

Article

Government, universities and the HSRC: a perspective on the past and present¹

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Abstract

The article considers the history of the HSRC's relationship with government and universities in three periods (1917-1945, 1945-1990 and 1990-2005), characterising the first as relatively harmonious, the second as conflictual and the third as uneasy. Underpinning this relationship is the nature of the funding of research in universities and entities such as the HSRC. This the article explores from its foundation to the current period, linking a discussion of it to the degree of independence of researchers and as mediating its relationships with government and universities. The article uses secondary sources to develop the argument and ends with a plea for the history of the HSRC to be written.

As the HSRC enters a new era under Olive Shisana, its first African and first female head, it is timely to consider key issues in its historical development and their implications for the present. The last time there was a sustained debate about the HSRC was in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the imminent ending of apartheid raised questions about what to do with the institutions that had nurtured apartheid. The HSRC was in the direct firing line having given intellectual support not only to the apartheid project but also, in an earlier period, to the scientific racism that gave life to its policies. The HSRC, along with many other apartheid institutions, survived that period. Many of its former critics now work within it. The HSRC, now seeking a more independent and confident research role, has reorganised itself and its relationships with government and universities. But it does so in the shadow of a past that still shapes these relationships in distinctive ways. Can another look at the history of the HSRC tell us anything about the challenges the institution faces today?

Institutional histories can be told in different ways: as a variant of ‘great man’ history, the history of the institution can be seen as that of its leaders; as a type of organisational history, it can be told as the unfolding creation, division, sub-division and recreation of its organisational structures; as political history, the relationship of its leading figures with and influence by political elites and ideas will predominate; as social and economic history, it will focus on the relationship with the broader society, and the influence and mediation of broader social forces; and as a history of ideas it will focus on the nature of the actual work conducted and concepts promoted and developed. Although it is possible to look at all these in an integrated fashion, one or other approach is likely to prevail.

This article is a preliminary attempt to open up the area for research, and it does not attempt to be comprehensive. It uses a limited range of secondary sources to periodise the historically changing relationship between the HSRC, universities and government in key periods. The sources used to reconstruct this history were created by participants in the institution itself, and need to be supplemented with deeper research examining a broader range of sources. EG Malherbe (1977) documented the early history, locating it within the context of the national educational and research priorities of the Union government. Other than Malherbe’s accounts, institutional histories in and referring to the apartheid period were written by HSRC staff members, usually for public advocacy and information. Such histories tend to focus on the organisation’s leaders and organisational structures. A study conducted by Ferreira (n.d.), was used, unacknowledged, as the basis for an official HSRC publication appearing under the name of one of its researchers (Smit 1979) at the end of 1979. It traces the organisation’s history from its origins to the late 1970s through an account of its different structures and their missions. Late apartheid produced a flurry of papers by academics focusing on what the HSRC’s future and post-apartheid role should be (Cloete, Muller and Orkin 1986, Cloete and Muller 1991, White 1992). At the same time, social and intellectual histories, such as those by Dubow (1995), Fleisch (1995) and Chisholm (2002), were written, which examined some of the continuities between segregation, apartheid and the research conducted by the institution.

It is apparent from the history of the HSRC’s predecessors that the institution cooperated with universities and government around national research agendas since the inception of national research funding in South Africa. At various times, different universities have been drawn into

relationship with the institution. Funding for research has derived from both internal and external sources. The internal source, the parliamentary grant, has historically been used for overheads, scholarships and for funding and administering bursaries for degree purposes. External funds, received for the first few decades from the Carnegie Corporation, were used to cover actual research costs. University-based research came into being on the basis of national research support whose direction, in turn, was influenced by the participation of key university researchers in the work of national agencies.

Following the advent of apartheid in 1948, this connection continued but became narrower and more limited in its scope, reach and national ideals. The HSRC was the institution created by the National Party to replace the Bureau for Educational and Social Research (BESR). Its tight connection to the government of the day from the late 1960s gave rise to a marked polarisation between liberal university and HSRC-based researchers. Probably because of the nature of the HSRC's field of work, this polarisation was more marked than was the case in an earlier period or with the other research councils. Views on the purposes of social research also became polarised, on the one hand around the abstract ideal of pure research conducted for its own sake, in isolation from society, and on the other, around socially committed and relevant research seen as having no distance or independence from its subject. The latter exists both inside the HSRC and outside it in universities, non-governmental organisations and research institutes. This duality should not be overemphasised, since the HSRC carried out much empirical work that, in its way, was committed to a particular vision of society and a particular concept of 'relevance'. In any case, in the contemporary period polarised views probably cannot be sustained in an environment where many of the boundaries created by apartheid have started to break down and where nearly all researchers are forced into marketised research relationships. These require closer scrutiny.

