BACKGROUND PAPER 2

An Overview and Analysis of Policy for Distance Education in South African Higher Education: Roles Identified for Distance Education and Developments in the Arena from 1948

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FOUNDATIONS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR: 1948-1989

PUBLIC EDUCATION SECTOR

A useful description of the development of the higher education and the distance education sector is found in Boucher M (1993) *Spes in Arduis; A History of the University of South Africa*. Boucher provides substantial evidence that South Africa has some of the oldest and largest providers of distance education providers, not only in Africa but also internationally. For example, the University of South Africa (UNISA), currently the only mega-university in Africa which is a dedicated distance education provider, has a rich history dating back to the 19th century, with the founding of the University of the Cape of Good Hope in 1873 as an examining body. In 1916, the latter was incorporated as a federal institution serving a number of colleges as an examining body and in this way over many years during this period made major contributions to the evolution of the tertiary education sector in South Africa and in Africa. In 1916, the university was eventually given national status by Act 12 of 1916. In terms of this Act, it was renamed, the University of South Africa, and it moved to Pretoria. The post 1916 period saw major changes in the development of higher education, when:

> one by one the other colleges left the federation. Act 4 of 1948 established a University of Natal which became operational in March the following year; Act 21 of 1949 created the University of Orange Free State from March 1950, Rhodes University came into being in on 10th March 1951, in terms of Act 15 of 1949 (Boucher, 1993: 192).

On 8 May 1946, the Higher Education Amendment Act gave effect to the University of South Africa with a new focus, as a fully-fledged dedicated correspondence institution. According to

one of the ardent supporters of this Act in the House of Assembly, the new initiative would "lead ultimately to the establishment of a great national university - a people's university - in South Africa. (Boucher, 1973: 220). In line with these sentiments, UNISA during the 1990s defined its mission as follows:

> The University of South Africa is an institution for tertiary education which, on the principles of equal opportunities, aims at providing society with academically and professionally educated men and women who can assist in meeting the needs and aspirations of the people of South Africa. (Harley, 1992)

Harley also noted that the university had always seen itself as offering a very broad spectrum of students opportunities to study at university level, especially those who did not have a chance to attend residential universities. He further argued that "No distinction whatsoever is made between students of different population groups concerning registration, administrative matters or teaching. For planning purposes it is, however, important that information with regard to the various groups should be available"(Harley, 1992: 6). It is, however, also worth noting that the UNISA graduation ceremonies were segregated along racial lines and continued to be organized in this manner for many years.

With the intensification of the population segregation strategies and in terms of the prescriptions and provision of the apartheid education policy, a number of university colleges were set up. For example the University of Fort Hare was converted to serve a particular population group and the Universities of Western Cape, the North, Zululand and Durban Westville were specially built for particular ethnic groups. Although all of these were set up as residential or conventional contact institutions, all of these institutions were originally affiliated with UNISA, politically mandated and designed to serve the needs of the disadvantaged population groupings in terms of the apartheid education agenda. By 1970, most of these university colleges, had been given independent status. By the mid 1980s more such university colleges had mushroomed in the rest of the Bantustans, for example the Universities of Venda, Bophutatswana and the Transkei. Throughout this period, UNISA remained as the only institution dedicated to the correspondence mode, it developed a large infrastructure which extended operations through regional centres in the three provinces of Natal, Western Cape and Northern Province.

It took another 34 years before a second public distance education institution was established. Technikon Southern Africa (TSA) was established on the 1st April, 1980 in terms of Act 40 of 1967. Its importance in the South African higher education landscape is described by Moore (2000) as follows:

> As a technikon, the Technikon RSA was unique in the South African higher education system. Thus, from its inception it has been faced with some very special challenges in providing technikon-type education and training through non-traditional modes of delivery. (Moore, 2000: iii)

Moore further notes that at the beginning, "the mode of education delivery strongly reflected the established practices that had made the University of South Africa a leading correspondence university during the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the instructional programs were strongly focused on the post-basic training of the then South African Police. For example, in 1991, 64,4% of the total enrolment of 45149 learners, followed the National Diploma in Police Administration. At that stage the majority of the registered students were

males and the predominant language of instruction was Afrikaans"(Moore,2000: piii).

