on Wolpe’s genius, we argued that equity/equality and development/quality as simultaneous social goals in higher education exist in a relationship of intractable and permanent tension. Their pursuit had the potential to result in purely populist or pragmatist positions that could ultimately advance neither social equity/equality nor economic, social, political and cultural development. Presciently, it was observed that “the financial and other resources required to redress the effects of the apartheid-capitalist system” in higher education were “not immediately available and, except in the long term, (were) extremely unlikely to become available” as “enormous calls will be made on limited resources to meet not only the needs of” higher education “but also other basic human needs such as housing, health and welfare services” (ibid., 3). In order to move beyond critique, and as a contribution to the debate on the transformation of higher education, we proposed that equity/equality and development/quality goals should be balanced, and this this balancing should constitute the essential frame for the formulation of policies for the transformation of higher education and individual universities (ibid.: 2).

If Wolpe was hostile to un-theorized notions of quality and standards and the privileging of the needs of economic development/quality over equity/equality, he was equally wary of a focus entirely on equity/equality at the expense of development/quality. As he put it, concentrating exclusively on either pole had extremely limiting effects on the shaping of policies appropriate to the challenges of a democratic South Africa and new economic and social imperatives and goals. On the one hand, an exclusive focus on equity/equality leads to the formulation of policies that are abstracted from the conditions in which the policies have to be applied; that is to say, they are elaborated in isolation from the concrete conditions of South African society and the development programmes that have to be pursued to transform those conditions. It can have potentially negative implications for quality, compromise the production of graduates

with the requisite knowledge, competencies and skills and adversely affect economic and social development. To assert, in populist fashion, the right of all to a university education assumes that there are no limits to access to universities, to the number of universities, or to the qualified people and material and financial resources available for effecting equity/equality. The formulation of policies that ignore the needs of development, the labour market and hence of jobs fuels the notion that equity/equality is fully and immediately attainable in education and employment under a new democratic government (Badat, Wolpe and Barends, 1994:6). On the other hand, an exclusive focus on development (economic and social development) and 'quality' and 'standards', especially when these are considered to be timeless and invariant and attached to a single, a-historical and universal model of higher education, on the grounds that without such development and the associated production of the required university graduates the basic economic and social needs of the people cannot be attained, prioritizes development and effectively retards or delays the achievement of equity/equality. It also has negative implications for eroding the racial and gender character of the high-level occupational structure forged under apartheid.

Morrow has pointed out that when confronted with an intractable tension between dearly held values and social goals, such as equity, equality, development, quality and the like, various "simplifying manoeuvres" are possible. One such manoeuvre is to refuse to accept the existence of a dilemma and that concomitant difficult choices and decisions are entailed – a moral blindness, if you like. A second simplifying manoeuvre is to elevate one value/goal above all others making this *the* value in terms of which all choices will be made and policies will be formulated. A third simplifying manoeuvre is to rank values/goals in advance so that if there is a conflict between them one value/goal will take precedence. In the latter two cases, the effect is to privilege one value/goal above another (Morrow, 1997). Morrow argued that simplifying manoeuvres can have tragic consequences. Wolpe refused to obfuscate the intractable tension between equity/equality and development/quality. He raised its existence strongly, confronted it at the level of policy implication and practice, and urged others to do so.

The way out of the equity/equality – development/quality impasse requires an important conceptual shift and a fundamentally different departure point for higher education and university policy formulation. Firstly, the competing, yet important, claims of both equity/equality (redress of social and institutional inequalities and advancing equality) and development/quality (socio-economic, political and cultural development of society, institutions and people, and the need for knowledgeable, competent and skilled graduates to contribute to such development) need to be recognised. On the one hand, equity/equality demands cannot be relegated to some future period when development has taken place. There are two reasons for this: the goal of equity/equality motivated the struggle against apartheid and continues rightly to be a persistent and pervasive demand; and, there is no guarantee, given the circumstances under which changes is occurring in South Africa, that development will necessarily entail significant redistribution and a secular trend towards general equality. On the other hand, the development of graduates, even where this entails a degree of inequality, cannot be neglected, as economic and social development is vital for enhancing the social

conditions of subordinate and disadvantaged social classes and groups (Badat, Wolpe and Barends, 1994:7-8).