The paper consists of three parts. All three consider the relationship between the HSRC and its predecessors with universities and government, and the dominant research trends. This is done through examining the periods 1917-1945, 1945-1990 and 1990-2005. Relationships in the first period can be characterised as relatively harmonious, the second as conflictual, and the third as uneasy. In each phase, the politics and policy of the day determined research agendas and different universities had, and have, a strong or weak relationship with the institution, depending on their relationship with the government in power.

Relationship between government, universities and the Bureau for Educational and Social Research: 1917-1945

The tension between the HSRC's relationship to government on the one hand and universities on the other is captured in the representations of its early historians: some see its roots in an agency conducting and coordinating research for government, others in a national effort to stimulate and coordinate research in universities and yet others in the inability of universities to generate research other than that intended for degree purposes. The latter was seen as necessitating the creation of an agency free to conduct and coordinate the research required to address South Africa's multiple social and economic challenges.

The Human Science Research Council was officially established through an Act of Parliament in 1969. Historians, however, see the National Bureau for Educational Research, founded in 1929, as its predecessor (see for example Malherbe 1977, 1981). The Bureau was established in the context of perceived 'sporadic efforts', and 'little continuity or coordination when it came to investigating problems which confronted the country as a whole' (Malherbe 1977:383). George Hofmeyr, Under-Secretary and later Secretary of the Union Education Department wrote an article in the *Cape Times* in June 1921 that 'provided the blueprint for what in 1930 became the actual Bureau of Social and Educational Research and in 1969 the Research Council in the Human Sciences' (Malherbe 1981:393). Hofmeyr argued that neither universities nor the Education Department were doing, or could do, the kind of research necessary to address national problems and that another institution was needed that would 'foster systematic and scientific research in social and educational matters of national importance', act as a clearing house for new ideas in education, assemble social and educational statistics and provide them as needed, collect and edit special educational reports, initiate and conduct educational surveys by means of standardised tests to obtain 'a true picture... of the amount of retardation there is in the different school standards and in different parts of the country', provide assistance in textbook and curriculum construction, and publish reports (Malherbe 1977:386-7).

When the Bureau was established in 1929, its main functions, as outlined by Malherbe (1977:388), were accordingly to: (i) collect and coordinate educational statistics and other data, (ii) serve as liaison between various education departments, (iii) keep in touch with educational movements and developments in other countries and (iv) conduct research on educational

problems. It was initially staffed by Malherbe who undertook research with postgraduate students. Paucity of government funds impelled Malherbe to undertake a trip to the United States in 1933 where he solicited a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, which had made similar grants to Australia and New Zealand. From 1934, the Carnegie Corporation sponsored the Bureau through a renewable five-year grant paid in yearly instalments. The Bureau, located in the Union Department of Education, acted as secretariat for the administration of the Carnegie grant which could not be used for the maintenance of the Bureau, which was a departmental responsibility. The grant enabled him to make an additional appointment.

Initiatives to stimulate research in universities began in 1916 with a government-created Industry Advisory Council. In 1918 a Science and Technology Committee presented a report arguing that universities and museums were not adequately equipped to conduct research: there were too few staff members attached to them, they lacked necessary research equipment and there was inadequate provision for bursaries and scholarships. In order to stimulate research, the Committee recommended the creation of a Research Awards Council. The work of the Research Awards Council (*Navorsingstoekenningsraad*) was primarily to make research grants and award bursaries and scholarships to university students and staff. The Research Awards Council consisted of members who were appointed in their personal capacity, selected from government, universities and social organisations. They recommended areas upon which research should concentrate on the basis of national priorities. Assistance gradually broadened from support of science and technology research to support also of that in the humanities and social sciences. The uptake from universities was initially poor: the majority of bursaries went to students and individuals outside universities. In 1938 the work of the Research Awards Council was split between a National Council and a National Executive. While the latter conducted the administration of scholarship awards, the former was an advisory body to government. Its work was linked to the Bureau.

The Bureau's inter-war research was certainly not apolitical; it was, indeed, closely linked to the policy goals of Government which were set within the objective of creating a united (white) South African nation. The rising political force at the time was the *gesuiwerde* Nationalist Party brandishing a narrow, exclusive ethnic nationalism. Their battle against the Fusion Government was waged in part in schooling, through contesting the bilingual schools established under Union. Instead, they sought unilingual, Afrikaans-

medium schools. Malherbe's research at this time strove to show that bilingualism and unity between Afrikaners and English-speakers was on the increase and justified bilingual schools (Malherbe 1977, Part I).

In keeping with the preoccupations of a segregationist society, research in the Bureau focused principally on matters of concern to white education. One of the first grants it received was from the Carnegie Corporation to conduct a Commission of Inquiry into Poor Whites in South Africa. The Corporation established a Trust Fund whose Trustees were the Governor-General of South Africa, Patrick Duncan, the Superintendent of Education in Natal, CT Loram, and the principal of the University of Cape Town. It in turn appointed a small executive committee consisting of university and government personnel to deal with the 'Poor White Problem'. An economist, an educationist, a medical doctor, and an American sociologist working with members of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and a women's welfare organisation conducted the research. It was an interdisciplinary study that examined the economic, psychological, health, educational and social conditions of poor whites using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Malherbe's report on education (1932) recorded not only his keen observations of the regional differences and variable causes of white poverty and the relationship between poverty and education, but also the results of IQ tests conducted on more than 1,500 children in schools and families. In his autobiography he writes, a little self-promotingly, that 'This report had the effect of prodding into action in a number of specific ways not only the Government, but also welfare organisations, especially the Dutch Reformed Church, with the result that poor whiteism as a national problem virtually disappeared over the years' (1981:121).