In comparison with the above two institutions, the third distance education provider, the Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC) was established in 1981 as a unit within a contact institution - Vista University. According to the 2003 Vista Calendar, the university was established in terms of ACT 106 of 1981. The contact section of the university started operations in January 1982 while VUDEC, only started operating a few months alter in April 1982. VUDEC's specific purpose was to improve teacher qualifications through distance education. It is important to highlight that this university was initiated as a result of a government commission of inquiry into "the needs and requirements of urban blacks in the Republic of South Africa". It has now extended its services and "offers other degrees to interested persons" (Vista University Calendar, 2003: 8) It should further be noted that the establishment of VUDEC, as a distance education wing, within the context of a conventional contact institution was the first attempt at the introduction of the dual mode system of public higher education in South Africa.

By the early 1980s, there were thus three distance education providers in the public higher education sector. Each of these providers occupied a special niche. VUDEC, for example, catered for urban Blacks; TSA specialized in technikon type education nationally while UNISA's mandate was for general academic education nationally. While the latter two were more open and inclusive in nature, VUDEC was originally meant to serve only urban Blacks. TSA's inclusivity was, on the other hand, compromised by its medium of instruction which was predominantly Afrikaans. Of the three institutions, UNISA could, thus be described as most inclusive since its medium of instruction was both English and Afrikaans and it catered for all students irrespective of race.

PRIVATE SECTOR

A brief overview of this sector indicates a rich history dating back to the turn of the 20th century. Though some of the providers started with small initiatives, aimed broadly at addressing the adult basic further, continuing education and training needs some of the providers have over the period made major in-roads in the areas of open and distance education provision. The INTEC College for example, is one of the very first correspondence colleges established in 1906. INTEC experimented with different ways of providing correspondence education and other distance education support strategies for out-of school youth, targeting students that required skills development, vocational training and personal growth opportunities. Other colleges which made their mark in the provision of private sector correspondence education are the Lyceum College which was founded in 1917, the Rapid Results College founded in 1928 and the Success College which was established in 1940. All these, in different ways experimented and contributed "valuable insights in the use of the print materials to reach the student body and also the use of the postal tuition services to offer guidance, advice, tutor-marked assignments and comments to its studentslargely in the pre-tertiary sector" (Ngengebule, Glennie, Perold, 1992:3).

In 1948, the Damelin Correspondence College was established, along similar lines to the other correspondence colleges already mentioned. Through its national network, the Damelin group now offers a wide range of accredited international tertiary qualifications and practical training using face-to-face tuition (full-time and part-time) distance-learning and business-to-business

through its corporate training arm. This college now ranks as a major provider of higher education opportunities, using a variety of distance education strategies including the use of the information and communication technology.

It is worth noting that the Bill published in 1946 to establish the University of South Africa as distance education institution met with fierce opposition from the private sector institutions such as Rapid Results College, Transafrica and Members of Parliament who were supporters of private providers. The reasons for this opposition were related to lack of consultation and the perceived assumption that private institutions were unable to provide an efficient service. The Bill was eventually passed but as noted by Boucher:

> Jan Hofmeyr, as Minister of Education and Finance, had tried to read lightly in the delicate matter of placing a state-aided institution in open competition with private concerns (Boucher, 1973: 217).

And that:

> Jan Hofmeyer was able, however, to reassure the House of Assembly that the Division of External Studies would devise a method to ensure that its students obtained no unfair advantage over those who studies with the private concerns (Boucher, 1973: 220).

And the partial state funding of distance education began then as:

> The government was prepared to find a subsidy of R17 000 on the understanding that the University of South Africa would itself raise the R20 000 (Boucher, 1973: 217).

Thus, distance education initially faced cautious approval and limited financial support from the state on the one hand and antagonism and competition from the private sector on the other.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

The non-government sector played a very significant role in the development and democratization of higher and distance education specifically during the apartheid era. One non-governmental organisation that played an important role in distance education during the apartheid years was the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED). Founded in 1959 at the height of the enforcement of apartheid to tertiary education, SACHED sought practical and innovative ways of ensuring access to quality education through distance education. Its first programme provided access to degree studies through London University. This was later changed to support for UNISA students when the London University option was discontinued in the 1970s. By this time it had also became clear that perceptions about UNISA had changed and more Blacks were studying through this university. SACHED's contribution to distance education in the higher education sector has been mainly through the development of support services for learners studying through this mode of education.

