

**Access, Success and Social Justice in  
Post-1994 South African Higher Education**

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## Introduction

South Africa's post-1994 democracy came into being on a rising tide of expectations, legitimacy and political will. Inheriting a higher education system characterised by social, economic and political discrimination and inequalities of a class, race, gender and geographical nature, the new democratic government committed itself to transforming higher education as well as the inherited apartheid social and economic structure and institutionalising a new social order. Over the past nineteen years no domain of higher education has escaped scrutiny, and there have been a wide array of 'transformation'<sup>1</sup> oriented initiatives. On the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of democracy, what distance has been travelled to achieve social justice in higher education? What was inherited and what have been the successes? What are the shortcomings and what more has to be done to realize social justice in higher education? This chapter focuses on access and success and equity and quality, and more generally on social justice social justice, in higher education. Social justice is considered to encompass both formal equality (the principle of sameness), and substantive equality or equity (fair and just treatment).

The dominant concept of post-1994 education change was the notion of 'transformation'. Wallerstein writes that in radical political movements 'development' was considered to have twin goals: 'greater internal equality, that is, fundamental social (or socialist) transformation' and as 'catching up' with the leader (Wallerstein, 1991:115), and that the view was that these twin goals were "parallel vectors, if not obverse sides of the same coin, (ibid.:116) However, he argues that historical experience shows that 'social transformation and catching up are seriously different objectives. They are not necessarily correlative with each other. They may even be in contradiction with each other' (ibid.:115-6). In much the same way as 'development', transformation was understood in different senses: a radical break with and change from the past, as 'catching up' with whites, and as almost any kind of change - 'improvement', 'reform', 'reconstruction' and 'development'. Chisholm rightly argues that the use of these terms "interchangeably has tended to empty them of specific significance" (2004:12). While these change processes may be related, they differ with respect to the *intent* and *nature* of change.

## Framing post-1994 education change

In 1993, on the eve of the transition to democracy, the gross participation rate in higher education was about 17%<sup>2</sup>. However, participation rates were highly skewed by 'race': they were approximately 9% for Africans, 13% for Coloured, 40% for Indians and 70% for whites (CHE, 2004:62). While black South Africans (Indians, Coloureds and Africans) constituted 89% of the population, in 1993 black students only constituted 52% of the student body of 473 000. African students, although comprising 77% of the population, made up only 40% of enrolments. On the other hand white students, 11% of the population, constituted 48% of enrolments. 43% of students were women. These statistics, taken together with the patterns of enrolments by fields of study, qualifications levels, and mode of study, highlight the relative exclusion of black and women South Africans in higher education. Yet, it should be clear that the deracialisation of higher education began before 1994. This was part of the strategy of repressive reformism, through which the apartheid state sought to crush political opposition and

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'transformation' since this is how government and a wide range of education actors describe the nature of change that is sought; though see below.

<sup>2</sup> The total enrolments in higher education as a proportion of the 20-24 age group

resistance to white minority rule, while attempting to create a black middle class that it was hoped could be co-opted and galvanised behind a reformist project.

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” (DoE, 1997:1.4), and the “gross discrepancies in the participation rates of students from different population groups” (ibid.) 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 also noted 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 emphasised 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 have been disadvantaged. A politics of equal recognition could not be blind to the effects of the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Nor could it blithely proceed from a notion that the advent of democracy was in itself a sufficient condition for the erasure of the structural and institutional conditions, policies and practices that had for decades grounded and sustained inequalities in all domains of social life. It was precisely this reality that gave salience to the idea of redress and made it a fundamental and necessary dimension of education transformation and social transformation in general. The *Constitution* stated 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).

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 also made on institutions to “mobilise greater private resources as well as to reallocate their operating grants internally” (ibid.:2.26, 2.27).

#### **Access, success, equity and quality post-1994**

There has been uneven progress in advancing equity, redress and quality in higher education. On the one hand, a significant achievement has been more equitable access and the deracialisation of the student body since 1994. By 2010, black students comprised 80% (714 597) of the total student body of 892 943; African students made up 66.7% (595 963 ) of students, and white students 19.9% (CHE, 2012: 1). There has also been commendable progress in terms of gender equity. By 2010, women constituted 57.4% (512 570) of the total student body (CHE, 2012:1). Still, African and Coloured South Africans continue to be under-represented in higher education relative to their population size (CHE, 2012:2).