The success of the poor white study, published in both English and Afrikaans, resulted in a larger grant and expanded brief for the Bureau which became known as the Bureau for Educational and Social Research (BESR). Its work expanded from coordination and provision of departmental statistics and information to standardised testing and collection of national educational statistics. It became a centre for information on research in South Africa, the forerunner of the South African Certification Council, and developed an extensive reference library. It hosted international and national conferences that were addressed by leading international figures and attended by government officials and academics, participated in national commissions and research and established a film division for schools. During this period, the Bureau was integrally linked to the Department of Education and fostered

a close relationship with universities (Malherbe 1977:389).

The BESR was not only concerned with white education however. In 1937 it appointed PAW Cook, a social anthropologist specialising in African societies, who became Director of the Bureau in 1945. Research was strongly oriented towards contemporary thinking in the United States on measurement and evaluation as the basis for allegedly rational approaches to educational planning. This provided the underpinning for objective and apparently scientifically validated differentiation between the learning ability of races, as expressed in such publications as JA Janse van Rensburg's *The Learning Ability of the South African Native* (1938) and ML Fick's *The Educability of the South African Native* (1939).

Relationship between government, universities and Human Sciences Research Council: 1945-1990

In 1939 Malherbe was appointed as Director of the Census and Statistics. In the same year the Second World War broke out, and the BESR was temporarily closed. In 1946, it reopened again, now known as the National Council for Social Research (NCSR). The educational statistics function moved from the Department of Education to this renamed entity. In 1948 the National Party assumed power. During this post-war period, the NCSR's most notable achievement was to devise and revise numerous tests for schools, often standardised for different races.

Between 1948 and 1969 the BESR, then NCSR, underwent several changes of leadership and internal reorganisation. It was a turbulent and unstable time in the history of the organisation. The new government established committees to coordinate research and statistics and to replace the bodies in existence before and during the war. An Interdepartmental Advisory Committee on Educational and Social Research was established in 1953 to act as liaison between the NCSR and different departments – in short, undoubtedly to establish the control of the now National Party-dominated state over the activities of the Council. A similar committee was established in 1964 for Manpower Planning. When the HSRC was finally established on April 1, 1969, the NCSR ceased to exist. While researchers have seen continuities in the research conducted in the 1930s with what came to prevail under apartheid, the institution that succeeded the Bureau, then Council, was in practice a very different kind of organisation. Its Council was appointed by the Minister of Education; it was not linked to any single department, and its funds were allocated from Treasury and voted by

parliament. The new organisation ‘burgeoned forth with ten institutes’ and its state grant was increased fivefold (Malherbe 1977:392).

Muller and Cloete (1991) have characterised developments since 1969 as going through three phases, linked to Presidents of the HSRC, each seen as giving the HSRC his own stamp. In the first phase, under the presidency of Dr PM Robertse (1969-1975), the HSRC was closely linked to the National Party government and politics. Research was largely commissioned by government and ‘was widely perceived to be accountable solely to them’ (1991:13). During this period, activities included administering the award of scholarships for research as well as supporting research conducted in and organised by Institutes for Historical Research, Information and Special Services, Communication, Manpower Planning, Research Development, Educational Research, Psychometric Research, Sociological Demographic and Criminological Research, Statistical Research and Language, Literature and the Arts. One woman featured in the top tier: Miss K Henshall, the administrative secretary, the only woman to reach this position in the public service at this time. No black people had any part in running or conducting research in the HSRC.

The second phase, under Dr Johan Garbers (1979-1986), saw an attempt ‘to shift the governing criteria of research work from the political to the academic’. However, accountability was internal, without reference to the broader academic world (Cloete and Muller 1991:155). During this period, the inadequacy of educational statistics generated by the HSRC and Department of Education led to the emergence of organisations linked to universities and/or the private sector that began to provide alternative statistical information and related research. The South African Institute of Race Relations, for example, had begun from the 1960s to undertake this role.