In its analysis of the distance education provision in South Africa, the SAIDE Report (1995), notes that the investigating team was struck by the *educational significance* of the non-governmental organizations that were at work in the country:

> The work of the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) is particularly noteworthy. Its efforts during the 35 years have been severely restricted by the policies of apartheid and the rigidities of university entrance policies. But the models it has developed and, more

important, the vision that guided them have provided valuable experience of the principles of open learning and adult learning that are central to education and training objectives of the draft *Policy Framework*."(SAIDE, 1995: 57).

GROWTH OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THIS SECTOR: 1990 - 1994

The first half of the 1990s saw tremendous growth in the distance education sector. At the same time there was pressure mounting from both public and private sectors of society to transform the education system. Additionally, for the first time, the voice of distance education students emerged strongly in the calls for change to the system.

Role of the public higher education sector

By 1990, VUDEC, TSA and UNISA had grown into very large establishments, with high annual student enrolments. For example, in 1990 the UNISA student enrolment figure was 104 302, by 1992 it had increased to 119 985 and by 1994 UNISA was said to be catering for about 38% of the total student intake at the universities in South Africa (UNISA, 1994). On the other hand by 1993, the student population at the TSA was 63 840, representing the largest section of the 'technikon type of student' in the country.

At this juncture, the Department of National Education's analysis of the size and nature of provision of higher education, particularly distance education, in the country prior to 1994, was one of satisfaction at the progress achieved. This position was based on the information contained in the report, the *Education Renewal Strategy (1992).* At this point, the working group responsible for the analysis advised the Minister of National Education that:

> The working group did not further investigate distance education in respect to the universities and technikons, since this mode of providing education is already well established. The AUT moreover, has already made recommendations to the various Ministers of departments of State responsible for the education on the utilization of off-campus programs by the technikons. In these recommendations it was emphasized that there should be no absolute separation between distance education and contact tuition, but that there is a spectrum of possibilities in this regard. In fact it was found that there should be no monopoly of distance education by specific institutions (Department of National Education, 1992: 30)

The assumption reflected above seems to indicate that, since distance education provision was "well-established" that the entire system was therefore also well functioning, efficient and effective. Based on the size of operations, infrastructure, **quantity** or the extent of the outreach, diversified modes of delivery both in the single (UNISA and TSA) and dual (VUDEC) mode institutions, different focus areas of operation and institutionalization of distance education, it could have been argued that this analysis was correct. Especially seeing that it could also be said that the system measured up well to one of the acclaimed benefits of distance education, namely, achieving economies of scale through large scale provision. However, whilst well **established,** the distance education system in this period could not be said to be well functioning or providing a high **quality** service. The only acknowledgment of quality-related concerns in the working group's report is described below:

Nevertheless, the application of the so-called "Open University" approach for South Africa should be substantially analyzed. In general, the average level of education in the developed countries is much higher than in the developing countries. This means that developed countries probably have better equipped students to register in their open universities than is the case in a developing country like South Africa (Department of Education, 1992: 30).

But, as seen above, the concern raised is only linked to poor levels of student 'preparedness' for entering higher education in the South African context. The role and responsibility of other players, for example, the educators, managers and administrators within institutions and the kinds of services they provide, are left unmentioned. Equally, the nature of services provided by distance education institutions in terms of the quality of materials produced, student support, administrative and management services and monitoring and evaluation of the total package, have a major role to play in the progression, retention and successful completion rates of students who qualified to enter the higher education sector. If in an attempt to facilitate greater access to higher education, distance education institutions enroll students with lower grades than contact institutions, it is their responsibility to ensure that students receive the kind of support that will help them to progress and not to drop-out. Thus the cursory acknowledgment of the fact that students entering distance education programmes, are in many instances ill prepared to do so, falls far short of recognizing and acknowledging the range of issues that are key to providing quality distance education.