In accordance with the Constitution, the mechanism of *quotas* was not employed to achieve equity and redress. Nor were unilateral or prescriptive targets or goals set for institutions. Instead, institutions were required “to develop their own race and gender equity goals and plans for achieving

them, using indicative targets for distributing publicly subsidised places rather than firm quotas” (DoE, 1997:2.28). Further, in congruence with the *Higher Education Act*, and on the basis of the “principle of institutional autonomy”, student admission was placed under the authority of higher education institutions. It was, however, emphasised that there was “no moral basis for using the principle of institutional autonomy as a pretext for resisting democratic change” and that institutional autonomy was “inextricably linked to the demands of public accountability” (ibid.:1.24). A number of mechanisms have been used to support the pursuit of equity and redress in higher education enrolments. First, alternative admissions tests have been devised to complement the national final secondary schools examination to determine eligibility for access to institutions. Second, provision has been made for the recognition of prior learning to facilitate access for especially mature students. Third, mature age exemption has been used in the case where students do not fully meet the requirements to be eligible to seek admission higher education. Fourth, extend curriculum programmes (such as the four year extended studies programmes in Science, Humanities and Commerce at Rhodes University for students that show potential but do not meet the usual admission requirement) have also played a role. Fifthly, use has been made of the discretion that academic governing bodies have long had to admit students to postgraduate studies on special grounds.

The overall progress in equity in enrolments since 1994 must be tempered by certain realities. First, enrolments at many historically white institutions continue to reflect lower black representation than their demographic representation; thus, white students continue to be concentrated at the historically white institutions. Conversely, there has been little or no entry of white students into the historically black institutions, which means that they remain almost exclusively black. Social class is a factor at play here. Students from the capitalist and middle classes are concentrated at historically white institutions, while those from the working class and rural poor are concentrated at historically black institutions. One reason for this is that under apartheid the higher education system was differentiated along lines of ‘race’ and ethnicity, resulting in the advantaging (educational, infrastructural, financial and geographical) of historically white institutions and the disadvantaging of historically black institutions. Despite initiatives to reshape the apartheid institutional landscape through mergers of institutions and other means, the historical patterns of advantage and disadvantage continue to condition the current capacities of historically black institutions to pursue excellence, provide high quality learning experiences and equity of opportunity and outcomes. In short, if equity of opportunity and outcomes were previously strongly affected by ‘race’, they are now also (or perhaps largely) conditioned by social class.

Second, the progress of black and women students masks inequities in their distribution across institutions, qualification levels and academic programmes. A larger proportion of African students are concentrated in distance education - 40.5% as compared to 33.3% for whites (CHE, 2012:7). African and women students continue to be considerably under-represented at the postgraduate level and in science, engineering and technology programmes. Third, there has been little improvement in the participation rate of African and Coloured South Africans. By 2010, the participation rate of Africans increased from 9% in 1993 to 14%, and that of Coloureds from 13% to 15%. In contrast, the participation rate of Indian students increased from 40% in 1993 to 46% in 2010. The white student participation rate stood at 57% in 2010, down from 70% in 1993. The overall participation rate in 2010 was 18% (CHE, 2012:3). In 2001 the *National Plan for Higher Education* estimated the gross participation to be 15% and set a target of 20% gross participation rate by 2011/2016 (MoE, 2001). Clearly, there has been a marginal improvement in the overall gross participation rate and severe inequities continue to exist in the participation rates of African and

Coloured students relative to white and Indian students. Indeed, “given that the participation is expressed as gross rates and includes appreciable numbers of mature students...well under 12% of the (African) and coloured 20-24 age groups are participating in higher education. It must be a cause of concern, for political, social and economic reasons, if the sector is not able to accommodate a higher and more equitable proportion” of those social groups that have been historically disadvantaged and under-represented in higher education (Scott, et al, 2007:11).

Judging by throughput and drop-out rates, undergraduate success rates, and graduation rates, a substantial improvement in equity of opportunity and outcomes for black students remains to be achieved. Contact undergraduate success rates should be 80% “if reasonable graduation rates are to be achieved” (DoE, 2006). Instead they vary widely across institutions with an average of 74% at the undergraduate level and 71% at postgraduate level. The white student success rate in 2010 was 82% at the undergraduate level and 80% at postgraduate level; that of African students was 71% and 66% respectively (CHE, 2012:11, 12). In 2010, the graduation rate of African students was 16%, and that of white students was 22%, with an average of 17%, which is low (CHE, 2012:9). In terms of throughput and drop-out rates for a three-year degree at contact institutions, of those students beginning study in 2005, 16% of African students had graduated in the minimum three years and 41% had graduated after six years, with 59% having dropped out. In the case of white students the comparative figures were 44% of students had graduated in the minimum three years and 65% had graduated after six years, with 35% having dropped out (CHE, 2012:51). The figures for three-year diplomas at contact institutions were worse: after six years 63% of African students had dropped out and 45% of white students (CHE, 2012:50).