Secondly, the crucial question for policy formation is this: “How is the relationship - the balance - between these two poles, always in tension with one another, to be determined?” (Wolpe, 1992: 5). In so far as both equity/equality and development/quality are prized but exist in a relationship of permanent tension, the challenge for a new government and higher education and universities is clear: “*to find a path which to some extent satisfies both demands as far as existing conditions permit*” (Wolpe, 1992: 5). That is to say, policies for universities and higher education have to *balance* equity/equality needs and development/quality needs. The task, fundamentally, is to imaginatively and creatively devise approaches and strategies that can contribute effectively and simultaneously to both equity/equality and development/quality. Of course, trade-offs could be involved; one consequence could be relatively slower processes of equalization and development, which could perhaps be accepted as a small price to pay.

In concrete terms, what is involved is *first* to assess the graduates needed for political, economic and intellectual/cultural development and *then*, in relation to this and the resources available, to operationalize policies geared towards ‘race’, class, gender and other kinds of equity/equality and the equalization of universities in congruence with their missions and goals. The simultaneous consideration of equity/quality in relation to the graduates required to reconstruct/develop/transform South Africa leads to a new model of the higher education system and within this the transformation of its different types of universities and individual universities (Badat, Barends and Wolpe, 1994: 12).

The post-1994 policy agenda

The post-1994 higher education goals were articulated in the 1996 South African *Constitution* and the foundational *Education White Paper 3* of 1997. The *Constitution* set out the character of the society that was envisaged, proclaiming the values of “human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms”, and “non-racialism and non-sexism” (Republic of South Africa, 1996: Section 1). The *Bill of Rights* unambiguously proclaimed that individuals and “the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth” (Sections 9.3 and 9.4). The state was enjoined to “respect, protect, promote and fulfill the rights in the Bill of Rights” (Section 7.2). The *Constitution* echoed the ANC government’s politics of equal recognition, as manifested in the *Freedom Charter* statements that “South Africa belongs to all”, and that “All national groups shall have equal rights”. With the advent of democracy, this politics of equal recognition was translated into the guarantee of equality in all spheres of society.

Education White Paper 3 noted that “there is an inequitable distribution of access and opportunity for students along lines of race, gender, class and geography” and the “gross discrepancies in the participation rates of students from different population groups” (DoE,

1997:1.4). It argued that “a major focus of any expansion and equity strategy must be on increasing the participation and success rates of black students in general, and of African, Coloured and women students in particular, especially in programmes and levels in which they are underrepresented” (DoE, 1997:2.24). The vision was of a “non-racial and non-sexist 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” (DoE, 1997:1.14). The intention was “to provide a full spectrum of advanced educational opportunities for an expanding range of the population irrespective of race, gender, age, creed or class or other forms of discrimination” (DoE, 1997: 1.27). Higher education was to contribute “to South Africa achieving ‘political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity’” (DoE, 1997:1.7).

Equity and redress, and more generally social justice, were considered to be imperatives. As *White Paper 3* noted: “The principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. (It) implies, on the one hand, a critical identification of existing inequalities which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination or disadvantage, and on the other a programme of transformation with a view to redress” (DoE, 1997: 1.18). It was stated that “such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals...(ibid.: 1.18). At the same time, it was emphasized that “ensuring equity of access must be complemented by a concern for equity of outcomes. Increased access must not lead to a ‘revolving door’ syndrome for students, with high failure and drop-out rates” (DoE, 1997:2.29).

In policy terms, this set out the argument that formal and substantive equality are not possible without active political commitment to positively discriminate in favour of those who are disadvantaged. A politics of equal recognition cannot be blind to the effects of the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Nor can it blithely proceed from a notion that the advent of democracy is in itself a sufficient condition for the erasure of the structural and institutional conditions, policies and practices that ground and sustain inequalities in various domains of social life. It is precisely this reality that gives salience to the idea of equity/redress and makes it a fundamental and necessary dimension of education transformation and social transformation in general. 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” (Section 9.2).