The African National Congress (ANC) policy formulating document: *A Policy Frame work for Education and Training(1994),* moved the debate on distance education in South Africa further by articulating the strengths of the existing system while at the same time raising strong and concrete concerns about the limitations of the system. The document notes that:

> the higher education system represented a major resource for national reconstruction and development and for capacity to contribute to the world-wide advance in knowledge and skills. However, its present structure and capacity are seriously distorted, its governance systems are outmoded and its funding have led to serious crises both for the students and the institutions (ANC, 1994: 12).

Additional concerns raised were the need for the expansion of the higher education system and provision in the country while ensuring and balancing the mix of outputs between the different levels and programs. A suggested priority area was to extend opportunities for wider access to higher education especially in communities who had been historically disadvantaged by the apartheid education system. This would be done *"as a first step towards ensuring that the goal that the student bodies of Higher Education should reflect the compositions of the broader society"*(ANC, 1994: 115*).* This policy document laid a firm foundation for the development of further strategies for of a new higher education system which would also concretely address issues relating to redress, specifically for the previously disadvantage. The new system that was envisaged was to have capacity to meet the vast challenges and was to include a far greater focus on distance education and resource-based learning. Whilst expressing a clear commitment to the use of distance education the framework also clarified its position about the extension of the system and the move towards multi-mode open learning. The document propagates that in the envisaged system:

> Part-time studies and distance education will be provided both through specialized institutions and existing institutions of Higher Education. Strong support will be given to institutions which seek to develop systems of open-learning and multi-media distance education (ANC, 1994: 115).

The above position was further reinforced by the outcome of the research into distance education carried out by the International Commission on Open Distance Education in South Africa (1994) which culminated in the SAIDE Report (1995), and also by the investigation carried out by the Ministerial Commission into Technology-enhanced Learning (1994) and the National Commission on Higher Education (1996). Whilst the findings of these investigations largely supported and emphasized the importance of open and distance education methods as viable strategies for addressing the South Africa higher education crisis, deep concerns were expressed on the efficacy, efficiency and effectiveness of the system such it had been developed in the apartheid system. They unanimously made a strong case for the transformation of all institutions in South Africa which were already using the correspondence mode into institutions using sound and well-functioning distance education modes. The report of the international commission, for example, highlighted a number of major deficiencies in the delivery and provision of distance education by key institutions such as UNISA, TSA and VISTA/VUDEC. It also expressed concerns about the quality of provision and support for the students, most of whom came from disadvantaged communities with major legacies of apartheid education. But, importantly it also identified that:

> A key element of well-functioning distance education institutions is that the institutions providing the education must take responsibility for setting up a system of services that help the learners who will for most of the time be studying on their own (SAIDE, 1995:64)

This highlighted that effective support services were deemed crucial the quality of experience for the distance student. The SAIDE investigation also identified the gap in the case of all the South African distance education provision, the lack of the support services. It is further noted that this gap was up until 1994 partly filled by non-governmental organizations (NGO), private and commercial providers.

Role of the private sector

South African policy formulating documents such as the NCHE (1996) the White Paper in Education and Training (1995) the Higher Education Act (1997), acknowledge the role of the private providers of higher education. They note the relatively well developed private sector provision and therefore encourage its continuation as part of the wider higher education landscape in the country. However, the challenge identified in this area is that of creating the space for expanding the role of the private provider, encouraging the growth of the educationally sound and sustainable private institutions whilst applying controls which discourage development of a plethora of poor quality, unsustainable 'fly by night' operators.

It is further noted that there has been a sharp increase in private higher education institutions, many of which operate as small single-purpose providers in one 'specialty' area. More recently, some of the local institutions have begun to operate in partnership with some overseas public or private institutions. On the other hand, globalization has opened up an influx of international higher and other levels of educational providers operating in the South African market. To ensure efficiency, equity and quality of standards, the Higher Education Act (1997) lays basis for the regulation of private higher education. "It provides a framework for the registration of private higher education institutions linked to three factors; (i) the financial viability of institutions; (ii) the quality of programme offerings; and (iii) whether the provision is in the public interest."