The third phase in HSRC history, initiated in 1986, ‘saw an extension of accountability from internal political and academic criteria outwards towards a broad marketplace of users with widely differing user criteria and united only in their market-determined desire for research that is useful’ (Cloete and Muller 1991: 156). While income generated by the HSRC constituted only 7 per cent of the total budget in 1987, it increased to 24,6 per cent in 1990 and 30,3 per cent in 1992, while marginally decreasing in 1993 (HSRC 1993:6). Staffing and research expanded even further. In 1987, the HSRC had close to 1,000 staff members. In 1990, staff and research were organised into Institutes and Groups, National Programmes and Centres and there were three regional offices. Although universities were represented on the

Council, there was little sense of participation or ownership in the work of the HSRC, which was largely conducted by its own personnel. The Council of 1990 consisted of representatives from industry and principals of universities, including those of Stellenbosch, RAU, Wits, Transkei and UWC. The presence of the two latter meant that in 1990 black people had begun to be represented on the twelve-person Council.

As noted above, in the 1980s, competing agencies emerged to provide reliable educational statistics. Market competition increased as universities and non-governmental agencies stepped up their research profiles through the establishment of donor-funded research units such as the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE). From CASE came a later, and recent, HSRC President. Like university-based researchers, those in these independent agencies were largely antagonistic to the work conducted by the HSRC because of its association with government.

By the beginning of the 1990s, there was a close research relationship between the HSRC and some universities; but there was little sense of identification with the HSRC on the part of the English-speaking or historically black universities. The result was represented in the *Transformation* colloquium held in 1992 and the serious proposals of the time for the closure of the HSRC (see *Transformation* 18/19, 1992).

There is no need to labour the point that especially in the early days of the HSRC it operated in close cooperation with the government of the day, embedded in the dominant segregationist and cultural ethos of the time. Much of the output of the Institute for Historical Research concerned the genealogy of Afrikaans-speaking families; what studies were done of black, Indian and coloured societies were within a determinedly ethnic paradigm, and the like (Miller 1988). The approach to black education is epitomised in such publications of the Institute for Educational Research as FP Groenewald's 1976 *Aspects in the traditional world of culture of the black child which hamper the actualization of his intelligence: a cultural-educational exploratory study* and A Nel's 1977 *Verantwoordelikheid by die bantoe binne westerse kultuurverband*. This changed somewhat in the years after the Soweto revolt of 1976, which had its origins in educational protest, making it necessary to begin to think in different ways about black education.

However, what can now be seen as the crucial issues should not blind us to the sometimes meritorious if limited work that was done almost entirely within the context of white education. In many ways South African educational research as carried out in the HSRC tracked the educational concerns of the

contemporary western world. Continuing the tradition of the BESR/NCSR, assessment remained a major concern, with work on testing of achievement, attitude, personality, aptitude and intelligence. There was work on 'differentiated' education, attempting to break the hold of a narrow humanities-based curriculum. Attention was paid to mathematics and science education, and increasingly to the use of computers in education. The language question – that is, English and Afrikaans – remained prominent, as it had done long before the appearance of the HSRC. The effect of television on learners was a preoccupation until well into the 1980s. There was work on Outdoor Education, drug abuse in schools, and sex education.

With the changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s new themes began to appear, or new formulations of old themes. There is a flurry of reports on the education of black delinquents in the late 1980s; education in Qwa Qwa is reported upon in 1991, there is a study of farm schools in 1987, the teaching of history is examined in 1991 and 1992, black primary education, especially the teaching of English in black primary schools, is looked at in 1987, 1988 and 1990, and other studies of black education begin to appear in greater numbers. There even begins to be an attempt to study the history of black education, as with studies in 1991 of the Bophuthatswana teachers' trade unions. The crucial precursor to all these was the pivotal multi-volume de Lange Report of 1981.

Thus education, which had been at the heart of the HSRC's institutional predecessors, remained a prominent preoccupation. From 1969, when the organisation came into existence, to 1987, there were 2,179 HSRC publications, though these figures are in reality an overestimate, as are those in the following paragraph, since many reports were published in both Afrikaans and English. Of these 180 were produced by the Institute for Educational Research, 373 by the Institute for Psychological and Edumetric research, 23 by the Committee for Differentiated Education and Guidance, 19 by the Education Research Programme, and 39 by the Investigation into Education. In total 634 educational items were produced, or 29 per cent of the total. This is a slight underestimate, since other programmes also produced some material relevant to education.

There were 770 HSRC publications of all sorts from 1987 to 1993 (Miller 1994). Of these, approximately 213, or 28 per cent, were on broadly educational topics. They were produced by a range of organisations within the HSRC, not all of them exclusively devoted to education. Many emanated from the Institute for Psychological and Edumetric Research and the Education

Research Programme of course, but others came from the Institute for Labour Economics Research and elsewhere.

One of the most significant reports during this period was the de Lange Commission of Inquiry Report into Education (HSRC 1981) also known as the HSRC de Lange Report. This represented the views of a new reformist National Party, seeking equality of opportunity within a constitutional framework that retained all the key features of apartheid. The moderate recommendations of the de Lange report were however roundly condemned by researchers and activists outside the HSRC increasingly drawn to the growing civil society anti-apartheid movement that burgeoned in the wake of the 1976 student revolt (see van Zyl 1991, and contributions in Kallaway 1984 and Nasson 1990). Its recommendations were still-born, although many were in fact resuscitated during the transition years of 1990-1994 to support the policy proposals of the party of the apartheid period, the National Party. At this stage the HSRC enjoyed a close relationship with the reformist wing of the Department of National Education. Indeed, the HSRC produced the Department of National Education's educational documents, the *Education Renewal Strategy* (DNE 1992) and *Curriculum Model for a New South Africa* (CHED 1991) to influence the education policy debate as it unfolded during the transition years of 1990-1994.

