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DISCUSSION PAPER

SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM: REALITIES, PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

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PREFACE

The Chair, representatives of various stakeholder organisations and research and development agencies, invited guests from the donor community and media, members of the Council on Higher Education, colleagues and comrades

Welcome to this first Consultative Conference of the Council on Higher Education. I look forward to meeting all of you informally during the duration of the conference.

For the present, my task is to share with you, arising out of the exercise of producing the Annual Report for parliament, the CHE's sense of the realities, key problems and challenges of South African higher education.

It is not my intention to read to you all 43 pages of Part 1 of the CHE Annual Report. That would be inviting a huge alcoholic drinks bill during cocktails later this evening. Nor is it my intention even to summarise the Annual Report. I believe that the Conclusion and the Executive Summary do a good job in this regard.

I want to take the Annual Report as read, and instead want to address in a somewhat different way from the Annual Report the key problems and challenges that we need to be putting our heads around if we are to realise the kind of higher education system that is called for by the *White Paper* of 1997.

INTRODUCTION

Higher Education policy development - from the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) of 1995, through to the *Higher Education Act* of 1997 and the *White Paper* on Higher Education (HE), *A Programme for Transformation of Higher Education in South Africa* - has taken as its point of departure a triple challenge:

➢ Overcoming social-structural inequities
➢ Contributing to reconstruction and development, and
➢ Positioning South Africa to engage effectively with globalisation.

In this it way, policy development sought to ensure that South Africa would be both a better place in the 21st century and better equipped for the challenges of the 21st century.

The gravity, the enormity of the challenge becomes more evident when one grasps that for various reasons it is not an option to postpone one or other elements of the triple challenge or to tackle them in sequence, but that they have to be confronted, by and large, simultaneously.

As the White Paper notes:

> (T)he South African economy is confronted with the formidable challenge of integrating itself into the competitive arena of international production and finance….
>
> *Simultaneously*, the nation is confronted with the challenge of reconstructing domestic social and economic relations to eradicate and redress the inequitable patterns of ownership,

wealth and social and economic practices that were shaped by segregation and apartheid (emphasis added).

In relation to this many-headed challenge, the White Paper identifies various and, indeed, diverse social purposes for South African higher education:

➢ Attention to the pressing local, regional and national needs of the South African society and to the problems and challenges of the broader African context.

➢ The mobilisation of human talent and potential through lifelong learning to contribute to the social, economic, cultural and intellectual life of a rapidly changing society.

➢ To help lay the foundations of a critical civil society, with a culture of public debate and tolerance which accommodates differences and competing interests.

➢ The training and provision of personpower to strengthen this country's enterprises, services and infrastructure. This requires the development of professionals and knowledge workers with globally equivalent skills, but who are socially responsible and conscious of their role in contributing to the national development effort and social transformation.

➢ Production, acquisition and application of new knowledge: …a well-organised, vibrant research and development system which integrates the research and training capacity of higher education with the needs of industry and of social reconstruction.

Translated into policy goals and initiatives, the HE transformation agenda is constituted by:

✦ Increased and broadened participation within HE to meet personpower needs and advance social equity
✦ The development of a single, national, integrated and co-ordinated system
✦ Co-operative governance of the system and institutions and partnerships
✦ Curriculum restructuring and knowledge production which is responsive to societal interests and needs
✦ Quality assurance through assessment and promotion of quality and accreditation of programmes
✦ Incorporation of HE programmes and qualifications within a National Qualifications Framework designed to promote articulation, mobility and transferability
✦ Improved institutional planning and management and the development of three-year institutional plans
✦ State funding on the basis of allocated student enrolments and accredited programmes with redress funding to overcome historical institutional inequities

Many of these goals and initiatives are, of course, not unique to South African HE. However, the fact of their being part of a period of political and social transition and a societal reconstruction and development programme to which HE is required to make a significant contribution means:

➢ That the HE transformation agenda is appropriate

> That the HE transformation agenda is necessarily comprehensive and of a fundamental nature
> That the tasks faced are particularly urgent, and
> That the expectations of HE are also considerable.