As a result of the ongoing deficiencies associated with schooling for students of working class and rural poor social origins, considerable numbers of students are under-prepared with respect to the knowledge and academic skills that are required for optimal participation and performance in higher education. Moreover, many students are handicapped in that the language-medium of higher education institutions is not their mother-tongue and often represents a second, and even third, language. Therefore, considerations related to the effective support of under-prepared students to ensure equity of opportunity and outcomes have loomed large at many institutions. Typically, academic development programmes have been created to address the under-preparedness of students and facilitate the development of the content knowledge and the academic skills and literacy and numeracy required for academic success. Over the years, the approaches of institutions to these development programmes have undergone changes. As Boughey notes, “the Academic Development movement in South African higher education has gone through a number of theoretical and ideological shifts which have contributed to the complexity of the forms in which student support initiatives now manifest themselves at an institutional level” (Boughey, 2005:1). She identifies three phases, “broadly termed ‘Academic Support’, ‘Academic Development’ and ‘Institutional Development’, which “are not distinct from each other and are indicative more of dominant discursive formulations than actual periods of time” (ibid.:1).

The ‘academic support’ approach was characterised by ‘a deficit assumption about the students they served in the context of an assurance about the ‘rightness’ of the practices which characterized the institutions to which they had been admitted” (Boughey, 2005:2). Support was an ‘add-on’ to the exiting academic programme, which remained unreconstructed. The ‘academic development’ model, especially in its more fully developed form, “had a much more embracing understanding of the notion of support constructing it as occurring *through* the development of curriculum and appropriate teaching methodologies and, thus, through work in the mainstream” (ibid.:33). As opposed to the

'add-on' support model, this was an 'infusion' model of the development of students alongside the reconstruction of curriculum and learning and teaching strategies and techniques. The current 'institutional development' model seeks to embed the enhancement of student learning "across the curriculum" and to locate initiatives "within a wider understanding of what it means to address student needs framed within the context of a concern for overall *quality*" (Boughey, 2005:36). Strategies here have included credit or non-credit bearing 'foundation' modules or courses that complement existing modules/courses, 'extended programmes' in which the academic programme is lengthened by up to a year to make space for additional foundation' modules/courses, and 'augmented courses' in which additional tuition is provided and more time is devoted to a course or the course is taken over a longer period" (ibid.:37-8). Of course, academic development programmes, whatever their form and content, require people with expertise and finances for their success and student success.

A study has noted that

the major racial disparities in completion rates in undergraduate programmes, together with the particularly high attrition rates of black students across the board, have the effect of negating much of the growth in black access that has been achieved. Taking account of the black participation rate, the overall attrition rate of over 50% and the below-average black completion rates, it can be concluded that the sector is catering successfully for under 5% of the black (and coloured) age-group (Scott, et al, 2007:19).

This, of course, "has central significance for development as well as social inclusion", and "equity of outcomes is the overarching challenge" (ibid.:19). If higher education institutions "are to contribute to a more equitable South African society, then access and success must be improved for black (and particularly black working class) students who, by virtue of their previous experiences, have not been inducted into dominant ways of constructing knowledge" (Boughey, 2008). There is, however, a further and important conclusion: that the under-performance of black students "will not change spontaneously. Decisive action needs to be taken in key aspects of the educational process – and at key points of the educational 'pipeline' – to facilitate positive change in outcomes"<sup>3</sup> (Scott, et al, 2007:20). Moreover, "systemic responses are essential for improving the educational outcomes", and the

necessary conditions for substantial improvement include: the reform of core curriculum frameworks; enhancing the status of teaching and building educational expertise...to enable the development and implementation of teaching approaches that will be effective in catering for student diversity; and clarifying and strengthening accountability for educational outcomes (Scott et al, 2007:73).

Overall, the motive forces of increased enrolment of black and women students have been the outlawing of discrimination and active national and institutional measures to promote social equity

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<sup>3</sup> "Such key points occur particularly at the interface between major phases of the system: between general education and FET, for example, as well as between FET and higher education, and, increasingly significantly, between undergraduate and postgraduate studies....(C)ontinuity in the system as a whole is necessary for improving graduate outcomes, without which meeting national developmental needs will continue to be an elusive goal" (Scott et al. 2007:20).

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

### **Proposed state interventions**

Two recent documents, the Department of Higher Education and Training's 2012 *Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training* and the National Planning Commission's *National Development Plan 2030* engage with the challenges and propose solution.

