



**COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

***The Transformation of  
Higher Education in South Africa:  
How Much Have We Achieved?***

***Perceptions of Policy Developments 1997-2003  
and Outlook for the Next Five Years***

***RESEARCH REPORT PREPARED FOR THE COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION***

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**ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ANC	African National Congress
ASAHDI	Association of Vice-Chancellors of Historically-disadvantaged Tertiary Institutions in South Africa
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
FET	Further Education and Training
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HAI	Historically-Advantaged Institution
HDI	Historically-Disadvantaged Institution
HE	Higher Education
HEAP	Higher Education Admissions Policy
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
NAP	New Academic Policy
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NEHAWU	National Education Health and Allied Workers' Union
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NWG	National Working Group
PQM	Programme and Qualifications Mix
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASCO	South African Students' Congress
SAUVCA	South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association
SET	Science, Engineering and Technology
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Objectives and Focus

This report has been prepared on the basis of research conducted to inform discussion at the Fifth Consultative Conference of the Council on Higher Education (CHE).

The CHE Consultative Conference 2003 marks the first five years of the CHE's work. It takes place at a juncture of accelerated, if contested, policy implementation, which in itself marks a new stage in the policy-making process for higher education. The conference thus serves as an opportunity for the CHE and higher education stakeholders to reflect upon and to debate:

- ❖ Higher education policy and its achievements at a systemic and institutional level in the period 1997-2003;
- ❖ The role of different actors and circumstances, as well as active and passive choices that have shaped the current state of the higher education system;
- ❖ The extent of what has been achieved in relation to what was intended;
- ❖ The achievability and value of policy goals;
- ❖ The roles of individual organisations into the future, with a focus on their vision, their concerns, and how they envisage their interaction and engagement in the emerging higher education scenario.

## 1.2 Methodology

Interviews were conducted with four sets of respondents:

- ❖ **Vice-Chancellors of public higher education institutions.** The sample of 10 respondents included eight Vice-Chancellors, one Acting Vice-Chancellor and one former Administrator. The sample of institutions included five technikons, five universities, five historically-advantaged institutions, five historically-disadvantaged institutions, and four regions.
- ❖ **Chairs and Chief Executive Officers of higher education sectoral bodies.** The sample of three organisations included as respondents the Chairs of the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP), of the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA), and of the Association of Vice-Chancellors of Historically-disadvantaged Tertiary Institutions in South Africa (ASAHDI); as well as the chief executive officers of CTP and SAUVCA.
- ❖ **National stakeholder organisations.** The sample of one respondent was made up of the president the South African Students' Congress (SASCO). Despite much effort, no other key role-players from stakeholder organisations could be reached in time.
- ❖ **Policy analysts and researchers.** The sample of six respondents included four directors of leading South African research centres with a special focus on higher education studies; one senior academic with a special interest in higher education; and an independent policy analyst. Three of the respondents work in centres or departments

located in historically-advantaged universities, one in a historically-disadvantaged university, and one in an independent research centre.

Interviews were conducted during September-October 2003, on the basis of a structured questionnaire<sup>1</sup> that probed the following issues:

- ❖ The most important changes in higher education over the last five years, and any associated problems or drawbacks;
- ❖ The most important contributions to policy development and implementation over the last five years, as made by individual institutions, organisations and role-players in their own estimation;
- ❖ The nature of participation in the policy process over the last five years by individual institutions, organisations and role-players in their own estimation;
- ❖ The view of individual institutions, organisations and role-players with respect to the role played by others in the policy process over the last five years;
- ❖ The most important policy-related issues for the next five years, and any associated areas of risk;
- ❖ The policy-related role over the next five years of individual institutions, organisations and role-players in their own estimation; and their views as to how relationships between role-players might develop.

The responses from the interviews were recorded electronically, coded, conceptually ordered and categorised. Emerging patterns were interpreted in their own right and with reference to official policy developments since 1997.

Given the sample size and the methodology of the research, the responses of the role-players, as well as the findings and conclusions of this research, can be taken as indicative only. The research should be understood as a limited survey of the opinions of informed key policy actors in South African higher education.

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<sup>1</sup> The questionnaire was aligned across different sets of respondents, although not identical. Compare: Appendix 2.

## **2 POLICY DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 1990**

In order to provide a context and convenient reference point for the rest of the report, this section sets out an overview of the key developments and milestones of higher education policy since 1990. First, the section recaps some pertinent features of the higher education system at the beginning of the 1990s, some of which provided the impetus for the large-scale transformation of higher education intended and pursued by the post-1994 policy initiatives. Secondly, the section accounts from a system-level perspective for a periodised view of key developments in higher education policy, initiatives, activities, and outcomes. Thirdly, it outlines the approach chosen in this research towards understanding what we have achieved in the transformation of higher education.

### **2.1 Background**

In the early 1990s, higher education was governed and funded through eight different government structures. Institutions were subject to vastly disparate governance and funding conditions, depending on whether an institution was within the old Republic of South Africa and provided education for white people, whether it provided education for African, Indian or Coloured people within the Republic, or whether it was operating as a provider of education and training for African people within one of the four independent homelands.

Higher education institutions were also different in terms of the purposes for which they had been established: the ethnic groups they served, the manner in which they were governed internally, the medium in which they taught, their relationship to the state(s), their understanding of knowledge production, and their relationship with the broader intellectual communities outside South Africa.

The largest South African demographic group had the smallest participation rate in higher education. This was aggravated by the skewed distribution of graduates by disciplines, in turn matched to the institutional missions. Most black students were enrolled in either education, the humanities or the social sciences, with an overall skewed distribution of enrolments between science, engineering and technology (SET) disciplines, business, education and the humanities and social sciences. Demographic inequities were notably marked at the postgraduate level, and in respect of the demographic composition of academic staff.

The post-1994 government inherited a higher education system that was segregated by race, ethnicity, class and geography; inequitable in terms of gender and language; divided by the disparate functions performed between universities and technikons; administratively fragmented; largely intellectually isolated from the state, from society (and the economic, developmental and cultural needs of the country), and from the international intellectual community; and characterised by highly uneven quality between and within different historical institutional types.