Of course, such a transformation agenda has considerable financial and human resource implications. Moreover, available resources will unavoidably shape the trajectory, dynamism and pace of the implementation and the achievement of policy goals.

KEY PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

In approaching some of the key problems and challenges of HE, it is important to make explicit the propositions and assumptions that constitute the point of departure and frame the analysis.

FRAMEWORK

The propositions that inform the analysis that follows are:

1. The existence of an adequately funded quality public HE system is a vital component of a society pursuing social goals of equity and economic and social development within a democratic framework, and is an overall public good.

2. Both the Constitution and the 1997 Higher Education Act provide for the existence of private HE. However, it is necessary to ensure that there exists a regulatory framework adequate to the protection of students and public HE, that by and large imposes the same obligations on private HE institutions as those imposed on public HE institutions, and that enhances the achievement of a national, integrated and co-ordinated HE system is a necessity. Private HE institutions in South Africa must be distinguished from their *not for profit,* and often prestigious, counterparts in countries like the United States by their principally *for profit* character.

3. The *Higher Education Act* and the *White Paper* provide the overall regulatory and policy framework for HE. The *White Paper* projects a vision for a veritable new HE system and sets forth a comprehensive agenda of HE transformation. It signals a number of key policy goals, various subsidiary policy aims and the policy instruments and mechanisms that may be appropriate to their achievement.

   The *Act* and *White Paper* are, of course, social constructions, products of historical conjunctures. Thus, the extent to which they are appropriate to the current conjuncture has to be constantly posed. Further, the White Paper's transformation statements with respect to certain issues may not always be entirely consistent and/or sufficiently precise and concrete.

   Moreover, policy goals, signals and references to possible mechanisms of transformation do not in themselves constitute detailed, thoughtful and iterative plans of implementation which take into account changes in the macro economic and fiscal environment, capacities of HE institutions, available human and financial resources and so forth.

4. The transformation agenda in South Africa, including within HE, is riveted with paradoxes. If a paradox is understood as entailing an idea constituted by opposing propositions that however contradictory they may be are, for good political and social reasons, equally essential for effective pursuit of the transformation agenda, resolving the paradoxes is crucial to the effective functioning of HE.

For example, the goals of equality and development stand in a relationship of permanent or intractable tension. An exclusive focus on equality can lead to the formulation of policies that are abstracted from the conditions in which the policies must be applied. That is to say, they may be elaborated in isolation from the concrete conditions of society and HE and the development programmes that may be appropriate to transform those conditions. An exclusive focus on economic development, on the grounds that without the production of the skilled human resources needed by the economy the basic economic and social needs of the people cannot be attained, may prioritise development and effectively retard or delay the equalisation process. It is far from self-evident that economic development necessarily entails equality.

For political and social reasons it is crucial to pursue both equality and development goals. The way to resolve the equality-development paradox is to recognise the competing, yet important, claims of both equality (redress of social structural inequalities) and development (socio-economic, political and cultural development and human resource development to effect this). Further, the challenge for HE is to find policies and strategies which, in the context of existing conditions, can satisfy both imperatives, can *balance* equality goals and development goals.

This represents a major and taxing challenge. Of course, when confronted with an intractable tension between dearly held values and goals 'simplifying manoeuvres' are also possible. One simplifying manoeuvre is to refuse to accept the existence of a dilemma – a moral blindness if you like. A second simplifying manoeuvre is to elevate one value above all others making this the value in terms of which all choices and policies are to be made. A third simplifying manoeuvre is to rank values in advance so that if there is a conflict between them one will take precedence. In the latter two cases, the effect is to prioritise or privilege one value/goal above another.

The entire National Education Policy Investigation of the early 1990s investigation posed educational transformation only in relation to equality and redress. The effect was a failure to pose adequately the transformation of education and training in relation to economic, political and social development and concomitantly a limited sensitivity to the difficult choices and trade-offs implied by any restructuring of education to contribute simultaneously to equality/redress and development.