The Green Paper 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.... The number of overall postgraduate qualifications obtained, particularly PhD graduates, is too low.' (DHET, 2012: 11). One "significant constraint on the ability of many students to obtain masters and PhDs" was poverty, "as poor students are under enormous pressure to leave university and get a job as soon as possible" (DHET, 2012: 13). It is acknowledged 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 resource shortages affected the ability of the historically black universities to "properly fulfilling their prime function – providing good undergraduate degrees to poor, rural students" (DHET, 2012: 42). The Green Paper wishes to "contribute to ...expanding access to education and training opportunities and increasing equity, as well as achieving high levels of excellence" (ibid., 2012:x). It, however, "does not go into detail in specific areas, but sets the basis for building a coherent system as a whole" (DHET, 2012: 3).

The National Planning Commission notes 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"; in 2009, whereas the benchmark graduation rate for a three-year undergraduate degree was 25%, the actual rate achieved was only 16%. For another, under-prepared students have meant universities needing to establish academic development programmes and being sometimes "ill-equipped" to do so" (ibid., 2011:16). As a consequence, universities have not been "able to produce the number and quality of graduates demanded by the country" (ibid., 2011:16). Since "race remains a major determinant of graduation rates", this has "major implications for social mobility and...for overcoming the inequalities of apartheid" (ibid., 2011:16). It was critical for universities to "develop capacity to provide quality undergraduate teaching" (NDP, 2011: 318). The NPC recognizes that "the university sector is under considerable strain. Enrolments have almost doubled in 18 years yet the funding has not kept up, resulting in slow growth in the number of university lecturers, inadequate student accommodation, creaking university infrastructure and equipment shortages" (NDP, 2011: 317).

The Green Paper proposes university headcount enrolments of 1 500 000 by 2030 (about 950 000 in 2012) and a participation rate of 23% (currently 16%) predicated on the "priorities (of) access and equity, as well as high-level excellence" and developing "formerly black and poor institutions as part



of building a quality post-school education” (DHET, 2012:5, 7).<sup>4</sup> It states that the “improvement of throughput rates must be the top strategic priority of university education”, which “will allow us to increase the number of graduates disproportional to the increase in the relatively modest projected expansion of university enrolments” (DHET, 2012: 41). The NPC adds the important rider that “for the increase in the number of graduates to be meaningful, the quality of education needs to improve” (NDP, 2011: 317). It calls for improving both “the quality of teaching and learning” and “the qualifications of higher education academic staff” – from “the current 34 percent” with doctorates “to over 75 percent by 2030” (NDP, 2011: 319).

The Green Paper recognises that “the provision of overall postgraduate provision deserves attention and that we need to drastically increase the number and quality of both the masters and the PhD degrees obtained....Improvement of undergraduate throughput rates must be a key strategy for increasing graduate outputs, for increasing the skills available to the economy, and providing larger numbers of students available for postgraduate study” (DHET, 2012: 42). The NPC proposes that “by 2030 over 25 percent of university enrolments should be at postgraduate level” (15.5% in 2010) and emphasizes “the number of science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates should increase significantly” (NDP, 2011: 319). More specifically, by 2030 there should be “more than 5 000 doctoral graduates per year against the figure of 1 420 in 2010” and “most of these doctorates should be in science, engineering, technology and mathematics” (ibid., 2011: 319).

The NPC appreciates the need to “expand university infrastructure” and that backlogs have “a major impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Student accommodation in universities needs urgent attention” (ibid., 2011:319). It correctly, emphasizes the need for “uniform standards for infrastructure and equipment to support learning, promote equity and ensure that learners doing similar programmes in different institutions receive a comparable education”, as well as the need for special programmes for “underprepared learners to help them cope with the demands of higher education”, and the necessity for these programmes to be offered and funded at all institutions. The Green Paper expresses the commitment to “progressively introduce free education for the poor up to and including undergraduate level”; the NPC proposes providing “all students who qualify for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme 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”. (DHET, 2012: 48; NDP, 2011: 325). It is, however, recognized that

an important challenge...is finding the resources to address those students who do not qualify for NSFAS loans because their families’ incomes exceed the threshold of R122 000 per annum but who do not earn enough to qualify for commercial loans. This group includes the children of many teachers and civil servants – precisely the groups from whose children future professionals and academics come from in most countries. The government must find ways to meet this challenge (DHET, 2012: 49).

Finally, the NPC favours that “greater emphasis should be placed on incentivising graduate output” on the grounds of “the international trend towards greater emphasis on output-based funding” but is mindful that the DHET “would have to address the risk of discouraging universities from taking students from deprived backgrounds”. (NDP, 2011: 325).

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<sup>4</sup> The NPC proposes an enrolment of 1 620 000 students by 2030.