(National Plan for Higher Education 2001: 64) In terms of these requirements guidelines to facilitate the registration are in place and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) have the responsibility for the accreditation and the registration of all the qualifications.

Role of the non-governmental providers

From 1971 to 1992 the SACHED project known as the Distance University Student Support Project (DUSSPRO) provided much needed student support services to the UNISA students. This project offered "counseling and tutoring, study skills courses for some groups of students enrolled with UNISA" (SAIDE, 1995: 64). It is worth noting that the efforts of this NGO went a long way to supporting students largely from disadvantaged communities. Nonyongo emphasized:

> that the majority of the tertiary distance education students are products of the Bantu Education system and are ill-prepared for tertiary study and for learning through the distance mode of education (Nonyongo, 1993: 25).

Whilst the advent of the democratic government introduced political transformation of South Africa, the nature and quality of students entering the tertiary field, particularly those from the historically disadvantaged communities, still suffer the legacies of the apartheid education system. Their choice of distance education as a first option of study is determined by economic and other social considerations. The reality is that even in the current democratic era, these students are often ill prepared, ill equipped with language and study techniques and therefore find it very difficult to cope with the rigors of the higher education environment. The experience and insights developed by the NGO provision described above, specifically in the field of student support have made significant contributions to the development of quality open and distance learning models envisaged for the transformed South Africa. For example, by the end 1993, UNISA started negotiations with SACHED about possible partnership in the delivery of the DUSSPRO related support services. The negotiations resulted in the launching of a joint pilot project consisting of the presentation of "student support services to UNISA students with a view to determining the feasibility of continuing with the program or adaptations thereof by UNISA after 1994." (Memorandum of Agreement between SACHED and UNISA, 1994:1) The lessons learnt from this pilot project contributed to the foundations of the student support innovations in UNISA from 1995 onwards.

Role of the Students Organizations

Any discussion about the developments in higher education and distance education would be incomplete if the voice of the student is not represented. In South Africa, since the 1976 Soweto Student uprising more and more student political organizations were formed. In higher education the Azanian Students Congress (AZASCO) formed in 1990 and the South African student Congress (SASCO) formed in 1991, are examples of students organizations that contributed significantly by placing the student's voice on the transformational agenda. These student organizations did not only concern themselves with issues of political control and governance of institutions of higher learning, they also took keen interest in issues relating to curriculum and tuition methods. At UNISA, students who participated in the DUSSPRO student support, showed great appreciation for the value of support offered by this NGO project. Nonyongo (1993) comments that when SACHED decided to close down the project there was a lot of animosity from the students. This brought about student demonstrations, with students vowing that:

> *DUSSPRO could not closed down as this project was an oasis in the dessert of lack of support from*

UNISA (Nonyongo, 1993: 37).

In defense of SACHED's decision, SASCO cautioned the students that they as students were registered first and foremost with UNISA *and therefore the latter should take the responsibility for their support*. SASCO further acknowledged that there was a need for "DUSSPRO type program" to serve the needs of disadvantaged students who were largely black and suffered the legacy of apartheid education. The students were encouraged to join hands with SASCO and approach the UNISA management to campaign for the transformation of UNISA distance education delivery methods, one of the key issues being the inclusion and integration of appropriate student support. The post 1994 era, also ushered in remarkable change in the governance structures of tertiary institutions. The policy formulating documents such as the NCHE (1996) White Paper 3 (1997) and the Higher Education Act (1997) emphasized the importance of the inclusion of the student's voice in all the governance structures of tertiary institutions. Although there was initial resistance to in the traditional correspondence institutional context, it was impossible for such resistance to be maintained against the pressure for transformation and eventually students representative councils (SRCs) were established at all the distance education institutions. The SRCs are now statutory bodies with mandatory representation on institutional structures such as the Council, Senate and the Institutional Forum, as prescribed by the legislation.