The National Commission on Higher Education was sensitive to the needs of both economic and social development and equity/redress. However, it did not dis-aggregate equity and confront the existence of, and indeed competing claims of, different kinds of equity. Thus, it was inconclusive about the priority and balance between, for example, *individual social* equity/redress and *institutional* equity/redress. This is a key issue that needs to be faced: the priority and balance between institutional redress (a focus on historically disadvantaged *institutions*) and individual social redress (a focus on historically disadvantaged *individuals*).

5. There is a considerable distance to be travelled towards the goal of a national, integrated and co-ordinated HE system. In this regard, there is a need to identify and tackle with vigour select core, priority issues and areas, and to make decisive choices and decisions and issue specific policy declarations. Moreover, a confluence of multiple and key HE policy initiatives must be achieved. These issues and areas include:

   ➢ The size and shape of the HE system
   ➢ How a single national, integrated and co-ordinated, yet differentiated system is to be achieved
   ➢ Development of a new academic policy framework for shaping and configuring the HE system
   ➢ How such a reconfigured system is to be sustained through regulation, good governance and funding

6. The resolution of a number of other subsidiary issues depends in large part on these initial choices and decisions. Prioritisation and decision making could contribute to providing greater policy direction, greater focus and depth to the work of central steering bodies and more effective use of the limited human and financial resources available.

7. There is a need in specific areas and around particular issues for adequate national and central shaping and steering of the HE system and appropriate and timely interventions, with a concomitant development of greater effectiveness and efficiency with respect to these processes.

8. The resources must be mobilised to support national structures and institutions to develop capacities congruent with the demands of the new conjuncture. Donor funding should be harnessed to support priorities and strategic initiatives.

It is to the problems and challenges that I want to now turn.

THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE

The HE system as a whole, and the CHE and the Higher Education branch of the DoE in particular, face a number of immediate and impending problems and urgent challenges. [As severe as some of the problems may be it may be over-dramatic to speak of a 'crisis' – parts of the system are actually functioning and even functioning well. One has to be cautious of using terms like 'crisis' too loosely since one could inadvertently contributing to, often incorrect and ill-informed, public perceptions].

These problems and challenges include:

→ Declining enrolments in public HE

→ Prospect of a decrease in public funding which requires urgent action

→ Laissez-faire public and private provision of programmes and qualifications and scramble for students.

→ Prioritising, making the difficult choices and decisions and achieving a confluence of different initiatives and elements

This necessitates:

- Resolving the issues of size and shape, and a single, national co-ordinated and integrated, yet differentiated HE system

- Decisively shaping and steering the system through robust policy and planning, and thereafter

- Sustaining a reconfigured system through appropriate financial and other mechanisms

→ Weak or fragile governance and management at various levels of the system, requiring building national and institutional governance and management and administration capacities

→ A weak knowledge and information base and/or processing capacity and the need for an effective Management Information System

Declining enrolments in public HE

South Africa's higher education sector experienced a period of rapid growth between 1993 and 1997. Head count enrolments in universities and technikons grew at an annual average rate of 6% - from 473000 in 1993 to 596000 in 1997. This was a total increase of 123 000 over this 5-year period. Enrolments levelled off between 1997 and 1998 (the increase in 1998 was only 9 000 or 2%). The peak enrolment for the system was the 1998 total of 605 000. Enrolments fell to 564 000 in June 1999 - a drop of 41 000 (or 7%) compared to the 1998 total.

This drop in total head count enrolments was not spread equally across all sectors of the SA higher education system. The changes in enrolment between 1998 and 1999 by sector were these:

Head count enrolment declines: 1999 compared to 1998 by sector

Sector	Change	
Historically white (Afrikaans) universities	+2 300	+2%
Historically black technikons	-900	-2%
Historically white (English) universities	-1 200	-2%
Historically white technikons	-3 300	-4%
Distance institutions (UNISA, Tech SA)	-24 700	-13%
Historically black universities	-13 400	-14%
TOTAL	-41 200	-7%

An analysis of the retention rates of universities and technikons and of their intakes of first-time entering undergraduates suggests that the enrolment changes experienced between 1998 and 1999 could continue into the next planning triennium of 2000-2002. The various scenarios constructed suggest that head count enrolments could change in the following ways in 2002 compared to 1999:

Possible enrolment declines: 2002 compared to 1999 by sector

Sector	Change	
Historically white (Afrikaans) universities	+14 000	+11%
Historically black technikons	+9 000	+20%
Historically white (English) universities	-2 000	-4%
Historically white technikons	-5 000	-6%
Distance institutions (UNISA, Tech SA)	-35 000	-20%
Historically black universities	-20 000	-25%
TOTAL	-47 000	-8%

The two tables indicate clearly that the institutional sectors most affected as far as student enrolments are concerned are the historically black universities and the specialised distance institutions (UNISA and Technikon SA).

There is a general perception that there is a growing private HE arena in South Africa. It is, at present, not possible to indicate with any certainty student enrolments at private HE institutions and more generally the size and shape of the private HE arena. However, it is becoming evident that because of the partnerships that exist between private and public HE institutions, a considerable number of students at private HE institutions are already counted in as part of enrolments at public HE institutions. This suggests that if private HE institutions were fully free-standing and their students were not counted as enrolments of public institutions, the decline in public HE enrolments would register as even greater.

Clearly, the increased enrolments in HE projected by the NCHE and called for by the *White Paper* have not materialised and there has instead been a decline in enrolments. The decline may have unfortunate social and economic consequences since labour market trends predict a sustained growth of 5% in the demand for high level skills. It also raises strongly and sharply raises the question of the sustainability of the current institutional shape of HE.

While one reason for the decline in enrolments is the fall in the output of students with matric passes, a comprehensive explanation has yet to be developed. In this regard, there is a need for a national study to gain a better understanding of the changes in student enrolments.

Prospect of decrease in public funding

A new funding formula is in the process of being developed and still some way from being finalised. If the present formula continues to be utilised for funding of institutions, a number of institutions which have experienced declining student enrolments and/or institutional debt during recent years - essentially the historically black universities and the two traditional distance institutions - could find themselves under severe financial and other pressures. There is also the prospect of the HE system as a whole suffering a considerable loss in government funding in the near future.

Possible government subsidy changes: 2002 compared to 1999 by sector (Rands millions: in Rands of 1999)

Sector	Change	
Historically white (Afrikaans) universities	+120	+9%
Historically black technikons	+92	+17%
Historically white (English) universities	+1	0%
Historically white technikons	-54	-6%
Distance institutions (UNISA, Tech SA)	-169	-25%
Historically black universities	-346	-26%
TOTAL	-356	-6%

It is clear that there could be a loss of 6% of the funds currently allocated to HE by government. The possible impact of declining enrolments on the subsidies of individual historically black universities ranges from decreased subsidies of between 11% and 52%, with an average loss of 23%.

The new funding framework will only distribute funds in a different way and will not necessarily inject any increased funds into the system. If we are not to lose the present level of state subsidy of some R 6.5 billion, we are going to have to convince the Finance Ministry about the efficacy of HE. More than this, and as in other countries where there is growing scepticism around the public benefits of HE and of science, we are going to have to convince the broader public of the worth of higher education.

The challenge, however, is not simply the formulation and technical implementation of a "goal orientated new funding system" as proposed by the White Paper. Rather, a new funding system has to be linked to the substantive achievement of, and also financially ground and sustain, an accessible and robust and new HE landscape.

Such a landscape would comprise of a mix of institutions with varying roles and functions which contribute in different yet complementary ways to the diverse economic and social development, knowledge, and personpower needs of South Africa. The issue of institutional redress funding has to be approached within such an overall context.

The possible crisis in HE funding calls for urgent attention on the part of the DoE, the CHE and the wider HE community. In essence, the challenge is to persuade government to maintain the present levels of HE funding with the guarantee that the key HE actors can and will, within a specified time-frame, reconfigure and revitalise the HE system and individual institutions for the public good.