By and large there can be little quibble with the overall visions, intentions and approaches of both the Green Paper and NPC. They provide good and accurate description and analysis of the problems and shortcomings that besets higher education. There is good 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.

The Green Paper purposely "does not go into detail in specific areas" (DHET, 2012: 3). The NPC too is lacking in details. Like many other South African higher education policy documents, they are expansive in vision but extremely short on details. Critical is how the priorities will be formulated and what these will be – always a difficult issue as it entails choices between dearly held goals and presents social and political dilemmas. Holding together the simultaneous pursuit of equity *and* quality, undergraduate *and* postgraduate study, and teaching-learning *and* research is not an easy matter. When confronted with an intractable tension between dearly held goals and values, various 'simplifying manoeuvres' are possible. One simplifying manoeuvre is to refuse to accept the existence of a dilemma. A second is to elevate one value or goal above all others making this the goal or value in terms of which all choices and policies will be made. A third simplifying manoeuvre is to rank values and goals in advance so that if there is a conflict between them one will take precedence. In the latter two cases, the effect is to privilege one value or goal above another (Morrow, 1997). There is, however, an alternate path: to accept that for good political and social reasons, values, goals and also strategies that may be in tension have to be pursued simultaneously. Paradoxes have to be creatively addressed and policies and strategies devised that can satisfy multiple imperatives, *balance* competing goals and enable the pursuit of equally desirable goals. To the extent that trade-offs are inevitable, their implications for values and goals must be confronted. In summary, details are needed on how the DHET or/and the NPC propose to mediate key paradoxes, potentially competing goals and establish priorities.

Overall it is clear that there are a number of issues that are in need of attention.

1. Especial attention is needed to improve the participation rates of African and Coloured students. On the one hand, this is dependent on improving conditions in schooling. On the other hand, it highlights that the NSFAS needs to be funded more adequately so that indigent African and Coloured students can be supported to access higher education.
2. The representation of black and women students at specific institutions and qualification levels and in particular academic programmes requires constant attention, and carefully designed interventions are needed to ensure improvements in representation.
3. The extent to which all institutions possess academically supportive cultures that promote higher learning, cater for the varied learning needs of a diverse student body through well-conceptualised, designed and implemented academic programmes and academic development initiatives, and mechanisms to promote and assure quality are moot issues. This raises sharply the question of the academic capabilities of universities. At the same time, separate from academic capabilities, it is necessary to emphasise the continued under-developed institutional capacities of historically black institutions; providing access to rural poor and working class black students, the inadequate state support for equalising undergraduate provision compromises their ability to facilitate equity of opportunity and outcomes.

Adequate public funding is necessary to enhance the capacities and academic capabilities of universities to increase the quantity and improve quality of graduates. However, such funding is a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition. There has to also be a willingness on the part of universities and academics to address important issues related learning and teaching, curriculum, and pedagogy, as well epistemology and ontology.

All too often teaching and learning, which are fundamentally important activities of universities, are neglected and overshadowed by the supposedly more glamorous endeavour of research. It may be that teaching and learning are frequently overlooked because they are regarded as innate abilities or commonsense activities. Wilfred Carr, drawing on Antonio Gramsci, points out that “the distinctive feature of common sense is not that its beliefs and assumptions *are* true but that it is a style of thinking in which the truth of these beliefs and assumptions is regarded as self-evident and taken for granted. What is commonsensical is *ipso facto* unquestionable and does not need to be justified”.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, universities have to give purposeful attention to the theorized development of teaching and learning and the preparation of academics. Unless this is done, there will be a failure to adequately prepare academics for the demands of academic work. This will also reproduce and even reinforce the untenable neglect of teaching and learning. The challenges in regards to teaching and learning are serious and must not be underestimated. Academic work today is much more demanding than before. Excelling in and managing the teaching, research and community engagement functions of the university, academic life and institutional transformation and development challenges require knowledge, specialist expertise and experience. Increased student numbers, large classes and under-prepared students all place great demands on the teaching role of academics. Academics require expertise to develop academic programmes and curricula, fashion appropriate pedagogies, facilitate learning and assess students, who come from increasingly diverse social, cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds. A key task, therefore, is to ensure that academics possess the teaching-learning capabilities that are essential to produce high quality graduates and enhance equity of opportunity and outcomes for students.

4. In the light of unacceptably poor pass and graduation rates and high drop-out rates the enhancement of the academic capabilities of universities, and specifically academics, and ensuring that there are rigorously conceptualised and designed and well-implemented high quality academic development programmes to support academics and students are urgent and important tasks in order to ensure equity of opportunity and outcome, especially for students of working-class and rural poor social origins. In this regard, there is knowledge, expertise and experience at some universities and, more generally, on enhancing the learning and teaching capabilities of academics and universities. This needs to be harnessed, expanded and put to work for the benefit of all universities.