There was understanding that “in order to improve equity of outcomes, the higher education system is required to respond comprehensively to the articulation gap between learners’ school attainment and the intellectual demands of higher education programmes” (DoE:2.32). It was suggested that “systematic changes in higher education programmes (pedagogy, curriculum and the structure of degrees and diplomas)” could be needed (ibid., 2.32). There was also a historical awareness that an “enabling environment must be created throughout the system to

uproot deep-seated racist and sexist ideologies and practices that... create barriers to successful participation in learning and campus life. Only a multi-faceted approach can provide a sound foundation of knowledge, concepts, academic, social and personal skills..." (DoE, 1997:2.32). It is understood, then, that in addition to measures of positive discrimination that operate largely in terms of historical rectification and at the level of individuals, structural change and the institutional transformation of education and society is necessary. Positive discrimination on its own, and in the absence of far-reaching institutional transformation, is likely to leave the status quo unchanged (Mamdani, cited in Sikhosana, 1993).

The *White Paper* expressed the commitment to increasing "the relative proportion of public funding used to support academically able but disadvantaged students" (DoE, 1997: 2.26). Concomitantly, it was recognised that "academic development structures and programmes are needed at all higher education institutions" to facilitate effective learning and teaching (ibid.:2.33). The *White Paper* proclaimed that "the Ministry will ensure that the new funding formula for higher education responds to such needs for academic development programmes including, where necessary, extended curricula. Such programmes will be given due weight and status as integral elements of a higher education system committed to redress and to improving the quality of learning and teaching" (DoE, 1997:2.34). A call was made on institutions to "mobilise greater private resources as well as to reallocate their operating grants internally" (ibid.:2.26, 2.27).

Equity/equality and development/quality, post 1994

It is clear that post-1994, the African National Congress government policy agenda has been generally one of pursuing social equity/equality and quality in higher education and equity/equality and "economic reconstruction and development" simultaneously. It is equally clear that this has resulted in difficult political and social dilemmas, choices and decisions, especially in the context of inadequate public finances.

1. To begin with equity/equality and development/quality in relation to students, initial rapid growth in enrolments gave way to enrolment planning in the face of inadequate public funding to support both universities and students through financial aid adequately. From 2007 onwards, infrastructure and 'efficiency' funding of almost R13 billion was invested to expand and improve facilities and equipment at universities. This highlighted an awareness of the negative implications for quality/development of a one-sided emphasis on equity/equality, especially in a context of funding constraints.

Although the participation rate of African and Coloured students remains a major issue, there have been impressive gains in access, enrolments and equity post-1994. However, the simultaneous pursuit of equity/equality *and* quality has had limited success. This is clear when gauged by drop-out, throughput and graduation rates. Improved quality and equity of opportunity and outcomes have been constrained by limited state funding for academic development initiatives to address under-preparedness (conceptual, knowledge, academic literacy and numeracy, linguistic, social) of especially indigent students. It is also necessary

to pose the extent to which there are supportive institutional environments and cultures, curriculum innovations, appropriate learning and teaching strategies and techniques, appropriate induction and support, and effective academic mentoring, all of which are vital if students are to succeed and graduate with the relevant knowledge, competencies, skills and attributes that are required for any occupation and profession, be life-long learners and function as critical, culturally enriched and tolerant citizens. A further issue is the continued under-developed institutional and particularly academics capabilities of HBUs. Admitting students from rural poor and working class families, the inadequate state support for institutional equity compromises the ability of HBUs to ensure equity of opportunity and outcomes. These realities “have the effect of negating much of the growth in black access that has been achieved” (Scott, et al, 2007:19). They are “indicative of a...higher education system...that is unable to effectively support and provide reasonable opportunities for success to its students. The situation reflects an inefficient use of the country’s resources” (DHET, 2013:2). They also have “central significance for development as well as social inclusion”, and “equity of outcomes is the overarching challenge” (Scott, et al, 2007: 19).

As a result of these shortcomings, the pursuit of “epistemological access”, which “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” has been compromised (Morrow, 1993:3; Boughey, 2008); the production of graduates that can contribute to the economic and social development of South Africa and to the public good has been constrained; the “wider project of democratising access to knowledge” has been retarded (Morrow, 1993:3); there has been limited erosion of the domination of knowledge production or high-level occupations by particular social groups; and there has been a waste of precious resources.