Laissez-faire public and private provision of programmes and qualifications and scramble for students

The shape of the HE system is changing because the previous distinctions by institutional types, modes of instruction and historical categories are loosening and eroding. This is more the result of the individual responses of institutions to the new policy environment and new conditions in South Africa rather than the outcome of major steering in terms of a national planning framework.

It is evident that there has been a considerable shift of students from the distance institutions towards the traditionally contact institutions. However, while the distance university and technikon (UNISA and Technikon SA) have lost over 40 000 (21%) students between 1995 and 1999, the shift of students to the traditionally contact universities and technikons has not necessarily been towards a contact mode of instruction. The head count total of students studying in the contact mode at residential institutions increased by only 6 000 (2%) between 1995 and 1999. Instead, a significant feature has been the expansion in programmes offered by the traditional contact institutions in distance mode and the accompanying considerable increase in students studying in distance mode at these institutions. The numbers here grew by 31 000 (111%) between 1995 and 1999. The changes in enrolments by mode of instruction are reflected below.

Head count enrolments by instruction mode
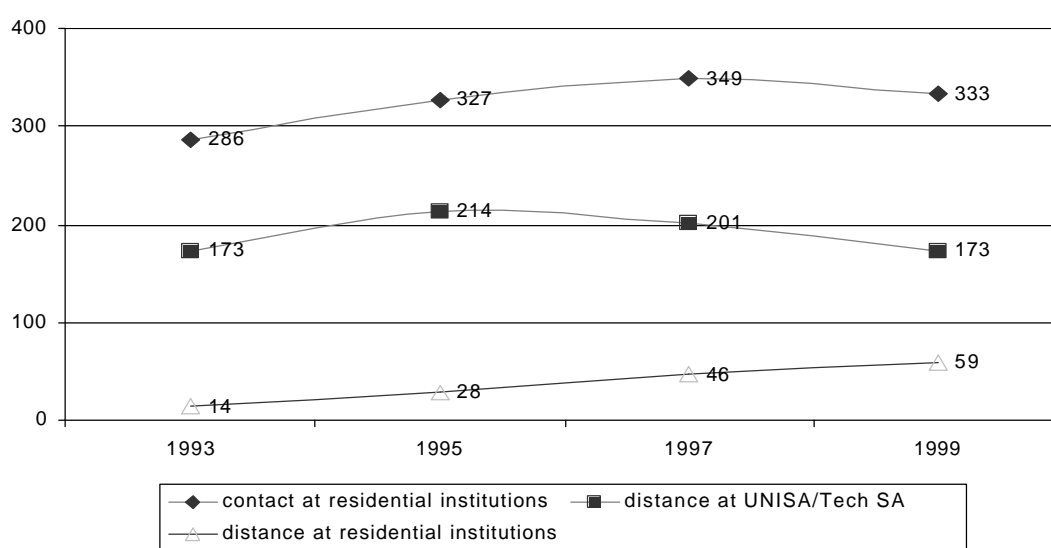
The table below provides a more detailed picture of the involvement of traditionally contact institutions in distance education.

Distance student enrolments at historically contact institutions

Institution	Head count total: 1999	1999 head count compared to 1995	Distance students: 1999	Black students: 1999
UPE	13 593	+7 878 (138%)	53%	79%
Pretoria University	52 179	+20 995 (67%)	49%	62%
RAU	18 575	-1 693 (-8%)	30%	47%
Natal	18 300	+2 469 (16%)	13%	76%
Potchefstroom	14 526	+4 063 (39%)	11%	48%
Pretoria Tech	23 147	+7 323 (46%)	11%	67%
Stellenbosch	18586	+3 866 (26%)	10%	25%

It is clear that it is principally the historically white Afrikaans-medium universities that have entered the terrain of distance education. It is also the case that the majority of

African students at historically white Afrikaans-medium universities are distance students: 39 600 compared to 21 600 contact students. It also appears that most of the distance education is concentrated in the humanities and teacher education fields.

The move of some public contact institutions into distance education overlaps with partnerships being formed with private HE institutions, with the latter in cases seeming to be responsible for the provision of distance education – a scenario of public institutions as 'suppliers' of programmes though not immediate providers.