Until recently, a constraint was the absence of state funding for academic development initiatives. Now there is earmarked funding, but it is inadequate to effectively support programmes for under-prepared students and will need to be increased.

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<sup>5</sup> Carr, W. (1995) *For Education: Towards Critical Educational Inquiry*. Bristol: Open University Press, pages 53 – 54; Hoare, Q. and Smith, G. N. (eds.) (1971) *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers. My thanks to Dr. Jo-Anne Vorster and Dr. Lynne Quinn for this reference.

5. It is necessary to distinguish between *equity of access* and *equity of opportunity* and *outcomes* for historically disadvantaged and marginalized social groups. While access may be secured through various mechanisms, equity of opportunity and outcomes depend crucially on supportive institutional environments and cultures, curriculum innovation, appropriate learning and teaching strategies and techniques, appropriate induction and support, and effective academic development programmes and mentoring, all of which require far more than a set of generic teaching skills and necessitate sustained and careful engagement.<sup>1</sup> These are all vital if students are to succeed and graduate with the relevant knowledge, competencies, skills and attributes that are required for any occupation and profession, be life-long learners and function as critical, culturally enriched and tolerant citizens. There is knowledge, expertise and experience at some universities and, more generally, on enhancing the learning and teaching capabilities of academics and universities. This needs to be harnessed, expanded and put to work for the benefit of all universities. Higher Education South Africa (HESA) has noted that there “may be a case for a national approach to professionalisation of university teaching to empower academics” and that the benefits could be “highly qualified academics, properly prepared to teach effectively in the contemporary South African context”, “a research centre of excellence for teaching and learning”, the provision of “support for academic development units at institutions; and promoting learning through drawing on “advances in information and communication technologies”. (HESA, 2006:28-29). Until recently, a major constraint was the absence of state funding for academic development initiatives. Now there is welcome earmarked funding, but it is unfortunately inadequate to effectively support programmes for under-prepared students and will need to be increased.
6. The challenge of opportunity must be viewed as “part of a wider project of democratising access to knowledge” and the production of knowledge (Morrow, 1993:3) This means that beyond providing students formal access, it is also vital to ensure “epistemological access” (ibid.,:3). This ‘epistemological access’ “is central not only to issues such as throughput and graduation rates but also to the very institution of the university itself and to the role it can play” in development and democracy in African societies (Boughey, 2008).

As a consequence of colonialism and patriarchy, knowledge production in Africa has been predominantly the preserve of specific social groups – often largely men (and in South Africa, white men). The democratisation of knowledge requires inducting hitherto marginalised and excluded social groups into the production and dissemination of knowledge. While “formal access is a *necessary* condition for epistemological access (in respect of the kinds of knowledge distributed by universities) it is...far from being a *sufficient* condition” (Morrow, 1993:3; emphasis in original). The implication for teaching is that “a reduction of the role of teaching to that of simply ‘conveying knowledge’...fails...to acknowledge the need to develop a citizenry which can be critical of knowledge which has been produced and which can contribute to processes of knowledge production itself” (Boughey, 2008).

7. One reason for the very high rate of drop-outs among black students is inadequate state funding in the forms of scholarships, bursaries and loans. Although a National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which operates on a means-test basis, has been successfully established and there has been considerable funding to promote redress for indigent students, the overall investments have been inadequate to effectively support all eligible students. This illuminates the historical and ongoing inter-connection of race and class - equity of access for rural poor and working class black students will continue to be severely compromised unless there is a greater financial aid for indigent students.

8. With respect to postgraduate education, a major constraint is that the funding for postgraduate study (especially full time study) through the National Research Foundation, and the size of the awards provided is severely inadequate. If South Africa is to accelerate economic and social development as well as ensure greater opportunities for and participation by black students from indigent backgrounds in postgraduate study, a goal of both the NPC and Green Paper, significantly more investment is needed in postgraduate and especially doctoral level study. At many South African universities the availability and quality of research infrastructure, facilities, and equipment is a constraint on the enrolment and production of doctoral graduates. This is so even at the 12 of the 23 universities that produce 95% of doctoral graduates (seven universities produce 74%) and also the bulk of peer-reviewed scientific publications. The challenge of the enhancement of institutional capacities is, however, not confined to nor should be reduced to infrastructure, facilities, and equipment. It also relates to the capacities to expand and mount new doctoral programmes, the management of doctoral education, the management of research and the mobilisation of funding for doctoral studies and students. In these regards, there is great scope for inter-university collaboration, though the nature, terms and conditions of such collaboration is important issues.