### **2.2 Periods in the Policy Process 1990-2003**

Education in general, and higher education in particular, had been a key site of apartheid social engineering and, concomitantly, of oppositional resistance and mass struggle. The development of concrete policy proposals for a new higher education system commenced well ahead of the election victory of the democratic forces and the African National Congress (ANC) in particular

in 1994. It was clear that a mere reform of certain aspects of the higher education system would not suffice to serve the challenges of a democratic South Africa aiming to take its place in the world. Thus, the purpose of policy development in higher education had been, and continues to be, a radical transformation of higher education without losing its valuable aspects; in terms of policy this required a fundamental departure from the ethical foundations of the previous regime (Badat, 2003).

The past 14 years have thus been characterised by intense policy-making and implementation activity in higher education over a wide front. Policy activity has covered:

- ❖ “The generation of values and principles to serve as criteria for policy formulation and adoption and the production of a democratic consensus on these;
- ❖ The development and adoption of frameworks in the forms of legislation, regulations based on legislation and various policy texts;
- ❖ The formulation and adoption of policies of different kinds – symbolic, substantive, procedural, material, etc. – that have sought to address different objects (institutional structure, access and opportunity, governance, financing, learning and teaching, etc.);
- ❖ The establishment of governmental and non-governmental infrastructure for policy implementation and further policy planning and development;
- ❖ The planning and the implementation of policies;
- ❖ The evaluation and review of policy” (Badat, 2003: 12-13).

By looking at different concerns and emphases, actors and processes in the policy activities, policy analysts and experts in higher education have sought to periodise the policy process since 1990 in various ways (e.g. Badat, 2003; Fataar, 2002; Kraak, 2001; Moja and Hayward, 2000). Saleem Badat, for example, identifies three periods of policy activity in the period from 1990-2003 on the basis of the nature of policy-making, the principal policy actors involved, and the outcomes of policy activity (Badat, 2003).

The first discernible policy period in higher education since 1990, lasting till 1994, was characterised by the predominant concern with questions of principles, values, vision and goals to effect the transformation of the inherited system, and relatively unconstrained by issues of financial and human resources, policy planning and implementation. During this period, considerable attention was focused on the role of the state in higher education transformation and the relationship between the state and civil society in transformation. A high degree of participation by mass movements and civil society in general in policy debate and policy-making was congruent with the general high levels of political mobilisation of mass movements and civil society formations in the context of political and constitutional negotiations (Badat, 2003: 13). Aslam Fataar adds that policy discourse of the period was characterised by a distinctive antagonism between the incumbent state representatives and “the counter-hegemonic bloc of popular protest forces” (Fataar, 2002: 5). For Badat, the most significant outcomes of the policy activity of this period were a general agreement on the values and principles that should guide policy-making, should serve as criteria for policy formulation and adoption, and the formation of policies of an essentially symbolic nature (Badat, 2003: 13).

A second period of policy-making in higher education identified by Badat began in 1995 and lasted until 1998. The now incumbent ANC embarked on a comprehensive review of higher education and the establishment of a new regulatory framework for the sector. The report of the National Commission on Higher Education (1996), the Education White Paper 3 and the Higher Education Act of 1997 elaborated in greater detail the overall policy framework for higher education transformation, and defined more extensively and sharply the goals, as well as

strategies and structures and instruments for the pursuit of these goals. Attention was also focused on marrying values, principles and goals and strategies in concrete domains such as governance, financing and funding, the shape and size of higher education, and learning and teaching (Badat, 2003: 13). The principal outcome of this period was a legislative and policy framework, the formulation and adoption of

In the appendix to this report, a table prepared by Badat (2003: 8-12) gives an account of the key developments and milestones of higher education policy. It testifies to impressive policy-making activity at the systemic level as well as to the growing role of the CHE in the policy process (in terms of initiatives, activities and outcomes).

### **2.3 Towards Understanding What We Have Achieved**

The question of the achievement of policy objectives is a pertinent one and simultaneously is cause for reflection about the continued relevance and/or necessary alignment of the policy goals expressed in the White Paper on Higher Education, given the changing environment. The question “how much have we achieved” in relation to the goals of policy that seek to address the shortfalls of the inherited higher education system, can be answered, firstly, by looking at quantitative data and the direction of trends with respect to various strategic indicators.

For example, there are objectively a number of substantial achievements in the transformation of higher education that can be accounted for by looking at some of the figures over time. Notably, with respect to equity and redress, the proportion of black students in public higher education has jumped from 32% of total enrolments in 1990 to 60% in 2000; women’s participation has increased three times as fast as men’s from 42% in 1990 to 53% in 2000. The academic profiles of institutions have changed with curricular changes, an increase in SET and vocational programmes, and a blurring of the functional differentiation between universities and technikons. The success of business degrees might indicate that higher education institutions are becoming more responsive to the labour market.

Quantitative indicators also signal that various challenges remain. Notably, the overall participation rate in public higher education has declined (and not increased as anticipated in 1996); the increase of participation per racial group leaves much to be desired: particularly the black African population remains underrepresented with a marginal increase from 9% in 1993 to 13% in 2000. Retention rates have in fact declined since 1997, and more so due to financial issues than to academic exclusions (despite the expansion of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme/NSFAS). Academic staff profiles have not changed significantly. There are also no serious indications of pedagogical innovations and changes in classroom relationships. There is no substantial increase in postgraduate output. Changes in research output from fundamental research to contract and applied research in a context where overall research output has stagnated means that fundamental research has proportionally declined; this necessarily raises the question whether we are depleting our knowledge resources.

And yet, quantitative and systemic indicators’ diagnostic power is constrained by our ability to interpret the symptoms they describe, as well as by their very nature, having been developed to measure change at a very particular point in the system. Alternatively, a critical interpretation of the achievement of high-level policy objectives can be arrived at by considering, on the one hand, the output of the policy-making process i.e. the manifest intentions of role-players, and on the other, the perceptions role-players have of the policy-making process i.e. the latent aspects of policy-making and role-players’ assessment of the consequences of the policy-making process in terms of implementation and objective change. In this research, the CHE has attempted to go the latter route and asked key role-players in the system, “How much have we achieved?”