This distinction between the supply and provision of programmes also holds in other instances: (a) institutes 'supplying' programmes which are delivered through private institutions; (b) overseas institutions 'supplying' programmes which are provided through public institutions and (c) overseas institutions 'supplying' programmes which are provided through local private institutions. In all these cases, the nature of teaching and learning and the issue of quality must be major concerns.

The provision by public institutions of distance education has also resulted in these institutions establishing teaching centres in various cities and towns and competition between institutions in these localities. In a more developed version of educational provision beyond ones immediate geographical location, though not necessarily related to distance education, has been the establishment of satellite campuses by some institutions in other cities and towns.

Finally, it is also evident that there are growing instances of 'programme creep' – historical types of institutions (universities, technikons, colleges) beginning to offer programmes and qualifications that were traditionally offered by other institutional types.

However, HE may still not be producing sufficient numbers of high-level graduates with the relevant cognitive and social competencies and skills. It is also unclear whether there is a shift towards HE producing the kinds and quality of knowledge, required for South Africa to become globally competitive and address the reconstruction and development challenge.

All of this must be a matter of considerable concern. Some of the changes may well be positive. Others, however, could institutionalise rampant and even destructive competition, make institutions excessively market-oriented with a mindset of 'market-share', and ultimately make the achievement of a national, integrated, co-ordinated and differentiated HE system, a key goal of the *White Paper*, much more difficult.

Prioritising and achieving a confluence of different initiatives and elements

At all levels of the system, there is a tendency for goals and policies to be pursued through often multiple initiatives with no or little co-ordination, articulation and confluence. Especially evasive is the crucial need for a relationship and articulation between macro-economic and social policy, human resource development policy and strategies and the formation of personpower through higher education. This entails and requires a capacity and mechanisms and instruments for policy co-ordination, management, planning and implementation. A crucial pursuit has to be interventions that enable a *confluence* of higher education, the wider S&T system and the economy and social sectors.

Within the HE system itself, the policy vehicles, instruments and mechanisms for ensuring a national, integrated, co-ordinated and differentiated system are, of course, still relatively new or in the process of being developed. These include the three-year institutional plans, the national planning framework, the new funding framework, a new management information system, as well as the Higher Education Branch of DoE and the CHE and its HEQC.

A confluence of multiple and key HE policy initiatives remains to be achieved. There are also severe problems related to availability of financial and especially human resources, inadequate high-level HE policy expertise, and a weak knowledge and information base. Indeed, many institutions sorely lack capacity to provide and process, often basic, data and information and either have no or a very limited cultures of reflective institutional research, usually the hallmark of quality institutions.

In this context, a number of actions appear to be vitally necessary and urgent and overriding challenges.

➢ First, the *White Paper* provided a comprehensive transformation programme, policy framework and general policy signals. However, this programme was, in part, grounded on certain macro-economic and fiscal policy assumptions that may no longer hold and have implications for the programme. There is thus a need to identify and tackle with vigour the core, priority issues and areas - the size and shape of the HE system, academic policy, how an integrated yet differentiated system is to be achieved and sustained by funding, etc. - to make decisive choices and decisions and issue specific policy declarations. The resolution of a number of other subsidiary issues depends in large part on these initial choices and decisions.

➢ Second, there is a need in specific areas and around particular issues for adequate national and central shaping and steering of the HE system and appropriate and timely interventions, with a concomitant development of greater effectiveness and efficiency with respect to these processes.

➢ Finally, the resources must be mobilised to support institutions to develop capacities congruent with the demands of the new conjuncture. Prioritisation and decision making could contribute to providing greater policy direction, greater focus and depth to the work of central steering bodies and more effective use of the limited human and financial resources available.

The movement towards a vibrant, dynamic and well functioning HE system which has both social and economic public and private benefits for society and individuals respectively depends on taking action and meeting the challenges above.

Size and shape

In the light of what has been already noted, the overall shape and size of the HE system remains a vexing issue.

While there is almost universal agreement that there is an urgent need to address the question of the shape and size of the HE system, there are, however, any number of differing and competing views on why the shape and size of the HE system is an urgent matter, and any number of notions of what should be the goals and nature of a shape and size exercise.