The Department of Higher Education and Training’s (DHET) 2012 Green Paper *for Post-School Education and Training* acknowledges that “despite the many advances and gains made since 1994”, higher education is “inadequate in quantity... and, in many but not all instances, quality”, and that it continues “to produce and reproduce gender, class, racial and other inequalities with regard to access to educational opportunities and success” (DHET, 2012: x). It notes that “universities are in general characterised by low success rates” (ibid.: 11). It accepts that “university funding (has) not kept pace with enrolment growth”, and that despite “attempts to bring about greater equity between historically black universities and those which were more advantaged in the past” a shortage of resources has compromised the historically black universities “properly fulfilling their prime function – providing good undergraduate degrees to poor, rural students” (ibid.: 42).

Looking ahead, the new *White Paper* proposes to increase participation rates from 17.3% to 25% and university headcount enrolments from about 950 000 in 2012 to 1 600 000 by 2030 (DHET, 2014:30). It states that “as participation increases, universities must simultaneously focus their attention on improving student performance. Improving student access, success and throughput rates is a very serious challenge...and must become a priority focus for national policy and for the institutions themselves” (ibid.:31). The National

Planning Commission (NPC), whose *National Development Plan* has been accepted as government policy, comments that “despite the significant increases in enrolment a number of challenges remain” (NPC, 2011:16). For one, “throughput rates have not improved as fast as enrolment rates”; for another, under-prepared students have meant universities needing to establish academic development programmes and being sometimes “ill-equipped to do so” (ibid.:16). As a consequence, universities have not been “able to produce the number and quality of graduates demanded by the country” (ibid.:16). More specifically, “the relationship between equity of access and equity of outcomes must...be a substantive area of focus” (ibid.:32).

As adequate student funding is a major constraint in ensuring greater equity of access, opportunity and outcomes, the *White Paper* commits government to “progressively introducing free education for the poor...as resources become available” (DHET, 2014:xiv). The NPC proposes providing “all students who qualify for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) with access to full funding through loans and bursaries to cover the costs of tuition, books, accommodation and other living expenses. Students who do not qualify should have access to bank loans, backed by state sureties” (NPC, 2012: 325).

There can be little quibble with the overall visions, intentions and approaches of the *Green Paper*, *White Paper* and NPC. They provide a good and accurate description and analysis of the problems and shortcomings that beset higher education. There is recognition of the need to hold firmly together the goals of “access and equity” and “high-level excellence”, the importance of undergraduate and postgraduate study, and teaching-learning and research and innovation. To their credit, both the *Green Paper* and the NPC are not shy to stress the needs of the “working class and poor” and rural students. However, like many other South African policy documents, they are expansive in vision but extremely short on details. The critical issue is how priorities will be formulated and what these will be in a context in which the finances to pursue all goals projected for achievement by 2030 concurrently are not likely to exist. This will entail difficult choices between dearly held goals, present social and political dilemmas and possibly increase social conflict between students and government and the universities.

2. Admissions policies

The equity/equality and development/quality paradox and tension is especially manifest with respect to university admissions, and particularly to programmes that are strongly related to economic and social development, keenly sought after by students and have limited intakes (medicine, dentistry, veterinary science, engineering, architecture, honours in psychology, masters in clinical psychology and the like). The regular challenges to universities from students, parents and certain organisations with respect to the non-admission of students with outstanding senior certificate results to medicine is an assertion of the claim that ‘quality’ or/and development needs must trump equity/equality.

Admissions policies need to reflect the engagement of universities with the apartheid legacy, the current social structure, constitutional, legislative and other social imperatives, and the institution's engagement with the ideas of social equity/equality and development/quality. 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 admissions policies could reproduce historical and prevailing social inequalities – the triumph of development/quality over equity/quality. In general, therefore, admissions policies should not reduce merit to academic accomplishments alone. A wider set of criteria should be deliberately employed to establish merit. It is legitimate to 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. Apart from academic results, criteria can also include the school attended, geographic origins, 'race', gender, income levels, home languages, civic involvement, special talents and abilities, nationality and hardships overcome. A more inclusive admissions policy has greater prospects of eroding social inequalities.

