

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITORS

Since the demise of the apartheid order, South African higher education has seen massive changes which have left an indelible imprint on the system, its constituent institutions and practices. The first democratic government established a National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) which charted a programme of transformation for the sector. By 1997, key higher education policy and legislation informed by the work of the Commission was in place to enable the systematic programme for the transformation of higher education to unfold. In the decade since the adoption of the White Paper on Higher Education and the Higher Education Act, change has manifested on many fronts.

The celebration of a decade of democracy in South Africa in 2004 provided an opportunity for the large-scale review of the transformation process in higher education. To this end, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) published the study *South African Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy* in 2004, which accounted for the changes that had occurred in the preceding ten years, indicating the apartheid legacy, continuities and discontinuities in the system, the current situation and remaining challenges, and how these related to national policy. Overall the analysis indicated that by 2004 the foundations had been laid for the single, coordinated and differentiated system envisaged by the NCHE in 1996; a number of new organisations had been established by government and the sector to co-ordinate the higher education system including the Higher Education Branch in the national Department of Education, the Council on Higher Education and its Higher Education Quality Committee, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, and the South African Qualifications Authority and the National Qualifications Framework. New funding, planning and quality assurance instruments had been developed. A new institutional landscape was emerging with the process of mergers and incorporations among public institutions and the regulation of the private higher education sector which became subject to the same governance, qualification and quality assurance regime as public providers. Student enrolments had grown to a participation rate nearing 18 percent and the student body had become representative in terms of its 'racial' and gender composition and included also significant numbers of international students (CHE, 2004: 234-236). However, change did not proceed in a linear manner from policy formulation to implementation. Rather, the ten-year review concluded that the ongoing transformation of higher education was "highly complex, consisting of a set of still unfolding discourses of policy formulation, adoption, and implementation that are replete with paradoxes and tensions, contestations, and political and social dilemmas." (CHE, 2004: 234)

This new publication of the Council on Higher Education takes its point of departure from the system level analysis done in 2004 but proceeds differently. This Review of Higher Education in South Africa is an edited collection of research papers which analyse key trends in South African higher education in the context of international developments. It consists of

papers which provide succinct research-based analyses of six major issues in the process of transformation and restructuring of the higher education system: public funding, governance, information and communication technologies, institutional culture, access, and change.

In this introductory chapter we summarise the key claims, major findings and conclusions of the papers and point out areas for further research.

Table 1: A summary of the key issues, question and finding for each theme

Theme	Question	Claim or Finding
Funding	How has the higher education funding framework changed over time, and with what consequences for institutions?	That the higher education funding framework has evolved gradually over time and the New Funding Formula is more state-centred and less cost-related which creates new uncertainties for institutions
Governance	Does conditional autonomy in policy and implementation reduce university autonomy and academic freedom?	That in the light of the interdependence of the state and universities, a system of <i>deliberative democracy</i> is indispensable for the institutional autonomy and practices of academic freedom in universities
Technology	How do practitioners and researchers working in higher education institutions understand ICTs and their relation to change?	That among practitioners and researchers, and in the absence of national policy on ICTs, there is a diverse set of meanings and uses for ICTs and its relation to change – from improvement, to innovation, to transformation
Institutional Culture	What are the problems inherent in the uses of the term <i>institutional culture</i> in South African higher education?	That institutional culture is an unstable term, not a concept, that has many and complex meanings depending on who is using it and for what purposes; and that its deployment to cover everything limits its value in universities
Access	What are the factors that facilitate or impede access, equity and success for adult learners in universities?	That while the majority of students in higher education are adult learners, they remain poorly and unequally served at all levels of the university, a problem exacerbated by poor information and monitoring of this group
Change	What are the major currents of change in South African higher education and what do they mean, given changes elsewhere?	That change in higher education, whether planned or incidental, takes its pace and direction from a range of complex variables, shaped by particular institutional contexts; it cannot be linear, predictable or uniform even within a single national context

1. THE MAJOR RESEARCH CLAIMS

A summary of the major research question addressed in each paper, and the main corresponding knowledge claim of each contribution, is captured in Table I.

Public Funding

The chapter by Gert Steyn and Pierre de Villiers on *The Public Funding of Higher Education* provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of funding mechanisms for universities and technikons in South Africa over the last 50 years. The authors show how the different funding formulae are reflections of different values and degrees of market orientation of subsequent governments, and how in monetary terms the effective funding allocations were developed for a sample of universities and technikons. Looking beyond the funding formulae to other public funding over time, Steyn and de Villiers make a case both, for the maintenance of funding by formula and for the re-introduction of earmarked public funding for certain capital-intensive projects at higher education institutions.