### **3 PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY ACHIEVEMENTS**

This section of the report draws together the perspectives of the research respondents. Three organising principles have been used. First, perspectives have been organised in terms of the research questions, whose logic was from a retrospective to a prospective focus, and from self-referential reflection by individual institutions, organisations and role-players, to reflection on respective roles, relationships and interaction. Second, perspectives have been organised around recurring themes in the context of each research topic. For many aspects of the research, frequency of mention of a particular policy initiative or development appeared to correlate with its perceived significance, and, generally speaking, the most frequently mentioned responses are treated first. Third, perspectives have been organised wherever relevant in terms of the set of respondents in question.

#### **3.1 Key Changes in Higher Education 1997-2003**

In identifying key changes in higher education in the period 1997-2003, some respondents (a mix of institutions, sectoral and stakeholder organisations, and policy analysts) referred to critical policy milestones such as the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996), the White Paper of 1997, the Higher Education Act of 1997 and the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) of 2001. These respondents alluded to their significance in terms of how they provided the overarching framework within which further substantive changes have occurred or been given effect.

The important change in higher education most frequently cited was restructuring through mergers and incorporations (cited by 70% of institutions in the sample, by 3 of the sectoral and stakeholder organisations, and 5 of the policy analysts). This was viewed as a critical policy development quite simply because it alters the entire environment within which public higher education is delivered. Two institutions in the sample that are only peripherally affected by mergers and incorporations nevertheless expressed the view that the restructuring had also an impact on them and had forced them to seek closer collaboration with regional partners.

A minority of respondents stated that the state had failed to articulate a clear rationale for mergers (1 institution, 1 sectoral body, 2 policy analyst) and that this created insecurity in the sector. In contrast, the respondent from the student sector understood mergers to be clearly a political imperative for building a non-racial system of higher education that was well articulated in the NPHE and emphasised that for students mergers and incorporations would improve access to quality facilities.

Restructuring through mergers and incorporations was also associated with a number of specific problems and drawbacks. Institutions were concerned that decisions had been made without due regard to whether the system had sufficient capacity and resources for implementation or to the potential impacts on individual institutions and on the system of sustained uncertainty in the complex merger process. Some lamented . meic0.043 i me

institutions would have a half-decade to become global players, while the merging institutions would struggle to find a niche in the national education sector. As many of these concerns relate to potential future developments, they are elaborated in more detail in the relevant section below.

The second most frequently noted critical policy development in the past five years was the new national planning regime. References were made to the NPHE (2 policy analysts, 1 sectoral and 1 national stakeholder organisation, 1 institution), institutional 3-year rolling plans (4 institutions, 1 sectoral organisation) and associated therewith the PQM exercise (6 institutions, 2 policy analysts, 1 sectoral organisation). Two policy analysts saw the NPHE as the policy milestone that signalled in no uncertain terms the new focus in policy-making that emerged in the late 1990s, from policy development to policy implementation. The new planning framework was also seen in a more general light as a move towards an outcomes-based policy culture in higher education.

A significant drawback associated with the NPHE was the uneven articulation between the implementation plan and the White Paper. The NPHE represented not only an implementation plan and refinement of White Paper policy but also inculcated a shift in emphasis to policy driven by concerns about efficiencies, fiscal constraints and market-related responsiveness (2 policy analysts). The impact of this shift in policy emphasis was not fully evident yet; on the one hand, the previous “laissez-faire” approach and implementation vacuum had created a range of institutional responses some of which were highly problematic; on the other hand, the new policy emphasis was bringing to bear some problems as well. One institutional respondent referred to the bureaucratisation of state-institution relationships with regards to the PQM. A policy analyst was worried about effects at the sub-institutional level: the emphasis on measurable performance and outcomes was creating a culture of “performativity”: Academics were abandoning labour intensive work such as undergraduate teaching, fundamental research and the production of Ph.D.s, and concentrating on consultancy work and commissioned research. One respondent from a historically-disadvantaged technikon commented that “teaching and learning has less of a profile than ever in South African higher education”.

Accelerated restructuring at the institutional and programme level, the new planning and quality assurance mechanisms, continual amendments to the Higher Education Act, as well as other policy developments and new regulations originating within and without the sector were perceived by close to half of the interviewees as intensified steering by the state of the sector (4 institutions, 3 policy analysts, 1 sectoral organisation) and as a growing bureaucratisation of the state-sector relationship (1 institution).

The opinions regarding the merits, effect and rationale of intensified state steering diverged greatly. Two institutional respondents interpreted intensified state steering as a threat to institutional autonomy (1 historically-disadvantaged technikon, 1 historically-advantaged university), a concern echoed by a policy analyst. The increasingly assertive role of the state in policy-making for the sector, one policy analyst argued, had altered relations among stakeholders at the system level considerably; and to another policy analyst, the increased state steering amounted to “the abandonment of co-operative governance at the system level”. At least one institution argued that the HE Act had been amended in ways that had the effect of punishing the entire sector for the “misdemeanours of the few”. This perception is counter-balanced by other comments. An independent policy analyst and a stakeholder organisation argued that increased state steering had become necessary due to the non-responsiveness of certain

institutions to the new dispensation and new policy goals. Another policy analyst claimed that state steering affected only weak institutions. The former administrator of an institution that had experienced a severe crisis put on record that strong steering from the centre had made it possible for his institution to “reconnect itself to the system as a whole and to its public interest role”.

Many respondents commented that the number and rate of policy changes was experienced as “policy overload” at the institutional level (7 institutions, 2 policy analysts, 1 sectoral organisation). Apart from legislation and regulations directly applicable to higher education, “peripheral legislation” added to the crowding of policy directives such as the SAQA Act and regulations, the NQF, labour relations and skills development legislation. One Vice-Chancellor noted that there were approximately 40 policies to be implemented simultaneously by his institution.