At the heart of the question of shape of the HE system is resolving what is meant by a single, national, co-ordinated, integrated and yet differentiated HE system and a new academic policy and degree and diploma structures and learning programmes.

The rationales for the establishment of higher education institutions in this country have varied. Today it cannot blithely be assumed that its rationale for an institution's existence is self-evident. What may have been convincing and adequate a decade ago should not be assumed to be so today. Government appears to be committed, as substantive policy, to a planned, co-ordinated yet differentiated higher education system. Sooner or later each HE institution could be required to demonstrate how, in what ways and to what extent it contributes to policy goals; will have to subject itself to the questions of the efficient and effective use of public resources and to many other searching questions.

In a differentiated higher education system a single institution cannot be everything and do everything. Choices will have to be made – regarding social purposes, size, kinds of knowledge creation and production, levels, domains and fields of knowledge creation and production, inter-institutional co-operation and partnerships and so forth.

Weak or fragile governance and management at various levels of the system

The *White Paper* of 1997 introduced new modes of national and institutional governance based on co-operative governance.

At a national level, co-operative governance has required the definition and re-definition of the exact roles, responsibilities and functions of the Higher Education Branch of the DoE, the CHE, and key stakeholder bodies. In some cases, the precise roles, responsibilities and relationship of the CHE and DoE are not yet fully settled and are still evolving.

Much the same situation pertains with respect to quality assurance activities and the relations between the CHE's Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA), professional councils and the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA's).

Principled co-operation without blurring of roles, mandates and identities, and close and continuous interaction and communication will be necessary among all HE bodies to achieve effective co-ordination and confluence around key areas and issues of HE transformation.

The notion of co-operative governance has been especially tested at individual HE institutions, where 'agreement in principle' has not always translated in to 'unity in practice'. The mediation of competing and sometimes irreconcilable claims and interests without institutional paralysis and/or loss of direction remains a major challenge at various institutions.

A complex of conditions has given rise to institutional situations characterised by weak and/or inadequate governance and management. The problems at these institutions go well beyond episodic student protests and relate fundamentally to institutional leadership and authority and management.

At a number of institutions, councils need to assume greater and more urgent responsibility as custodians of the public interest and for the overall financial performance of their respective institutions. However, this does not detract from the essential separation that must be maintained between the roles of a council in governance and those of the executive management's of institutions. Until and unless institutional level governance and administrative structures and processes are reconfigured the very process of strategic planning and the implementation of what may be excellent strategic initiatives could come to naught. The principles of democracy and accountability and transparency are not in competition with those of efficiency and effectiveness.

The restructuring of senates has been uneven, and there has been especially a lack of clarity about the precise role of different stakeholders in senate. In terms of governance, there may be a need to distinguish between academic freedom, institutional autonomy and *academic rule* – the assertion of the idea that certain important decisions relating to academic activity should be taken only by or on the mandatory advice of academics.

It is clear, and has already been recognised by the DoE, that in the new environment education and training initiatives to improve effective governance, including leadership and management capacity development programmes, are a necessity.

However, the considerable institutional differentiation means that capacity development needs of institutions are quite varied. They range from more conventional and very specific interventions to augment the already existing skills and capacity to the need for multi-skilled institutional support teams to help the leadership of an institution to stabilise, focus and re-direct the institution. It is also evident that the need for training is not restricted to institutional managers and administrators but also extends to the membership of councils of institutions and to student leaders.

Weak knowledge and information base or processing capacity

The current HE information systems are sorely inadequate, especially in relation to information around finance matters. Further, many institutions sorely lack capacity to provide and process often basic data and information and either have no or a very limited culture of reflective institutional research, usually the hallmark of quality institutions. Overall, there is a weak institutional culture in South Africa of HE research and a dearth of HE policy expertise.

Essential to steering around HE participation targets and growth rates is the need for a much more responsive and modern information system that provides policy relevant 'real time' data on students and staff, both in the public and private HE arenas.