Further research with a focus on the political economy of higher education funding is needed in order to understand better the political and fiscal context within which the public funding of higher education has evolved. What explains the cautious, evolutionary approach to changes in higher education finance which the authors have observed? There are several possibilities. One possible explanation is that the allocation of public funding to higher education must be understood in relation to the overall fiscal regime. Government's commitment to fiscal discipline within an overall liberal macro-economic framework precluded many of the radical changes to the distribution of resources which had been advocated by the anti-apartheid movement. Thus, for instance, there was no massive funding redirected from the historically white and privileged components of the higher education sector to the largely rural, black and marginalized segments of the national system of universities. Actual redress funding was insignificant in volume to make any impact on the scale of inequality between former white and former black universities; moreover, this small scale funding, even if available on a year to year basis, simply did not have any impact on institutions which were experiencing various degrees of crises of governance. Furthermore, as previously white universities and technikons started to deracialize their student bodies, the binary arguments of 'historically white' and 'historically black' universities became less helpful to analyse the reality of the higher education system. What challenges does this situation pose to the implementation of a higher education funding formula which is responsive to both social justice objectives and the needs of the country in terms of the production of high-level skills and research outputs? Moreover, how effective has funding been as a steering mechanisms to bring about change in higher education, to what extent there has been an alignment between funding and the other two steering instruments chosen for the transformation of higher education: planning and quality assurance? These are some of the questions new research on the funding of higher education will need to engage with to complete our understanding of the impact of funding on higher education.

Technology

The power of technologies in education lies in the fact that they serve both symbolic and practical purposes. As a symbolic value, the physical presence of information technologies signals progress, advancement and all the trappings of being modern – which explains why computers appear so prominently in the advertising media of schools and universities. As a practical subject, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) offer powerful capacities for linking students and staff, lecture rooms and conferences to people and programmes throughout the planet, in real time.

The chapter by Laura Czerniewicz, Neetha Ravjee and Nhlanhla Mlitwa entitled *ICTs and South African Higher Education*, offers a broad description of the meanings of ICTs in South African universities and maps ICTs in public higher education as an emerging field of enquiry and educational policy. The authors find that the discourses of ICTs in South African higher education are inextricably linked to a discourse of “change”. However, change and the role of ICTs in change processes is viewed in different ways. One prevailing notion of change is that of *improvement*. In this sense, ICTs are linked to expectations of efficiency gains and enhanced learning experiences. A second notion of change in this context is *innovation*. The application of ICTs is embedded in the idea of an emergent knowledge society. Here the emphasis is not, as under the improvement paradigm, on the addition of new elements to make an existing system more efficient, but rather on doing things differently. It is primarily amongst the members of this latter discourse community that attention is paid to the pedagogic implications of the application of ICTs in teaching and learning. The implications of this approach can also be clustered as part of a much more critical discourse of change as *transformation* and the integration of ICTs in teaching and learning as an opportunity to re-think teaching and learning practice.

Computers have become a ubiquitous feature of South African universities and yet there is tremendous unevenness in institutional policy development, physical infrastructure, delivery capability and practitioner understandings of ICTs, their meaning and their potential for educational change. The obvious point is that historical privilege and disadvantage are reflected once again in the observations about who has access to ICTs and who does not. ICT provision offers opportunities to exploit these technologies in teaching and learning, in student administration such as online registrations, as well as to expedite the research opportunities and linkages for academics, and to inform parents and other clients with necessary information about people and programmes. In a poor country, where investments in R&D remain comparatively low and where institutions function competitively and, with rare exception, in isolation of strong partnerships, the great IT divide may remain a fixed feature of the higher education landscape unless a concerted effort is made and ICT policy-makers and developers become mindful of local strengths. There is too little said about perhaps one of the most efficient mechanisms for advancing learning in universities in poor countries – M-learning (i.e. the application of mobile technology in education). Czerniewicz *et al* argue that a national policy framework on ICT and a mechanism to channel funding for the purpose of ICT development could go some way in eliminating backlogs.

The chapter invites for further research in a number of dimensions of the topic. Most apparent is the need for a similar study that explores ICTs in distance education in South Africa, which was beyond the scope of this paper. More theoretical work on the role of ICTs in a national context like South Africa will also be required towards building an understanding of the real potential of ICTs in developing countries characterised by extreme social inequalities.