Conversely, some respondents focused on the continued existence of policy vacuums in certain areas, particularly with regards to adoption of the New Academic Policy (NAP - 1 historically-advantaged and 1 historically-disadvantaged institution), planning (1 technikon), and - with reference to the early days after the establishment of the HEQC - quality assurance (1 institution, 1 sectoral organisation),

Reference to implementation backlogs at the institutional level (1 analyst, 1 national stakeholder organisation) could thus be seen in the light of the quantum of policies to be implemented; two institutions and one policy analyst argued that the lack of a prioritised, co-ordinated policy implementation plan had contributed to the uncoordinated responses of institutions to new policy. This was echoed by one institution who commented that in the midst of policy overload, there was a lack of capacity at the DoE and no implementation support from the centre. A stakeholder organisation and two policy analysts offered another explanation for implementation backlogs. Both argued that the differential implementation of policy was the result of either conscious resistance to change at the institutional level or the lack of capacity of institutional leaders to manage a transformation agenda.

that the NQF, which was originally “mooted as an exemplary framework” had given little satisfaction so far, as there had been “a lack of capacity and skill in its implementation”. Another institution commented that SAQA had “gone mad” in recent times.

A number of other developments, both at the level of policy and in the sector in general were mentioned by interviewees as significant. These included the NAP, the national student financial aid scheme, the regulation of private higher education provision, proposals for a national student applications service, and the national policy on institutional governance and good governance initiatives by both DoE and CHE. In the sector in general, the changes in the participation rates of students had a positive side, namely the increased participation of black and women students, as well as a negative one, i.e. the general decline in enrolments. Concerns regarding academic reproduction and the question as to where the next generation of academics should come from were also mentioned (1 analyst, 1 sectoral organisation).

Quite uneven was respondents’ assessment of the general state of the higher education system five years after the White Paper and Higher Education Act came into being. Respondents felt that there was still a lot of uncertainty in the system (1 institution); that despite many attempts to co-ordinate the system it was now more fragmented and uncoordinated than five years ago (1 policy analyst); and that a significant success for the system overall was the relative stabilisation of historically black universities after 2000 (1 policy analyst).

### **3.2 Role and Contributions 1997-2003**

In commenting on their role and contributions to policy development and implementation in the period 1997-2003, higher education institutions and their sectoral bodies tended to fall into two groups: those who felt their involvement had been continuous, and those who felt their involvement had been limited. All the sectoral and stakeholder bodies and six institutions (a mix of technikons, universities, historically-advantaged and disadvantaged institutions) felt their involvement in policy development and implementation since 1997 had been continuous. Four institutions felt their involvement had been limited: in two cases this was owing to institutional crises and thus limited capacity for involvement during the period under review. In the other two cases (both historically-advantaged technikons), this appeared to be linked to a sense that their policy inputs had little impact. Nevertheless, it was apparent that all four institutions had attempted to channel inputs of one kind or another via their respective sectoral bodies, and

made some form of institutional submission to policy proposals in the past five years, although three also mentioned that generally their ability to engage policy issues (and impact) had been circumscribed by their size or because they had to focus on ensuring their institution's survival. Three universities particularly highlighted that their institutions had positioned themselves in support of the national policy initiatives, and one saw its involvement in policy development as a way of providing benefit to the whole country (1 historically-disadvantaged institution, 2 historically-advantaged institution of which 1 is an Afrikaans-medium institution).

Despite an apparently high level of involvement in policy development through either one or several channels, there was a sense in many responses that in the later part of the period from 1997 to 2003 consultation had increasingly become a lip-service (2 institutions, 1 sectoral body). (The point of reference of these comments was the immediately preceding period; respondents from stakeholder organisations, for example, were quite mindful that there had been a lack of consultation under the previous dispensation.) In the last years it was felt that government had increasingly insulated itself (3 policy analysts), and experts who had been drawn into the bureaucracy had developed a negative attitude towards outsiders (2 policy analysts). Some particularly criticised the later part of the process leading to mergers, i.e. the NWG and the Ministry's announcement of mergers prior to final consultation (3 institutions, 1 sectoral organisation).

The opinions of policy analysts regarding their contributions to policy development diverged similarly. While they were quite mindful of the gap between policy research and policy-making, the majority felt that the impact of policy research conducted by analysts and experts on policy developments was still considerable albeit less than in the period prior to 1998. Three analysts commented that a significant shift had occurred during the last five years towards more commissioned research and consultancy work, especially for the CHE and the DoE. Moreover, policy research had become more empirical (rather than normative) over the last five years testifying to the emergence of a more evidence-driven policy-making culture. Only one policy analyst felt that the impact of his guild had been nil between 1997 and 2003.

As a result of increased consultancy work, policy analysts saw their contributions in policy development since 1998 circumscribed by the predetermined areas and terms of reference of commissioned work. At the same time, independent policy analysis and the scholarly and critical work that should augment consultancy work and be conducted by academics in the institutions was scarce and mediocre. One analyst was particularly outspoken: He commented that most independent and critical analysis was poor, lacked serious theoretical discussion and was overall of low quality compared to closely defined work commissioned by government and CHE. Only a very limited number of individual contributions was outstanding. Another analyst echoed these concerns, albeit not as harshly.

There was some agreement on significant policy-related debates that had conceptual and even theoretical resonance amongst policy analysts and to which they believed they had a contribution to make. Noted were mergers (3 policy analysts), governance including the governance of mergers (3 analysts) and increasingly theoretical debates around the nature of the state and the relationship between institutional autonomy and state steering; two analysts made reference to the debate on higher education and the public good. Conceptual concerns with knowledge, quality, equity, responsiveness, and efficiency had dominated policy-related discourse at some point during the last five years; an emerging debate around a theory of change in higher education was also noted by three analysts.

### 3.3 Assessing the Role-Players in the Policy Process 1997-2003

After having commented on their own contributions and roles in the policy process over the last five years, the interviewed key individuals were asked to assess the roles of other role-players. At the general level, it was mentioned that the term “stakeholder” should be discarded in policy-making discourse because it was misleading: as a market-related term it did not capture the public good dimension of higher education and thus distorted the function of different individuals and organisations in the policy-making process. Many respondents also referred to the complexity of policy-making and the relationships between role-players that were often irreducible to short-hand value tags. One respondent further argued that the discourse of “stakeholders” (as opposed to “role-players”) mirrored the hierarchies of intensified state steering. Some welcomed being able to comment freely on the performance of others, some others did not comment or only registered comments for one or two role-players.