Additionally, student organizations, including SASCO engaged the government and the relevant institutions advocating for the recognition of distance education learners as full participants in the higher education sector. Government was also pressurized to provide financial support to academically deserving distance students, in the same way in which provision was made for students in the conventional face-to-face institutions of higher learning. Against this background, distance education students at UNISA and TSA now qualify to participate fully in the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)*,* which is a government strategy to ensure access to tertiary education for the historically disadvantaged. Unfortunately, however, students on distance education programmes at traditionally face-to-face institutions still do not qualify for this type of financial support.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT IN THE HIGHER AND DISTANCE EDUCATION (1995-2003)

The chronology of policy development in higher education, during this period began with the 15 March 1995 White Paper on Education and Training and culminated with the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE). This, includes policy and recommendations on how policy should be implemented, evaluated and financed. The 1995 White Paper places great emphasis on the value of education and training based on the principles of open learning and states this as follows:

> The Ministry of Education is anxious to encourage the development of an open learning approach, since it resonates with the values and principles of the national education and training policy which underpins this document and has applicability in all learning contexts. (Department of Education, 1995: 28 para 26).

This White Paper further notes that the Ministry has the responsibility to advise the government

on whether the *"vast infrastructure of intellectual and professional endeavour, substantially supported by public funds, is yielding a good return to the nation, and how it might be assisted to do better."* It further announces the establishment of a National Commission of Higher Education (NCHE) whose terms of reference would cover the entire sector. The recommendations contained in the Commission's 1996 Report formed the basis for the *White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* 27 July 1997 which, *inter alia*:

- advocates for an integrated and co-ordinated system of higher education, but not a uniform system
- recognises three types of institutions within the higher education system *viz* universities, technikons and colleges but which would not be discrete and mutually exclusive sectors.
- proposes that the programmes offered at institutions will be determines in the planning process on the basis of the "fit between the institution's proposed programme mix and regional and national needs, as well as an assessment of current institutional missions and capacities.
- encourages the development of regional cooperation and partnerships of a range of higher education institutions as a means of transcending divides in the sector and as a *"harbinger of new institutional forms"*
- announces the Ministry's intention to undertake in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education (CHE) an assessment of the optimal number and types of institutions needed for a transformed higher education system (para 2.37 - 2.45).

Echoing the sentiments of the 1995 White Paper, this White Paper on Higher Education endorses the fact that distance education and resource-based learning which are based on the principles of open learning have a crucial role to play in addressing the challenges of expanding access, diversifying the body of learners and enhancing quality within the context of limited resources because the two modalities of educational delivery enable learning to take in *"different context, at a multiplicity of sites, at learner's own pace, using many media and a variety of learning and teaching approaches"* and also that they are *particularly appropriate for learners who are already in employment, or who need to earn in order to meet study costs.* Within this context, the White Paper goes on to state that:

> The Ministry supports the development of a national network of centres of innovation in course design and development, as this would enable the development of franchising of well designed courses, quality and cost-effective learning resources and courses, building on the expertise and experience of top quality scholars and educators in different parts of the country

> In addition, contact and distance education institutions will be encouraged to provide effective and flexible learning environments on a continuum of educational provision, in which educators will be able to select from an increasing range of educational methods and technologies those that are most appropriate to the context within which they operate. This development, together with a regional network of learning centres, will not only broaden access, but also facilitate and enhance quality education, especially in rural areas and less well-endowed urban institutions (Department of Education, 1995)

As foreshadowed in the 1997 Higher Education White Paper, the Minister of Education requested the CHE in January 2001 to conduct an "overarching exercise designed to put

strategies into place to ensure that our education system is indeed on the road to the 21st century". The CHE was specifically asked to provide the Minister with:

> A set of concrete proposals on the shape and size of the higher education system and not a set of general principles which serve as guidelines for restructuring.

The CHE took the 1997 White Paper as its point of department and its work was guided by the goals and purposes of this White Paper. It also recognised that to meet the challenges of the 21st century, the reconfiguration of the higher education system will mean no "business as usual" and would "leave no institution untouched". The CHE's assessment culminated in the June 2000 Report: *Towards a new Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21st Century*. This report notes a number of key problems and challenges of the higher education system. Among the problems are the geographical location of institutions; fragmentation of the system; competition among public providers; inefficiencies related to students throughput rates, graduation rates, dropouts, repetition and retention; skewed patterns of student distribution in various fields of study; skewed distribution of students, academic and administrative staff in terms of race and gender and low research outputs etc. The key challenges noted relate to effectiveness, efficiency and equity. After arguing for reconfiguring higher education by moving towards differentiation and diversity within an integrated and coordinated national system, the CHE made a number of recommendation towards achieving this goal.