System Governance and Autonomy

The ongoing debate on the nature and extent of external regulation of higher education is spawning a rich literature on the meanings of the institutional autonomy of universities, academic freedom, and public accountability in the democratic dispensation. The chapter by Penny Enslin, Felicity Coughlan, Joseph Divala, Mike Kissack and Thokozani Mathebula adds a further contribution to the debate. The authors of the chapter on *System Governance, Public Accountability and Institutional Autonomy* take a normative stance in their discussion of the involvement of government and other agencies in South African higher education. They have chosen to discuss the relevance and practical implications of the principles and practices of *deliberative democracy* for university governance in South Africa and investigate whether the formal provisions for systemic governance in relevant policy and legislation lend themselves to the practice of deliberative democracy.

At the outset, Enslin and her team contrast the tenets of deliberative democracy to those of the “aggregative” model of democracy. Rather than relying on a count of votes to determine who takes decisions or to actually decide on a matter, deliberative democracy emphasizes the free and equal participation of all citizens in the process of public deliberation based on the principles of deliberative publicity. The authors then apply the perspective of deliberative democracy to higher education. In particular, four dimensions for potential deliberative practice in universities are identified by the authors. These include the deliberative practices in a university’s core functions of teaching, learning and research; the internal governance of institutions; the relationship of the university to society in terms of its role as a repository of deliberative resources; and lastly, the external regulation of the university.

The main propositions held by the authors open a number of areas for debate and further research. Can deliberation as an intellectual attitude prevalent at higher education institutions, be equated with deliberative democracy? What would be the practical implications of the application of deliberative democracy for the actual governance processes and structures which organise life at universities? How should a democratic state committed to redress and social justice relate to higher education institutions, and what should be the relationship between these institutions and the state? What is the role of new managerialism at universities themselves in undermining deliberative processes?

The key question that emerges from the chapter – What would the pre-requisites be for deliberative democracy as a culture of governance to emerge in South African higher education? – remains to be answered in such a way that takes into account a differentiated approach to state steering in line with institutional capacity on the ground (Du Toit, 2005: 5).

Institutional Culture

John Higgins takes on *Institutional Culture* in his contribution to this book. He designates the term 'institutional culture' not as a concept but (following Raymond Williams) as a *keyword* – i.e. “an item of contested vocabulary in a conflictual and disputed social process.” Higgins critically examines the ways in which 'institutional culture' is deployed as a means towards understanding what may be involved in the successful transformation of higher education. Treating 'institutional culture' in this manner is not about selecting a definition as the “‘true’ or ‘proper’ or ‘scientific’ sense and dismissing other senses as loose or confused” (Williams, 1983: 91, cited by Higgins). The difficulty with the term is not the reality it refers to; “it is rather the fact that naming that reality is part and parcel of a series of complex arguments about the future of higher education in South Africa in which there are (in Williams’ terms) ‘fundamentally opposed as well as effectively overlapping positions’.” To start out, Higgins states that 'institutional culture' has become a buzzword which is deployed “to explain or explain away phenomena as different (or as related) as marking and manslaughter”. He argues that the wide range of uses of the term gives the impression that institutional culture “may well be the key to the successful transformation of higher education in South Africa” or, conversely, its main obstacle. Yet, its meaning is perplexingly difficult to pin down.

One sense in which 'institutional culture' has come to be used in South African higher education is as a critique of the ostensible 'whiteness' of academic culture. Institutional culture as 'whiteness' refers to that which is experienced by black staff and students as alienating and disempowering in their encounters within historically white universities. Yet the findings of a study on institutional culture conducted at the University of Cape Town lead Higgins to argue that 'race' which offers itself quite apparently as the most “obvious and immediate factor in the experience of alienation and anomie, may well be a secondary phenomenon in terms of explanation”.

Some of the questions raised by this argument which merit further debate are, whether it is possible to diminish the weight of 'race' in an analysis of institutional culture in South Africa. How is cultural capital defined and constructed and what is its role in shaping institutional culture in colonial/postcolonial situations? What are the conditions of possibility and terms of reference for a debate about institutional culture in South Africa which can examine the very concepts that are used to explain the problem?

Higgins also points to a second sense in which 'institutional culture' is used in South African higher education. In this use, “institutional culture names the contested terrain of power and authority between administrators and academics as South Africa adopts and adapts global initiatives in the neo-liberal reform of universities”. From the perspective of the administrative reformists, the institutional culture has to be brought in line with 'the logic of accountability' and the need for the University to 'pursue excellence'. From the perspective of academics, in contrast, institutional culture is a complex mosaic of disciplinary values and cultures which are constitutive

of academic activity. The ensuing tension between the administrators' instrumentalist view and the academics' constitutive view of institutional culture is a replica of a much larger ongoing debate about the purposes of higher education in a developing, democratising society.