As a consequence of apartheid, knowledge production in South Africa has been predominantly the preserve of white men. The democratisation of knowledge requires special measures to induct previously excluded social groups such as black and women South Africans into the production and dissemination of knowledge. The NPC notes that “Higher Education South Africa has developed a detailed proposal for a National Programme to develop the Next Generation of Academics for South African Higher Education and that this ‘deserves to be implemented” (NDP, 2011: 319). This is a good example of an imaginative and well-developed programme constrained by the lack of funding.

In so far as improving the proportion of academics with doctoral qualifications is concerned this will require a dedicated programme, supported by funding. However, it cannot be assumed that academics with doctorates will be accomplished supervisors of doctoral students. Attention has to be given to equipping academics to supervise effectively – possibly through formal development programmes, mentoring and experience in co-supervising alongside experienced supervisors. More effective supervision could also contribute to improving graduation rates.

9. Institutional cultures, especially at historically white institutions, could compromise equity of opportunity and outcomes. The historical origins of institutions, lingering racist and sexist conduct, privileges associated with social class, English as the language of tuition and administration, the predominance of white and male academics and senior administrators, the lack of black and women academics and role-models<sup>6</sup>, and lack of respect for and appreciation of diversity and difference could all combine in different ways and to differing degrees to reproduce institutional cultures that are experienced by black, women, and working class and rural poor students as discomfoting, alienating, exclusionary and disempowering, with negative consequences for equity of opportunity and outcomes. Even if equity of opportunity and

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<sup>6</sup> Black academics constituted only 44.1% of the total permanent academic staff of 16 684 in 2010; they comprised less than 20% of the academic staff at some historically white universities. Women academics comprised 44.1 % of academics in 2010 (CHE, 2012:41). Women tend to be concentrated at the lower levels of the academic hierarchy.

outcome are not unduly compromised, the overall educational and social experience of students may be diminished. The limited erosion and continued reproduction of class-based, racialised, masculine and gendered institutional cultures obstruct the forging of greater social cohesion.

The systematic and progressive transformation of institutional cultures, in congruence with constitutional ideals and values, remain important and urgent tasks. The challenges are to uproot historical cultural traditions and practices that impede the development of more open, vibrant, democratic and inclusive intellectual and institutional cultures, to respect, affirm and embrace the rich diversity of the people that today constitute and must increasingly constitute historically white universities, and to purposefully create and institutionalize cultures that embrace difference and diversity, and sees these as strengths and powerful wellsprings for personal, intellectual and institutional development.

10. The advancement of equity and redress entails various measures. Sikhosana notes “that most current conceptions of redress are limited to 'affirmative action', yet wonders whether affirmative action can indeed “overcome all forms of structured advantage” given that it tends to be “confined to the elimination of race and gender-based inequalities” and neglects “those inequalities based on class or socio-economic position” (1993:1).<sup>ii</sup> He argues that in this way, affirmative action fails to lay “the foundation for effective programmes of redress” (1993:1). He concludes that affirmative action is a “very limited and reformist form of redress” as it does “not look beyond race or ethnicity and gender”, is “based on efforts to move target groups into the predominantly white male mainstream without questioning that mainstream system itself”, and will “widen class inequalities” (1993:22; 18-19). This is to be contrasted with strategies that bring about institutional transformation. Mamdani also poses this challenge, when he asks

whether a strategy designed to address the grievances of a racially oppressed minority could be adequate to dismantling the apparatus of domination which strangled a racially oppressed majority. In other words, no matter how open the access to minority white institutions, in the name of "Affirmative Action", will this not simply alter the racial composition of that minority with little consequence for the oppressed majority except to legitimize their exclusion as based on merit this time round? In the final analysis, will not embracing the language and vision of "Affirmative Action" obscure the very task that must be central to democratisation in a "new" South Africa, that of *institutional transformation*? (cited in Sikhosana, 1993:16; emphasis added).

The critical issue is whether affirmative action is viewed as a *sufficient* condition to advance equity and redress or as simply one *necessary* measure among many others – including in learning and teaching - designed to achieve fundamental *institutional transformation*.

11. Public funding of higher education is inadequate in the face of the legacy of past inequities and the new demands on and expectations of universities. At least three areas of higher education are in need of either additional funding or dedicated new funding: in terms of the current funding framework, the block grant component of funding to universities; the NSFAS in order to provide equity of access, opportunity and outcomes for talented students from indigent and lower middle class families; and earmarked funding for high quality academic development initiatives to enhance equity of opportunity and outcome; curriculum innovation, renewal and transformation to enhance the capabilities of institutions to meet the graduate needs of the economy and society. The infrastructure funding that has been provided to universities since 2008 for academic

buildings, student accommodation and scientific equipment has been critical for enhancing the capacities of universities in the face of large backlogs and growing enrolments.