Debates about the role of the HSRC at the end of apartheid

Criticism of the HSRC reached a crescendo in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the attack on the apartheid state was itself reaching a high point. Amongst the foremost critics of the HSRC were intellectuals at the white liberal universities, and most notably sociologists at Wits University (Webster 1981, Cloete, Muller and Orkin 1986, Cloete and Muller 1991, White 1992), a recent black PhD graduate of Stanford University (Jansen 1991) and historians of South African society (Dubow 1995, Fleisch 1995). Whereas the former were principally concerned with the relationship between the HSRC, state, market and universities, the latter were mainly concerned with the nature of its intellectual contribution to the politics of knowledge in South Africa.

Amongst the historians, Dubow meticulously documented how scientific racism and eugenicist ideas informed much of the social science research conducted by researchers associated with the various predecessors of the HSRC in the 1920s and 1930s. These included PAW Cook, EL Fick and the Stellenbosch and Columbia-educated EG Malherbe, who, as noted above, founded the National Bureau for Educational Research in the Union Education

Department in 1929 as its research division. For Brahm Fleisch ‘the rise of intelligence testing, the use of efficiency surveys and standardised educational measurement within the context of major South African “problems” of the 1920s and 1930s’ under the aegis of the Bureau inaugurated a new approach to the relationship between research and policy, between social scientists and social change’ (1995).

Sociologists contributing to this debate were concerned with the ‘symbiotic relationship between power and knowledge’ (see Jansen 1991). Webster (1981) argued that apartheid influenced social research not so much through direct interference in the work of the university-based academics it supported as in the work that its institutes conducted in the service of the state. Cloete, Muller and Orkin (1986, 1991), on the other hand, were interested in showing how ‘English’ industrialists collaborated with the state in the neo-apartheid reform programme and how the state, through the HSRC, was intent on obtaining the cooperation of the universities, research institutes and government departments in this exercise. Participation of university-based academics in the activities of the HSRC had achieved the purpose of co-option; they largely legitimated its illegitimate existence (Cloete and Muller 1991). The link at that stage between the HSRC and universities was through the HSRC’s administration of student and staff research grants: the fear was that this power would be wielded to control universities. The threat was not so serious, however, as the HSRC budget was small relative to other science councils and there was evidence that its allocations had declined steadily from the dizzy heights of the mid-1980s.

But what this declining budget signalled was an even more serious threat: ‘As the total budget of the HSRC declines proportionally, so too will the agency budget for university academics. This means that university social scientists, together with their HSRC colleagues, will increasingly be forced to compete for research funding in the market’ (Cloete and Muller 1991:148). Unlike Cloete, Muller, and Orkin (1986), Cloete and Muller (1991) acknowledged that the new-look HSRC under Garbers was an attempt by academics and researchers to wrest back control from the politicians. Garbers’ business management techniques and his strong emphasis on productivity might have contradicted a new research ethos, ‘but this was management by and for academics towards a new efficient and professional academic control’ (Cloete and Muller 1991:149). From the mid 1980s, onwards, as funds to the HSRC declined, the market-related research agenda of the HSRC became stronger. In their farsighted article, Cloete and Muller argued

that:

Now, with the state reconstituting itself on a new footing via the cementing of corporatist relationships between state, capital and other groups in the private sphere ..., the research from the HSRC is being bound back more firmly to service the expanded corporate state. Indeed, in a far more direct way than before, social science becomes, via the market, one of the productive forces, and the HSRC becomes a 'super consultancy' to the corporate state. (1991:150)

In their view, citing Wexler, such privatised research is 'the antithesis of public life: the anti-democratic enemy' (1991:151).

Speaking one year later at a colloquium hosted by the radical social science journal, *Transformation*, on the question: 'Can the HSRC join in the Future?', Caroline White's answer was an unequivocal 'No'. This was because of its inability to lead the institution into the future, its lack of representivity and its lack of productivity. She argued for the dissolution of the HSRC, the redeployment of its staff to state departments or to universities, 'farming out' the research to the universities and maintaining the HSRC as a 'small secretariat servicing committees that make decisions about the distribution of the present budget' which should be 'doubled' and 'remaining HSRC (staff) to be offered fair and reasonable redundancy packages' (1992: 31).

The critical literature of the 1980s and 1990s, then, cast the HSRC as 'the enemy' tarred by association with government and policymakers. Written from the perspective of university-based researchers, it reflected the gulf that had developed between researchers at those universities interested in research for social change, and researchers at the HSRC. There are deep questions underlying much of this about the nature of knowledge and society and what has changed in the contemporary period.