Access and Success of Adult Learners

The chapter by Michelle Buchler, Jane Castle, Ruksana Osman and Shirley Walters flows from their comparative study of *Equity, Access and Success of Adult Learners* in South African higher education. The researchers have analysed national public higher education data and conducted three case studies of different public universities to arrive at their conclusions. For analytical purposes, the team defined 'adult learner' as students enrolled in higher education who are 23 years or older. Thereby they contrast adult learners from the traditional straight-from-matric university students. The analysis of HEMIS¹ data provides the authors with an incipient system level picture of the participation of adult learners in public higher education institutions.

Case studies of adult learning at the University of the Western Cape, the University of the Witwatersrand and the Vaal University of Technology including interviews with academics, administrators and adult learners go some way in mapping the factors involved in the participation of adult learners (which exceeds 50% of total enrolments), especially such factors which may facilitate or hinder equity, access and success. The authors find that adult education remains unevenly provided within higher education, that institutions are cautious about granting access through the route of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and that "while adult learners are accessing higher education, they are not necessarily 'workers'." The typical adult learner accessing higher education in the three case institutions comes from a lower middle-class background, is black and the first generation in his/her family to enter higher education. He or she has family responsibilities (married or not) and is likely to be in full-time employment. Career progression and job security are the key motivations behind adult learners' educational effort. In effect, adult learning in higher education is less about providing access to the underserved and the unemployed; this group is actually overshadowed by participation of the professional classes in the over-23 years of age category of enrolments. In spite of their difficulty of "juggling family, work and community responsibilities alongside their study commitment", these highly motivated adult learners in all three case studies and selected programmes demonstrate significantly better retention rates and graduation rates than their younger class-mates. This finding is the more significant given that the authors generally found a lack of specific institutionalized support and commitment to this group of students.

At the policy level the question raised by this chapter is what is the place of adult learners in higher education policy? What has been the actual impact of the National Qualifications Framework in facilitating the democratisation of knowledge? What is the place of the different components of the South African education system in producing the skills and knowledge required for equitable socio-economic development?

¹ The Department of Education's Higher Education Management Information System.

Change in Higher Education

The final chapter of this book has been prepared by Jonathan Jansen and a team of researchers from the University of Pretoria. *Tracing and Explaining Change in Higher Education: The South African Case* surveys and categorises research on South African higher education; it points out what are considered the five most important changes in South African Higher Education; it then examines policy changes and responses to them in two case studies, one focused on the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework at the University of Pretoria and the other focused on private higher education. Lastly, the chapter seeks to put change in South African higher education in the context of higher education changes at a global level.

The authors start out by identifying five major changes in South African higher education since the middle 1990s: the changing institutional landscape, the rise of private higher education, new modes of delivery, the changing value of academic programmes, and changes in the academic workplace precipitated by the rise of managerialism. Later in the chapter, the authors add the reorganisation of the qualifications system to this list and examine the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework as the key policy instrument in this regard. This and the case study of the regulation of private higher education in South Africa in the chapter offer some counter-intuitive findings and conclusions.

The chapter shows how national trends in South Africa find their parallel in patterns of change in the rest of the world: the massification of higher education, the decline of the humanities, the shift towards mixed modes of delivery (distance and online learning alongside contact tuition, for example), the rise of accountability regimes, and the displacement of the collegial ethos of traditional universities with a creeping managerialism inside institutions. The two most prominent examples of higher education reform are also reflected in international higher education: the rise of national qualifications frameworks and the growth of international private higher education. Is this a case of reform mimicry? Certainly, change in South African higher education has been framed within the wider neo-liberal project that precipitated similar developments elsewhere; yet, there is a significant progressive dimension prompted by the urgency of equity and development in this country which adds qualitatively different characteristics to the change process. Albeit institutional, cultural and political forces within the country have given the various aspects of change and similar-sounding terms, they may have in fact very different features and outcomes here than in other parts of the globe.

The chapter raises questions about the content of a possible theorisation of change in higher education, the extent to which seemingly conservative policy instruments can be used to produce progressive effects. How do local and global pressures for change intersect and with what effect? How do institutional and state agency combine in the terrain of policy implementation to produce change in higher education?

The editorial committee of the Review would like to thank the authors and critical readers who participated in the production of this publication. We hope that their reading will generate much needed debate and critical engagement, and theoretical development among higher education scholars.

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