One of the most controversial strategies used by higher education institutions to assist in achieving equity/equality in admissions generally and also specifically in programmes with limited enrolments is that of *affirmative action*. Both the Constitution and laws provide for the use of affirmative action as a strategy for enhancing social equity/redress. As Albie Sachs notes, pervasive inequities 'cannot be wished away by invoking constitutional idealism' (Sachs, 2006:x). 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' (Sikhosana, 1993:10). 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 (Alexander, 2007). Indeed, we find ourselves in the grip of a *profound paradox*: the use of 'race' to promote social equity/redress. 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?' (2008:59). 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?’ (Kapur and Crowley, 2008:50-60).

We have already noted that there can be imaginative and creative approaches and strategies that can contribute effectively and simultaneously to both equity/equality and development/quality. Strategies that have been developed include ‘extended studies’ and ‘extended curriculum’ programmes, ‘augmented curriculum’ and ‘foundation curriculum’ programmes, and initiatives “to design curricula and approaches that enhance the effectiveness and quality of mainstream provision” (<http://www.ched.uct.ac.za/departments/adp/overview/>); honours programmes that are structured over a longer period to accommodate potentially talented students; and constituting student cohorts with due sensitivity to social diversity. The consequence of in some instances slower processes of equalization and development is a small price to pay.

Beyond these examples, there have not been significant systemic interventions at the levels of academic programmes and curriculum and it is debatable whether the simultaneous pursuit of equity/equality and development/quality has occurred as energetically and extensively as it could have. The Council on Higher Education’s (CHE) recent proposal for “undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa” deserves serious consideration as a way of overcoming the current scenario of “high attrition and low graduation rates (which) have largely neutralised important gains in access” (CHE, 2013:9). The CHE argues that “modifying the existing undergraduate curriculum structure is an essential condition for substantial improvement of graduate output and outcomes”, and advocates “a flexible curriculum structure for South Africa’s core undergraduate qualifications” (ibid.:16). In practice, this would mean that “to meet the needs of the majority of the student intake, the formal time” of all current undergraduate qualifications would be increased by one year, and “to provide effectively and fairly for diversity in preparedness, the new curriculum structure (would) be flexible to allow students who can complete a programme in less than the formal time to be permitted to do so” (CHE, 2013:20). In order “to ensure the maintenance or improvement of the standards of qualifications, curricula in the new structure (would) retain or improve upon existing exit standards through utilising the additional curriculum space afforded to ensure realistic starting points and progression paths, and to introduce valuable forms of curriculum enhancement” (ibid.:20). The CHE is well aware that such a new curriculum structure will entail significant transformation in the field of learning and teaching – which needs to be linked to building the academic capabilities of universities.

3. Equity/equality and development/quality is not only a concern in relation to students but also academic and high level support staff at universities. Racism and patriarchy as key features of colonialism and apartheid profoundly shaped the social composition of academic staff. Over the past two decades the academic workforce has become more equitable, though in 2012 the full-time permanent academic staff of 17 451 academics remained largely white (53%) and male (55%). The distribution of academics across universities has continued to follow the historical contours of ‘race’ and ethnicity; in 2009,

the proportions of black academic staff at universities ranged from 17% to 91% and the representation of women varied between 29% and 51% (DoE, 2010).

Post-1994, South African universities have needed to confront two challenges. The first challenge is reproducing and retaining the next generations of academics. The large increase in student enrolments over the past 20 years “has not been accompanied by an equivalent expansion in the number of academics” (DHET, 2013:35). Expanding higher education enrolments and the establishment of new universities mean that a larger academic workforce is required. Given the current retirement age of 65, in the coming decade over 4 000 or 27% of academics will retire, including 50% of the most highly qualified professors and associate professors. The second challenge is transforming the historical social composition of the academic work force through measures for advancing social equity and redress for black and women South Africans. It is necessary to emphasise the *simultaneity* of the two challenges. Reproducing the next generation of academics without attention to social equity and redress for black and women South Africans will simply reproduce the previous inequalities. There is, however, a third important challenge. To the extent that key goals include substantively transforming and developing South Africa’s universities and enhancing their academic capabilities, this has profound implications for the *character* of the next generations of academics that have to be produced. The corollary is that the next generations of academics must not only be largely black and women South Africans, they must also possess the intellectual and academic capabilities related to teaching and learning, research and community engagement that are fundamental for developing South Africa’s universities.