The Ministry of Education's subsequent National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) of 2001 was a response to the CHE report and it supports most of the CHE Report recommendations. The NPHE presents concrete details on how to change the higher education landscape in terms of: providing mechanisms for restructuring higher education; providing indicative targets of the size and shape of the sector; increasing participation rates including participation rates of SADC countries; efficiency improvements; shifting the balance of participation between humanities, business and commerce and science, engineering and technology from 49%, 26%, 25% to 40%, 30%, 30% respectively; ensuring that all graduates are equipped with the requisite skills; establishing equity targets, especially equity of access for blacks and women, equity of outcomes and equity of staff composition and lastly ensuring differentiation and diversity of the sector through institutional missions and programmes including range and type of qualifications offered.

Congruent with these ideals, the NPHE proposes to loosely maintain existing missions and programme differentiation of technikons and universities for the next five years and to lift the moratorium on the introduction of new distance education programmes in contact universities which had been imposed by the Ministry in February 2000. It is important to note that this moratorium created fears about the Ministry's intentions and the seemingly exclusive policy on distance education provision. The NPHE allays these fears by recognising the rapidly blurring distinction between contact and distance education programme provision resulting from the significant range of media used in education delivery resulting in the continuum of educational provision ranging from pure correspondence to face-to-face. Equally, it recognized that an increasing number of distance education programmes were being offered by face-to-face institutions - also as a result of the changes in information and communications technology and the search for cost-efficiency. Also adding to the changing landscape of higher education provision was the increase in competitions from private providers and policy pronouncements on

the efficacy of distance education and resource-based learning. Whilst welcoming these developments, the NPHE warns against the adoption of distance education as a *"panacea for the challenges that confront higher education in South Africa"*. Suggestions, that because of globalisation and the development of virtual universities, distance education is seen as the *beginning and end of higher education* and that it can replace face-to-face institutions where *scholarship, research, teaching and service are valued in equal measure and where the focus is on the full range of disciplines..* and that *knowledge generation and intellectual development are themselves the product of social integration and engagement,* were strongly cautioned against. Questions were also raised about the quality and efficiency of distance education programmes, in particular, questions were raised around large-scale programmes which appear to be driven by a profit motive rather than by commitment to addressing the socio-economic needs of the country.

But, despite these concerns, the NPHE lifted the moratorium on contact institutions' provision of distance education from 2002 with the proviso that programmes are part of the institutions' three-year rolling plans, that institutions seek approval for the new distance education programmes that are not subsidised, that there is a fit between the programmes and institutional missions and capacity, and whether regional and national needs are met and also quality assurance criteria of the Higher Education Quality Council.

In line with the recommendation to restructure the higher education system by reducing the number of institutions through mergers and new institutional forms, the NPHE proposed an investigation into how the institutions can be reduced and "not on whether the number of institutions can or should be reduced". With regard to distance education the Ministry proposed the establishment of a single dedicated distance education institution through the merger of UNISA and TSA and the incorporation of the distance education centre of Vista University. The Ministry also announced that it would establish a Working Group to facilitate this merger, advise on the role of the single distance education institution in South Africa and investigate the broader role of distance education in higher education. The Minister of Education has since assigned this task (in October 2002) to the CHE and the latter has set up a task team to carry out this task.

CONCLUSION

Distance education has a long history in South Africa. From its initiation in the eighteen century, stakeholders involved in distance education have come from the public and private sectors of the country and both have influenced policy in various ways. The correspondence nature of distance education with, *inter alia,* limited student support has tended to predominate throughout the years of distance education provision in the country. Post apartheid policies seek to transform this form of distance education and ensure meaningful access to and success in education through this method. They also seek to integrate distance education into the whole education system and present it as part of a reconfigured higher education system. The proposed merger between the three distance education providers will lead to the establishment of a single dedicated distance education institution catering for large numbers of students and hopefully transformed to become a well functioning institution encompassing the values and ideals presented in the policy documents.

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