It is something of an irony that institutions which so readily encourage research and knowledge production around all kind of issues are so tardy and even reticent to conduct research of immediate and direct value to themselves and to create the enabling conditions for this. The development of an effective Education Management Information System and a culture of institutional research are, of course, of considerable importance.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude, and conclude, in the context of the danger of a rampant and profane marketisation and commodification of higher education, with a reminder of the moral basis of higher education - a moral basis that our public policy documents both endorse and seek to promote.

Our policy goals require us not merely to advance all forms of knowledge and scholarship and to develop well-planned and co-ordinated teaching, learning and research programmes to address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, Southern African and African contexts.

We are also implored to support a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights by educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, just, non-racist and non-sexist social order.

Around late 1995 there was an incident at Harvard University. A student from a wealthy family sexually molested a fellow student, a young woman from a working-class family in the mid-west who had won a scholarship to Harvard. It happened while she was cleaning his room, something that she also did for other students in order to survive.

It so happens that the woman and the man who molested her attended a moral philosophy course together and were also the top two students. Following the incident, the woman confronted the professor of moral philosophy. Her question was what is the point of readings, seminars, lectures and essays on goodness, and the concept of good. How do you teach goodness, teach people to be good?'

We can point at any number of South Africans, men and women, black and white, within and outside HE, who are or have been magnificent symbols of good, be this of an intellectual, academic, political or personal nature. The have contributed to powerful legacies of courageous critical scholarship, commitment to social justice and a humane society, and political action towards these ends.

Those of us who are linked to and staff our HE institutions should be able to identify with these commitments and have an especial responsibility to keep alive such commitments. We are especially challenged on three counts:

→ First, how do we, through teaching, and research and related activities, teach good? To put it sharply, how do we avoid becoming so captive of our own institutional brochures - extolling the virtues of the information literacy skills, competencies and outcomes that our courses and programmes produce, their compliance with the NQF, registration with SAQA, their quality , assurance by this and that body and so forth - to the extent that the moral and ethical considerations of how and what we teach and teach towards is ignored or becomes an after-thought

→ Second, how do we produce professionals and researchers, who can think theoretically, analyse with rigour, gather and process empirical data and do all this with a deep social conscience and sensitivity to the diverse needs of our people and society, and

→ Third, how do we, in short, produce young men and women who will personify good, and in this way ensure that in the years ahead the political, social and

intellectual life of our country will not be banal, self-centred and mired in greed or desperate attempts at simply survival, but rich and vibrant, incorporating questions of social justice and intellectual and political actions towards a humane society.

This is not to overstate the importance of HE institutions or academics. It is, however, to recognise that social movements, political parties and the like are not enough. It is also not enough to only hold government culpable for omissions or failures, or bemoan the lack of efficacy of social movements.

The achievement of equity, development, justice and democracy in South Africa requires academics and HE institutions to become powerhouses of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination and diffusion, and of the formation of new generations of thinkers and actors.

We displayed remarkable intellectual honesty, ingenuity, creativity, inventiveness, strategic and tactical acumen, stolid courage and purpose to be rid of tyranny and to fashion our democracy.

We need to rediscover and reawaken these abilities and aptitudes. And we need to harness them to now think, fashion and innovate the technologies, instruments, mechanisms and processes of transformation towards a HE system that is progressively characterised by equity, quality, responsiveness to economic and social development needs, and effective and efficient provision and management.

In the challenges that face us as a country, as a HE system and as individual HE institutions, and as academics and administrators:

→ We must be able to respond, heads held high, when asked: Is HE on the road to being a system of and for the 21st century? Is HE ready to achieve the diverse purposes that have been defined for it and is it poised to contribute to the economic and social development challenges that confront South Africa and the African continent? As the Minister of Education has indicated, the South African public has a vital interest in the answer – particularly that majority segment that has been denied for so long and has been promised by government a better life for all.

→ We must be able to respond, heads held high, when asked: Where are the academics, the learned intellectuals? Where is the intellectual vision? Where is the intellectual engagement, critique and clarification? And where is the intellectual contribution to the development of an equitable, just and humane democracy?