Most respondents commented on the changing role of government in the policy process particularly since 1999, with a broad agreement emerging that government had become more assertive and played a much stronger role now than at the beginning of the period (7 institutions, 4 policy analysts, 4 national organisations). Half of these respondents were unhappy with the change (3 historically-advantaged institutions, 1 historically-disadvantaged institution, 3 policy analysts, 1 sectoral body) while the other half was ambiguous or indifferent about the change (2 historically-advantaged institutions, 1 historically-disadvantaged institution, 2 national organisations) or saw it as a good sign, a maturing of government (1 policy analyst; 2 national organisations).

Almost all reference to government was aimed at the Ministry, and most criticism referred to the Ministry consulting less with the sector and experts in the sector (1 institution, 5 policy analysts). Where consultation was occurring it often had no impact, or very limited impact, on policy, i.e. recommendations by sector bodies were often not taken further (2 institutions and 1 sectoral body). With regards to mergers, one policy analyst claimed that not the sector but the ANC had been consulted on merger proposals. This view was indirectly endorsed by the comments made by two institutions. Another policy analyst lamented that “cliques” were emerging where personal rather than institutionalised ties took precedence in consultation. On the positive side, it was noted that the Ministry had been able to advance good policies in a very complex environment, that the assertion of its role at the helm of the system was important for the success of the transformation agenda, and that the more mature approach by government towards the sector had actually reduced confrontations (2 institutions, 1 policy analyst, 1 sectoral body).

One Vice-Chancellor of a university also commented on the role of the Department of Labour in higher education, which he found problematic, and argued that SETAs increasingly sought to dictate to universities about purpose of their programmes.

Concomitant with the perceived stronger role of government, the role of institutions and sectoral bodies was seen as weaker and respondents were ambiguous as to how to assess the performance of the sector in the policy process. Most respondents were unhappy about the way institutions had performed in the policy process and felt their ability to influence policy had weakened at least marginally (3 policy analysts, 1 sectoral body, 1 national organisation). In many

ways both, institutions and their sectoral bodies had provided little more than knee-jerk responses to government policy proposals (1 policy analyst) and had increasingly become preoccupied with defending vested interests (2 policy analysts). The role of sectoral bodies in the policy process continued to be seen by two-thirds of respondents as significant, and many institutions in the sample perceived sector bodies as enabling them to participate in a meaningful way in policy-making at the system level (4 institutions). Some felt their influence had weakened somewhat (1 institution, 2 policy analysts), others felt it had actually become marginally stronger (2 institutions, 1 policy analyst, 2 sectoral bodies). There was no agreement as to whether the role of sector bodies was satisfactory or not, with a third of respondents being happy, a third unhappy, and another third ambiguous about the role they had played in the course of the last five years (5 institutions, 3 policy analysts, 1 sector body).

Respondents were most unhappy about the roles played by staff and student bodies and other stakeholder representatives since 1998. Academic and support staff organisations had close to no impact on policy beyond the institutional level (2 institutions, 2 policy analysts, 1 national organisation), and student organisations had gone through a complex metamorphosis from the stalwarts of the anti-apartheid struggle to representatives of narrow stakeholder interests (1 policy analyst), whose voice was heard but had no impact (1 institution, 2 policy analysts). NGOs had almost completely lost their voice as representatives of the public sector in this policy period (1 institution, 1 policy analyst), and there was little evidence of any direct impact of business representatives on higher education policy-making (2 institutions, 1 policy analyst).

Therefore the respondents agreed that in the policy process since 1998, the greatest change in the role and significance of policy-making role-players had occurred with regards to staff and student bodies as stakeholder organisations and NGOs as public sector representatives. All policy analysts in the sample were concerned about this development and some expressed their worry about its future development.

In their self-assessment policy analysts had claimed that their role had changed and their influence on policy had lessened between 1998 and 2003. This view was endorsed by respondents commenting on policy analysts' role (3 institutions, 2 sectoral bodies). The evaluation of policy analysts' contribution to policy-making, however, ranged from "valuable contribution to critical reflection" (1 institution) to "they add no value" (1 sectoral body). Caught somewhere within this ambiguity were comments such as "they do good work but it has no impact" (1 institution).

Apart from the above-mentioned role-players, regional higher education consortia were mentioned as providing a new kind of channel to influence policy; SAQA was criticised for lacking expertise which caused problems at the institutional level; and private higher education providers were noted as providing a healthy competition to publics while nevertheless needing to be regulated well.

### **3.4 Key Policy-Related Issues 2003-2008**

When respondents were asked to anticipate policy developments over the next five years as well as their own role in the policy process, a balance of issues emerged, spread across the core functions of higher education, the role of higher education in society, and responses to anticipated national policy initiatives. Concerns with equity and quality, the economic and social needs of the country, mergers, funding and governance dominated the responses.

For the next five years, mergers are set to continue to be the single most important issue to dominate the policy agenda in higher education and the majority of respondents expect to focus on merger issues (7 institutions, 4 policy analysts, 2 sectoral bodies and 1 national organisation). Particular challenges highlighted were the financial stability and risk management of merged institutions (3 institutions), new institutional identities and the shape of comprehensive institutions (3 institutions, 1 sectoral body). One respondent was hoping to see the emergence of true people's institutions through mergers (1 national organisation).

Responses as to potential drawbacks, or risks, associated with policy developments in the next five years clearly showed that mergers are seen as a risky business for higher education. Both institutions actively involved in mergers and incorporations, and others who are not directly affected, associate with mergers a set of particular risks: capacity to manage risk associated with mergers (3 institutions, 1 policy analyst); costs and other resource needs of merger (1 institution, 2 policy analysts); job losses and fee hikes (1 national organisation). Generally, institutional responses reflected a sense of insecurity around the process of merger, and in one case at least, fears of "turmoil". One policy analyst was particularly concerned about disagreements around process in merged institutions and the challenges posed thereby for institutional leadership and staff participation, as well as the government's capacity to manage the merger process and post-merger phase. Some respondents were particularly concerned about the unintended consequences of mergers for the system, mainly that mergers might lead on the one hand to a further weakening of weak institutions (1 institution, 1 policy analyst) and on the other that they might perpetuate and entrench institutional elitism (2 institutions, 1 sectoral body).