A failure to invest in and cultivate the next generations of high quality academics will have far-reaching consequences. Social equity and redress and the pace and extent of the deracialisation and degendering of the academic workforce will be compromised. The quality of academic provision will be increasingly debilitated, with consequences for the capabilities of universities to produce high quality graduates and knowledge. The goal of transforming and developing South African universities, including enhancing their teaching and research capabilities, will be constrained. The ability of universities to contribute to development and democracy through new generations of outstanding scholars that are committed to critical and independent scholarship and social justice will be hampered. The greater inclusion of blacks and women in knowledge production, a necessary condition for epistemological transformations, will be delayed.

It has long been considered that the remuneration of academics has seriously lagged behind equivalent posts in the public and private sectors, and was a major obstacle to building and retaining the next generations of academics. New evidence that shows they are relatively well-remunerated is an important facilitating condition for building and retaining the next generation of academics. So too is the Higher Education South Africa (HESA) initiative that has resulted in a *Proposal for a National Programme to Develop the Next Generation of Academics for South African Higher Education* (HESA, 2011). The proposal explicates the goals that should be advanced by a national programme, and the values and principles that

should underpin such goals and a national programme; identifies strategies and mechanisms for developing next generations of academics, and especially black and women academics; outlines the conditions that are critical at national and institutional levels for developing next generations of academics, and proposes a funding model and budget that is cost-effective and sustainable. The National Planning Commission has embraced the proposed HESA programme, noting that it “deserves to be implemented” (NPC 2012, 319). This is a good example of an imaginative and well-developed programme that is predicated on the simultaneous pursuit of equity/equality and development/quality. Having largely been supported by international donor support for over a decade, and such support now being largely exhausted, the effort to build the next generations of academics is currently constrained by the lack of state funding.

It should be noted that paradoxes and tensions exist not only in relation to the concurrent pursuit of equity/equality and development/quality but also, in a context of limited resources, with respect to the simultaneous pursuit of different kinds of equity/equality: ‘race’, class, gender, disability, geographical origins, institutional, etc. To the extent that resources do not permit full equity/equality, this raises other difficult dilemmas and choices, and trade-offs have to be made between different kinds of equality. Similarly, when ‘development’ too begins to be disaggregated (into economic, social, political, cultural and other kinds of development) competing claims arise and trade-offs are necessary. Indeed, equally desirable yet potentially competing goals confront universities and the polity at every turn: good quality undergraduate *and* postgraduate study; outstanding teaching-learning *and* research and innovation; support for the natural sciences, engineering and technology *and* the arts, humanities and social sciences; infrastructure capital development *and* infrastructure maintenance, economic development *and* greater social equity; economic development *and* environmental sustainability. The critical question for policy formation is how is the balance between differing and possibly competing goals to be struck? In so far as both the potentially competing goals are prized but stand in a relationship of intractable tension, what strategies can to some extent satisfy both demands as far as existing conditions permit.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above discussion, at least six critical questions deserve detailed investigation:

1. Whether and to what extent government, state officials and universities have been and are clearly and acutely aware of the paradoxes and dilemmas of pursuing simultaneously social equity/equality and quality in higher education and equity/equality and development/quality;
2. Whether and to what extent these actors have made recourse to “simplifying manoeuvres” – denying the existence of any paradoxes or dilemmas or privileging one value or social goal above another;
3. Whether and to what extent government, state officials and universities have sought to imaginatively and creatively devise approaches and strategies that contribute effectively

and simultaneously to both equity/equality and development/quality – to “(finding) a path which to some extent satisfies both demands as far as existing conditions permit”;

4. How, in what ways, and to what extent they have made choices and trade-offs, with what degree of transparency, what have been the choices and trade-offs, and with what consequences and results with respect to equity/equality and development/quality.
5. How have the ‘the available choices’ been formulated, how have they been argued and struggled over, and how, in what ways and to what extent has there been an innovation of the ‘just machinery’ that provides the ‘opportunity to choose’ and to make decisions (Wright Mills, 1959:174)
6. The outcomes of transformative initiatives are never guaranteed. The policies that embody the trade-offs between equity/equality and development/quality may have unintended results; what have been the “possible side-effects on other valued ends” (Terreblanche, 1992:549).

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