Relationships with universities and government: 1990-2005

The period since 1990 has been as turbulent as the years following the advent to power of the National Party. Leadership, and institutional structure and control have been in the melting pot. As an immediate response to potential closure and further cutting of the parliamentary grant, the presidency of Rolf Stumpf (1990-1999) saw major changes in the effort to reorient the institution to the changed context. These included, on the one hand, major reorganisation of priorities. The *Annual Report* of 1993 records a massive expansion and redirection of resources to research funding at universities,

capacity building initiatives, an affirmative action programme and reorientation of the regional offices to service local community needs. New priority areas for internal funding were developed and the parliamentary grant distributed accordingly.

On the other hand, it involved ‘the rightsizing of the staff component ... through ... early retirements, non-replacement of resigners, the scrapping of vacancies, the elimination of temporary or occasional workers, the conversion of full-time posts to five eighths posts and, as a last resort, retrenchments’ (HSRC 1993:5). In this context of changed priorities, the President observed that: ‘Much of the HSRC’s work does not lend itself to income generation. The research and services are largely for the benefit of groups or individuals ... who often cannot pay the HSRC for its services. It is therefore unlikely that the organisation will ever be in a position to generate adequate funds to sustain its activities’ (1993:6). Anticipating cuts to the parliamentary grant, the President looked forward to increased development of external funding.

The HSRC Institutional Review of 2003 chaired by Akilagpa Sawyer identified three phases of transformation marked by three main trends after 1997: (1) the downsizing of the organisation; (2) the decline of the parliamentary grant; and (3) systematic rebuilding, improved representivity and orientation towards its dominant research function (HSRC 2003:7). Turbulence was at a high point in 1998. Responsibility for, and overseeing of, the work of the HSRC had shifted from the Department of Education to the Department of Arts, Science, Culture and Technology. This introduced a strong science and technology focus into the HSRC (HSRC 1997/8). While retrenchments continued and new staff were employed, priorities changed. An institutional review was conducted and the focus now became improvement in the quality of research, the project management system, partnership research, stakeholder involvement and improving staff diversity. Education remained a strong focus of research alongside democracy and governance. The Chairman of Council, Njabulo Ndebele, resigned. The President’s term of office expired and two recently appointed, high profile executive directors left the organisation amidst much ill feeling among all parties involved. Financially, the institution appeared unstable and insecure. At this time, the formal relationship with universities through the research award system was severed when the award-granting component moved out of the HSRC and was re-established as the National Research Foundation.

What was the nature of the research produced during this turbulent

period? Again, HSRC publications help to answer this question. Since the publication in 1994 of S Miller's *HSRC publications/RGN-publikasies 1987-1993* there has been no similar work through which it is possible to gauge the institution's intellectual output precisely. No doubt this is a by-product of the considerable and repeated changes that the organisation has undergone. Currently, one source for HSRC publications is the library catalogue, which by no means fully represents publications by the HSRC or by people working there at this period. More comprehensive, it would seem, are the lists of publications in the annual reports. For instance, a search of the library catalogue for 1993 to 1998 reveals 248 items published by the HSRC. However, a search of the *Annual Reports* for that period – when even these very reports were of variable quality – gives 658 items, and the 1994 report does not give the publications for that year. Thus, this is an underestimate, even when allowance is made for publications that did not appear under the HSRC imprint.

In the 1990s, and to the present, education remained throughout an important element in the HSRC's activities. In the early 1990s, a continuing theme, as it had been for decades, was evaluation and testing, in the school and more widely. This, as has been seen, has a long history going back to before World War II. Education, training and the labour market also remained crucial. The substantial amount of work done in the linked areas of youth and the family in the early 1990s is striking. Probably this represented the concerns of the time about apparent social dysfunction, epitomised at its most oversimplified in the concept of the 'lost generation'.

Another notable phenomenon, not peculiar to the specifically educational output of the HSRC, is the disappearance of Afrikaans, without any other African languages appearing to take its place, except in the rather limited symbolic form of the CEO's introductions to the annual reports in several languages. Studies which had routinely appeared in both English and Afrikaans, and often in Afrikaans alone, evaporated. In publications about education the last use of Afrikaans was around 1997 in a few guides to courses and scholarships and the like. Whatever the rhetoric of language diversity, the reality was that in this environment English now dominated.

The Orkin presidency (2000-2005) introduced changes that involved aggressive recruitment of new staff drawn from the liberal universities, NGOs and some with experience of the new government. New priorities were identified in line with new national needs. Fresh resources were raised from external sources to supplement the parliamentary grant; by the end of 2004,

external grants constituted 60 per cent of the HSRC's income. The HSRC Press was revamped. New strategies for the communication of research were developed. By the end of his term, Orkin could boast that in terms of all his priorities, he could show significant improvements: external contracts and earnings had trebled, and the percentage of projects with external participation had likewise increased significantly. The quality of research had improved greatly, with the HSRC outperforming the top universities in refereed journal publications per head. Most importantly, equity had improved markedly, with the percentage of black researchers rising from 40 per cent of all researchers in 2000/1 to 51 per cent in 2004/5. The percentage of female researchers had also improved considerably since apartheid days, but remained relatively low (HSRC 2004/2005).