Policy analysts expect vivid debates on merger process and outcomes over the next five years (4 policy analysts).

A focus on equity and quality is anticipated to continue to dominate policy developments and implementation with respect to teaching and learning over the next five years. At the top of the equity agenda of higher education is the need to increase participation in higher education – most particularly the participation of black students - by means of academic development and support programmes, comprehensive financial aid and other measures (4 institutions, 1 national and 1 sectoral organisation). Equity concerns also inform a stated commitment to changing staff demographics and making staff representative of the diversity of the country's population (3 institutions, 1 policy analyst, 1 national organisation). A policy analyst commented that the investigation of institutional cultures will increasingly become necessary to uncover obstacles to student and staff equity at the micro-level; an institution anticipated the need to review its value system and language policy to achieve its equity objectives. In addition, references were made to the importance of curriculum review and the Africanisation of the curriculum (1 institution, 1

national organisation) and related to this, the influence of current investigations into indigenous knowledge systems (1 policy analyst).

The quality of higher education teaching, learning and research is a related and important concern (6 institutions, 3 policy analysts, 2 sectoral bodies, 1 national organisation). The need to focus on the core functions of higher education, namely: research, teaching and the curriculum, enhancing research capacity, professionalising teaching and learning, and conducting comprehensive reviews of the curriculum, are stated objectives of respondents. The importance of full implementation of both the national and institutional quality assurance systems was noted (3 institutions, 2 policy analysts). The need to enhance the quality of the learning environment (by focusing attention on diverse factors such as varied learning environments linked to community outreach, and the quality of student residences) was mentioned by three respondents (1 institution, 1 policy analyst, 1 national organisation).

Respondents also anticipate policy developments in other spheres of teaching and learning. A policy resolution will be required with regards to multi-mode delivery and distance education (2 sectoral bodies). Policy developments are anticipated ahead of the replacement of the current matriculation certificate by FET Certificates (1 sectoral body); in order to enhance articulation between general, further and higher education (1 policy analyst); and in order to facilitate adoption of the NAP (2 institutions).

Failure to focus on the core functions of higher education is seen as a potential risk for policy development in higher education (2 institutions, 2 policy analysts, 1 sectoral body). Associated with this, fears of the loss of a technikon-type educational focus were expressed by one institution and a sectoral body.

The need to support sustainable economic growth and development will move into the centre of debate on the role of higher education in society. Four institutions, two sectoral bodies and a policy analyst call for the development of a higher education plan to support sustainable economic growth and see the potential failure to develop such a plan a serious risk not only to the fulfilment of the public interest role of the higher education sector, but to the broader achievement of the goals of a post-apartheid South African society. In particular it is seen as critical that the sector not develop such a plan in isolation; instead this process should be supported by cross-sectoral dialogue – i.e. between the sector and the state, as well as between different sectors of the state and their associated Ministries (3 institutions, 3 sectoral bodies). Institutions anticipate forging close regional partnerships with the private sector (3 institutions) and/or with government (4 institutions). Intentions to contribute to the development initiatives of the African Union and NEPAD are mentioned by three institutions. Policy developments in support of broad-based black economic empowerment are also anticipated (2 institutions and 1 sectoral body).

As noted under mergers, the financial sustainability of higher education is of foremost concern to merging institutions. Developments around funding in general (1 institution, 2 policy analysts) and the new funding formula in particular (4 institutions, 1 policy analyst, 1 sectoral body) are expected to continue as foci of higher education policy in the next five years. Three institutions expressed the fear that a new funding formula might be inadequate for a range of reasons that included a lack of sound theoretical underpinnings, potential failure to support a focus on

redress and equity, and the difficulties of incorporating the new funding formula into the business plans of merging institutions.

Policy debates on system-level governance and the relationship between the sector and the Ministry and DoE, and between CHE, DoE, and sectoral bodies are expected to increase. The complex balance between public accountability and institutional autonomy is seen by three institutions, four policy analysts and a national organisation as one of the crucial forthcoming debates. There is a risk of further polarisation of the state-sector relationship (1 policy analyst); government insulating itself from critique to its own detriment (1 policy analyst); and the sector becoming increasingly resistant to state steering (1 policy analyst). The implications of a differentiated system of higher education for system-level governance will have to be conceptualised (1 policy analyst, 1 national organisation) and the question of redress funding addressed (2 institutions). One national organisation expects contestation around a lack of policy implementation with regards to student involvement in governance.

Policy overload may be a sustained drawback for higher education in the years to come (5 institutions, 1 sectoral body, 1 policy analyst), and should be alleviated by a prioritised, co-ordinated policy implementation plan (2 institutions, 1 sectoral body). A policy analyst fears that the greatest risk for the higher education system and the transformation project will be tentativeness in policy-making and implementation, both at the system and institutional levels (shared by one institution).

Besides the focus on funding, quality assurance, mergers and governance in general, policy analysts expect further engagement around other system-level policy instruments, notably planning (1 policy analyst) and the emerging monitoring and evaluation system of the CHE (2 policy analysts). The role of private providers in the national system of higher education is likely to come to the policy table (1 policy analyst – although 2 institutions felt that recent regulation of private providers had largely resolved this question). The internationalisation of South African higher education, debates on the developing country context, GATS, and so forth, are anticipated to have impact on policy development between 2003-2008 (1 institution, 2 policy analysts, 1 sectoral body). One sectoral body highlighted the urgency of addressing the loss of academics and researchers to the system through “brain drain” and lack of interest in research. As an associated issue, this organisation suggested that, as part of the process of restructuring, five or six institutions should be identified as the key locus of “research power” in the system, enabling other institutions to focus on the development of new norms for excellence in teaching and learning.

Lastly, two important societal issues were mentioned as requiring urgent attention. The first is poverty. Higher education, it is argued, must grapple with poverty in the country and develop institutional and sectoral responses to alleviate poverty and remove it as an obstacle for individual access (1 institution, 1 policy analyst, 1 national organisation). The second issue is HIV/Aids. There is unevenness in the sector’s response to the pandemic (1 institution) and in relation to students and staff (1 policy analyst). Clearly, these issues are linked to the need for the sector to develop a plan for sustainability and economic growth, identified by a larger subset of respondents.