Finally, the pace of equity in higher education continues to be severely constrained by conditions in South African schooling. Ultimately, improved access and outcomes in higher education and specifically in the fields of science, engineering and technology especially for black South Africans is strongly dependent on significant improvements in the quality of South African schooling.

## Conclusion

On the final page of *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela writes:

The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning (1994: 617).

He adds: 'I can rest only for a moment...for my long walk is not yet ended' (ibid.,: 617).

While the *Constitution* and an array of laws and policies direct the state to realize profound and wide-ranging imperatives and goals in and through higher education, the analysis above indicates significant advances in some respects, but also shortcomings and challenges in the achievement of social justice in higher education. One line of analysis could be to question the "devotion" in practice of the post-1994 government to a strong version of social justice, and link this to perhaps divergent and even contradictory understandings of equity and redress. On the one hand equity and redress is considered as historical rectification, as in the equalization of per student expenditure. This entails no redistribution of substantial goods and resources from those who were previously advantaged. On the other hand, equity and redress is considered as distributional justice, as in providing resources to those who were most disadvantaged under apartheid. Conceived in this way equity implies redistribution in the sense of diverting state resources away from historically white institutions and from the wealthy towards historically black institutions and the economically and socially disadvantaged. This has not occurred, and nor has there as yet been uniformity and standardization in provision across institutions, if only at the undergraduate level.

Thus, "the truth" is that in 2013, higher education in South Africa generally fails to perform 'in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others'. The question of values and strategy for social justice continues to loom large. Mamdani has posed whether a strategy that has its origins in the United States and sought "to address the grievances of a racially oppressed minority" can deliver social justice for "a racially oppressed majority" (cited in Sikhosana 1993: 16). As he argues, affirmative action and other forms of redress could "alter the racial composition" of student enrolments and still shut out the majority of students, with finance and certain notions of 'merit' now the key exclusionary mechanisms. The danger, as he points out, is that affirmative action could "obscure the very task that must be central to democratisation in a 'new' South Africa, that of *institutional transformation*" (emphasis added; ibid.,: 16).

The past 19 years suggest that shortcomings include the quality of teaching and learning, problems related to academic and institutional cultures and practices, a lack of effective academic development strategies for supporting underprepared students, and inadequate finances for academic

development activities and students in financial need. Ultimately, the 'long walk' to equity in and through higher education has 'not yet ended'. At the same time, the past 19 years also teach that the problem is not always visions, goals and policies, or even finances, but the planning of implementation and the development of clear plans, effective implementation in relation to available resources, and leadership and management. Institutions have to be governed and managed; structures established; programmes and projects formulated; funding voted and allocated (and accounted for); buildings constructed, equipment and materials mobilized, people recruited, and so forth. All of these have to be effectively stitched together successfully by *people* with the necessary knowledge, expertise, skills and the appropriate values and attitudes. Funding is important and affects the pace of the achievement of goals, but so too does the extent to which there are dedicated people to plan and implement and undertake high quality education and training.

The political is also significant in other respects. Lankshear has rightly noted that policy is concerned fundamentally with the "politics of daily life – with issues of power, control, legitimacy, privilege, equity, justice and the dimensions of values generally" (1987: 231-232). Motala has contended that ostensibly consensual and unifying radical visionary policy frameworks, such as the *White Paper* on higher education, which promise social equity, redress and social justice "often obfuscate...the reality of power and historically entrenched privilege" (2003:7). He goes on to argue that "in reality, many of the articles relating to equity are not achievable without purposeful [even aggressive] and directed strategies, which set out deliberately to dismantle the core of historical privilege, disparities in wealth, incomes and capital stock, critical to unlock the possibilities for social justice and fairness" (ibid:7). Notwithstanding the various conditions that may set limits and exert pressures on the pace and substance of change, this usefully raises the question of political will and the extent of the willingness of the ANC and the state to be "directive... and interventionist", to take "positive discriminatory measures in favour of the poor", display "political courage in the face of administrative challenges" and possess "the will to defy public discontent from highly articulate and organized interests" (Motala, 2003:7).

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<sup>i</sup> My thanks to Prof. Mckenna for the latter point

<sup>ii</sup> Others committed to social justice have also raised concerns about affirmative action primarily benefiting a growing black capitalist class and middle class and reinforcing class inequalities, the efficacy of the use of race and gender as proxies of advantage and disadvantage and the possibility of race categories becoming ossified rather than eroded (Alexander, 2007).

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