However, continuities with the distant and more recent past persisted. These included the conception of the relationship between social science and policy which saw social science as serving policy defined as national need, the definition of research in terms of market relationships, and an apparently conflictual relationship with universities and university-based researchers (HSRC 2003).

Relationships with government are more ambiguous. Given its mission and history, it is not at all surprising that the HSRC played a role in supporting apartheid. A new HSRC Act is in the making, but it is likely that the imperatives to serve both the state and market-based 'user' interests will remain. How these two imperatives are balanced, interpreted and managed will to a large extent determine the degree of independent and creative research that can be achieved by those working at the HSRC. If researchers are given space within the broad social remit of the organisation, it is likely that independent research will be a feature of the HSRC. If their research agendas are tied too narrowly to state and market interests, it is likely that this independence will suffer. Currently, the space is there but it has to be fought for. This is provided for in the way that research agendas are decided. Researchers can put in bids for tenders, or frame their own research projects and seek external funding, or be requested to conduct specific pieces of research. The parliamentary grant provides possibilities for independently-initiated research. Within the context of constrained resources, the likelihood of a narrowing of possibilities is strong. Ironically, greater financial independence from the state may give the HSRC the critical distance that many researchers seek, not by removing external pressures, which will always be present, but rather by diversifying them and ensuring that the

research that the organisation pursues will not be dependent on one, or very few, powerful organisations. This point cannot be lost on those currently responsible for the parliamentary vote to the HSRC, still one of the smallest allocations amongst all the science councils.

The HSRC's relationship with government in this period has depended on the CEO and on researchers themselves. On a number of occasions, most notably in the case of research conducted on HIV/AIDS by Olive Shisana and her team (Shisana and Simbayi 2002), and the annual *State of the Nation* publication (Daniel, Habib and Southall 2004, and Daniel, Southall and Lutchman 2005), there have been open disagreements with government policy. Government has criticised HSRC research, and HSRC research has in turn questioned and exposed weaknesses and contradictions in current policy and practice. In short, there has been an ambiguous yet dynamic relationship between an organisation in headlong change, and a government finding its way in uncharted political territory. Mutual collaboration and criticism are at the moment in uneasy and unpredictable balance, and it is difficult to discern in what precise way the relationship will evolve.

The relationship with universities has been equally mixed. The recently-reconstituted Council of 9 is chaired by Jakes Gerwel, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape and includes one Council member from the University of Cape Town, one from Wits University and another former Dean from the University of the Western Cape. Remaining Council members are drawn from government (1), the private sector (3), and independent consultants (2). The HSRC Review of 2003 found in its stakeholder analysis that 'representatives of the higher education community, while generally complimentary about the new HSRC, felt that the organisation had competed aggressively with higher education institutions (HEIs) for a scarce pool of top level researchers but had not formed strategic partnerships with HEIs in the interests of national development' (HSRC 2003:8). Less well-disposed academics, it noted, saw the relationship between the HSRC and universities as 'predatory and irresponsible' (2003:117).

The *Annual Report* for 2004/5 responded by showing that the approximately R25m paid to collaborators located largely in universities from its R100m research earnings for 2003/04 was more than twice what the National Research Foundation paid out for Social Sciences and Humanities Focus and Institutional Programmes (ie excluding bursaries). This occurred through collaborative partnerships. The reality however is that both HSRC and university-based researchers now operate far more clearly in the market than

before 1994. Given the rapid marketisation of higher education in the past 15 years, HSRC and university-based researchers are placed in competition with one another for scarce resources. In this context, the HSRC Review’s perspective that trust and collegial relationships can provide a platform and base for a strengthened research effort and sharing of resources is to be welcomed and built upon.

Two of the main criticisms of the 2003 HSRC Review included the financial model and representivity. The financial model, it noted, had been developed for a context in which the parliamentary grant was declining and research sources needed to be diversified and expanded if the HSRC was not to close down. New foundation grants and contracts were brought in to expand such sources of funding. But these strengths needed to be used to support institutional collaboration both inside South Africa and on the continent. Although the specifics of the financial model are changing, its basic features as established in the 1980s and expanded in the 1990s are not likely to alter except at an internal level where pressures to bring in research funds are being taken off younger researchers.