The review of policy developments over the past few years, coupled with the analysis of empirical data, may enrich understanding of the limits and possibilities of change in the sector at both macro and micro levels. Some policy analysts hope it may eventually lead towards the development of a theory of change for South African higher education. Two policy analysts expressed an expectation that the atheoretical tendency in policy analysis and reflection will be supplanted, and that the role of academics and policy analysts will change in the near future towards more critical, rigorous and reflective analysis of higher education and policy.

### **3.5 Anticipations of Role-players and the Policy Process 2003-2008**

The majority of institutions in the sample anticipate the continued import of sectoral bodies, and particularly of a higher education association formed from a merged SAUVCA and CTP. There is hope that the new HE association will speak with a single voice for the sector (2 institutions, 1 sectoral body).

At the same time, the sectoral association of historically-disadvantaged institutions expects to reinvent itself as a lobby group within the new HE association. It intends to ensure a sustained focus on issues of redress and equity from outside an institutional paradigm, with emphasis on black economic empowerment as a critical lever of change.

One policy analyst argues that the likely increasing differentiation between three groups of institutions – top/elite global players; second level national institutions; survivalist, domain-seeking institutions – will possibly start playing itself out in state-sector relationships. According to the analyst, the most significant post-1997 policy drivers were government interventions aimed at putting struggling institutions to rights; the future may see a dual governance model emerge with concomitantly differentiated roles for different types of institutions.

Anticipation of government's role in the next five years was given less attention by institutions and sectoral bodies than their assessment of its role in the last five years. Comment was nevertheless made (as noted above) that the balance between public accountability and institutional autonomy, and government's role in facilitating such a balance, remains a highly pertinent issue. One institution made specific reference to the fact that this is not a dilemma for higher education alone – the media, for example, confronts this question too. (Interestingly, no reference was made in this context to the public accountability role inherent in institutional Councils or to the pivotal role that academics should play in effecting the crucial balance between accountability and autonomy.)

Some more peripheral aspects of state-sector relationships were noted, for example: the close relationship between political appointees and members of the bureaucracy; what the future might hold in the case of a change of Minister (1 policy analyst); the role confusion of academics who have turned bureaucrats and their future (1 policy analyst).

As noted above, most institutions expect that the new sectoral body will be able to represent their interests effectively and in a more unified way, and one institution hoped that the CHE would get in touch with institutional needs and capacities, and become more of a sector

representative. One policy analyst felt distinctly that “the worst is over” and that we would enter into a “period of deepening submission to central steering” and “quietness”.

The role of staff and students in the future is not expected to change (1 policy analyst, 1 national organisation), unless they adopt a more oppositional stance (1 policy analyst). If the development agenda of government and business should run into significant problems (e.g. continued high levels of unemployment), it is likely that students will be the first to become vocal. However, that will not necessarily have an impact on policy (1 policy analyst).

One national organisation expects staff and students, as “agents of change” in higher education, to become more active, and to build programmatic relationships with communities surrounding the institutions. The establishment of a national student federation that can represent all students on issues of policy in higher education is also envisaged (1 national organisation).

There is seemingly a commitment amongst policy analysts to return to critique over the next five years (3 policy analysts), while continuing to support the development of policy and implementation processes by examining them and developing alternatives (3 policy analysts). On the one hand, it will be important to convince government of the good will of the sector, that government and the sector should see each other as partners in development, and that policy analysts could make a contribution in deepening these relations (1 policy analyst). The return to more basic research and critique is seen by another researcher as a cyclic imperative (from critiquing apartheid, to making policy, to being side-lined, and now returning to critique), which is somewhat inherent in the role of policy analysts.

The development of relationships with local industry (6 institutions, 1 sectoral body) and local/regional government (3 institutions, 1 sectoral body) is an objective of numerous respondents. Institutions who commented on their intention to develop partnerships with regional government noted that the latter tend to have resources which they are not always able to use optimally. Effective partnerships between institutions and regional governments through contractual training and research agreements would therefore boost both implementation capacity and resource effectiveness.

## 4 TRENDS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This section of the report interprets the patterns of perspectives that emerged in the responses and so seeks to identify and evaluate the “story lines” that emerged in the research. It is organised into three subsections. Firstly, the findings of the previous chapter (with respect to key developments over the last five years, own contributions of respondents, and anticipated developments) are categorised, compared and trends discerned. Secondly, the emerging story lines on policy developments are compared to the actual policy output, in order to assess the emphasis and foci in the responses; significant disconnects between achievements and perceptions are highlighted and interpreted. Finally, in the conclusion, a tentative response is given to the question: How much have we achieved in the goal of transforming higher education?

### 4.1 Higher Education and Policy Development: Lost and Found?

The analysis of responses from the four groups of policy actors has produced three interlinked categories of issues. These relate primarily to either the core functions of higher education, the role of higher education in society, or national policy instruments. Significant shifts in emphasis between these categories can be discerned in the assessment of the policy developments in the last five years and the anticipation of policy developments from 2003 onwards.

A marked emphasis on national policy instruments as the defining element of policy-making and implementation was evident in the retrospective assessment of policy developments by role-players. The aggregated findings point out that 65% of all responses on policy developments relate to either funding or planning, or more generally, to the definition and re-definition of system-level governance. Adding to that the references made to quality assurance and the HEQC, close to three-quarters of identified key policy developments in higher education relate to system-level policy instruments.

The category of responses coded as references to teaching, learning, research, and community service, i.e. the core functions of higher education, make up most of the remaining 35% of response units. Yet even here, the responses were dominated by references to the effect of macro transformation policy on institutional policy (equity concerns), national planning in higher education (PQM, SAQA, NAP), and quality assurance (HEQC). Only four references were made to the importance of professionalising teaching and learning (2 institutions, 2 sectoral bodies); only one significant reference was made to research as a significant element in policy development (a sectoral body referred to the urgency of retaining researchers and identifying the locus of “research power” in the system). Not a single reference was made to community service as a determinant of policy development.