The *Annual Report* for 2004/5 (9) summarised the HSRC’s transformation process over the last five years as follows:

Table 1: HSRC coupe indicators March 2001– March 2005

		%								
COUPE		20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	05/06
Contracts/ grants	Research earnings as a percentage of total research income		21			64				62
Outreach	Percentage of projects with external participation		22			51				55
Users	Percentage of competitive tenders that are successful		24			43				33
Performance:	Percentage of black researchers (excluding interns)				40	51*				55
Performance:	Percentage of researchers in total staff			30		53				60
Excellence: Publications	Refereed journal articles, per researcher head, as %, unadjusted		23						79	75
Excellence: Qualification	Percentage of researchers with Master's or Doctorate degrees						64		92	90

*58% including

At the level of representivity, the 2003 HSRC Review noted that ‘the transformation of the organisation needs to be deepened, especially in respect of the central question of gender’ (2003:118). By 2005, black researchers constituted 50 per cent of all researchers, an improvement of two-and-a-half percentage points per year rather than the intended four.

The new CEO, Dr Olive Shisana, has taken up where her predecessor left off. She has responded to the recommendations of the HSRC Review in various ways. The challenges the institution faces during her presidency are dealt with in *Transformation 62* (Habib and Morrow 2006) and will not be repeated here.

In this refashioned HSRC, educational research continued as a vital part of the majority of HSRC research programmes. Amongst the educational research products in this period were studies on children’s rights, rural education, HIV/AIDS and teachers, the human resource needs of the society and capacities to meet it, higher education, technical and vocational education, systemic evaluations, assessments of maths and science achievement, the overall character of the research and development system in South Africa, and values, democracy and rights across the system.

Conclusion

The challenges that the institution now faces are similar to those faced over its history: resources, relationships with government and universities, and the quality and independence of its research. In all these respects, there are both continuities and discontinuities.

Relationships between universities, governments and the HSRC have varied over time. The conception of the relationship between social science and policy articulated by its founder, EG Malherbe, still underpins the HSRC’s self-image, as it does that of many academics in universities. Having had a directly funded relationship with the Department of Education for most of its existence, the HSRC now has none, being under the auspices of the Department of Science and Technology (DST). Relationships with the DST as much as other government departments are mediated by the market. Educational and social research remain a key focus of the HSRC’s overall research programme. The distinction between operational and research costs, and who carries responsibility for them, has changed. The operational costs of the Bureau for Educational and Social Research and its successors, including the HSRC founded in 1969, were carried by the Department of Education. Research costs were borne by grants from the Carnegie

Foundation. The funding environment and activities of the HSRC have changed considerably since then, first as part of the apartheid research exercise and then as part of a wider process involving the marketisation of research. Parliament votes a grant to the HSRC, but its use is not specifically tied to operational or research costs. External research income remains an important income stream for the HSRC, which currently has a broader remit than education alone, encompassing, amongst other areas, urban and rural research, and democracy and governance. Educational and social policy, however, continue to be amongst the most significant fields of research within the HSRC.

Despite an increase in staff drawn from increasingly diverse intellectual backgrounds, institutional relations with universities have improved only marginally from the 1960s when the HSRC came into existence. On the other hand, staff at the HSRC have a close consulting relationship with different government departments. The test of the independence and autonomy of the research and staff of the HSRC is yet to come. Some would say that this test has already come and gone. The events surrounding the resignation of Dr. Xolela Mangcu from an Executive Directorship, revolving around his accusations that top HSRC management had failed to resist alleged untoward pressure from governmental sources, show that the territory between independent and commissioned research is unstable and sometimes treacherous. This is particularly the case in an organisation such as the HSRC, substantially funded by government.

Though there have been a number of studies that have looked at aspects of the HSRC, placing the organisation in the context of the intellectual trends of the day, there is no large-scale, critical, historical study of the organisation. Only in the context of such a study could the work and changing nature of the organisation in education, as in other areas, be satisfactorily contextualised. The importance of such a study is that it would describe the genesis of 'official knowledge' in the past, and would serve to point, through continuity or perhaps contrast, towards how such knowledge is produced in the present. As it becomes possible to look at the relatively recent past more dispassionately, the time may have come when such a major study of the HSRC should be undertaken.

A study of this type would of necessity be in large part a study of thinking expressed in Afrikaans. To create an accurate picture of the past, it is important that the plentiful material in this language is not ignored and that as far as possible it be brought into dialogue with the wider world.

Lastly, linked to the previous points, the HSRC should immediately and determinedly address the question of its own records. The Library is doing what it can to gather together everything that the organisation produces at present. It will, as already noted, be more difficult to fill the many gaps that seem to exist in the records of published material over the past decade. Beyond the published material, there should be an effort to organise and make accessible the archives of the organisation. There ought to be a mass of material relating both to the history and administration of the HSRC, and to the numerous research endeavours that have been carried out under its name. This should be gathered together and made available to scholars. It is an uncomfortable paradox that the main social science research organisation in Africa does not have a properly functioning archive. Without this it will wander in a confining present with little perspective on its own origins and history and the likelihood that it may unnecessarily repeat earlier experiments and errors, without even knowing that it is doing so.

Note

1. This article does not reflect or represent the views of the HSRC.

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