The role of higher education in society was quite clearly defined and refined by system-level policy imperatives rather than by institutional initiatives or responses to developments external to the higher education system. Only a single reference was made to the increased marketisation and commercialisation of higher education (presumably with reference to private and international providers), and the broadening of the policy perspective due to international developments.

Disaggregating the responses by the sets of respondents tempers the picture markedly and a new story emerges - particularly from the institutional responses. Institutional responses as to key policy developments reflect a good balance between issues that relate directly to national policy instruments (54%) and those that relate more to core functions of higher education (46%). Yet, if further disaggregated by institutional type, it emerges that while respondents from technikons and universities did not perceive policy developments to any significant degree of difference, responses from historically-advantaged institutions are almost the exact inverse of those from historically-disadvantaged ones. This can be illustrated by means of the following table:

**Table 1: Perceptions of Key Policy Developments by Institutional Type (weighted) 1997-2003**

Key Development	HDI	HAI	Total (weighted)
National Policy Instruments	37%	66%	52%
Core Functions	63%	34%	48%
Unit Responses (Sample Size)	24 (5)	41 (4)	65 (9)

Respondents from historically-advantaged institutions perceived two-thirds of key policy developments to be related to the establishment and application of national policy instruments (including system-level governance matters). In historically-disadvantaged institutions, almost two-thirds of responses relate to the changing programme mix (shift towards SET, degree granting status for technikons, PQM). The disaggregation by institutional type also shows that 75% of references to intensified state steering were made by historically-advantaged institutions; as were 70% of references to mergers. The total of institutional responses weighted by institutional type shows a balance between the two categories. (References to policy developments that relate directly to the role of higher education in society for the period were negligible). Despite the statistical and methodological inadequacies of the survey, the picture that emerges is that there are markedly different perceptions of the experience of increased state steering (i.e. the development and application of national policy instruments) between historically-advantaged and historically-disadvantaged institutions.

Analysis of responses by sectoral bodies and policy analysts further shows that it is these respondents who perceive policy developments with regards to national policy instruments as more significant than those that relate to the core functions of higher education. Sectoral bodies make almost exclusive reference to national policy instruments (81%), with the remaining references focusing on PQM, SAQA/NQF, HEQC, NSFAS, etc. Policy analysts perceive policy developments with respect to national policy instruments (64%) as most significant, followed by references to quality and programme-mix concerns (28%), and policy developments that make reference to the changing role of higher education in society (8%).

Looking solely at the aggregated findings of the research, the question would arise as to what happened to the core of higher education in the process of repurposing institutions, in seeking to reshape, resize and transform them? However, from a disaggregated view, bias in the perception of a certainly comparable policy-making experience emerges from the institutional perspective.

Thus there are two different stories being told of higher education policy, which can best be explained as historically conditioned differences of perception. Historically-advantaged institutions appear to have linked the development of national policy instruments over the last five years more significantly to perceptions of “increased state steering” and an upset in the

balance between “public accountability and institutional autonomy”, and thus possibly to have interpreted them as intrusive. Historically-disadvantaged institutions, however, appear to see the same developments as less intrusive than facilitative, a conclusion that was certainly endorsed by a former Administrator.

Respondents’ retrospective emphasis on national policy instruments as the defining element of policy-making and implementation over the last five years is countered by a different prospective emphasis. Respondents anticipate that policy developments will need to engage with the role of higher education and focus more specifically on the core functions of higher education. Overall, the findings with respect to key policy developments needed over the next five years, were categorised as: policy focus on core functions (39%), national policy instruments (37%), and the role of higher education in society (24%).

Looking at aggregated findings, there are three significant differences between the retrospective and prospective responses. Firstly, for the coming five years, the expectation is that equity concerns with regards to teaching and learning and their key input components (staff and students) will continue to be important policy drivers; concerns for the quality of teaching, learning and research, however, are expected to assume a distinctly different shade. Now that most structures and processes of quality management are in place, a focus on the professionalisation of teaching and learning, capacity development for research, and curriculum review is expected to dominate policy. Secondly, the role of higher education as a contributor to development, locally, regionally, nationally and continentally, in partnership with the private and public sector, are themes that did not appear in the assessment of the last five years and yet take a significant share of expected policy drivers for the future. Thirdly, while mergers, governance, planning and funding issues will presumably still define more than a third of policy-making, this is a far cry from the previous 65%. It would appear that the policy analyst cited above may be right in speculating that “the worst” is over in policy-making, that most structures, processes and instruments are in place now, and that the system is ready to settle down and concentrate on refining its core functions.

What does the disaggregated story tell? A re-look at the responses from the perspective of different sets of respondents – further broken down in terms of institutional types - shows that some different expectations are held by historically-disadvantaged and historically-advantaged institutions, yet these are not near

**Table 2: Anticipated Key Policy Developments by Institutional Type (weighted) 2003-2008**

<b>Anticipated Developments</b>	<b>HDI</b>	<b>HAI</b>	<b>Total (weighted)</b>
National Policy Instruments	35%	24%	30%
Core Functions	35%	45%	40%
Role of Higher Education	30%	31%	30%
Unit Responses (Sample Size)	20 (5)	29 (4)	65 (9)

In the prospective questions, policy analysts were not so much asked about key future policy developments as about the debates on policy they expect. Thus their answers tended to focus on areas of contestation. Policy analysts continue to expect most contestation around national policy instruments (planning, funding), and especially mergers and system-level governance (58%); followed by debates around academic policy, articulation, and quality assurance (23%); and least contestation with respect to the role of higher education, internationalisation, and HE's developmental mandate (19%). Policy analysts therefore expect contestation in policy-making and implementation to continue – notwithstanding the countervailing perception that “the worst is over”.

From the perspective of sectoral bodies, it is hoped that the next five years will be used to strengthen relationships and to create a different emphasis in state-sector governance, away from regulation and towards more consultation. It would nevertheless seem that the realisation of these hopes will depend upon the ability of the new sectoral association to pursue actively its desire for meaningful consultation and to project coherently the perspectives of the sector.

## **4.2 Policy Perceptions and Policy Outputs: Near Neighbours**

The weighted assessment of retrospective responses on policy developments has produced a picture that apparently mirrors the actual output of policy. Once coded in the same way as the responses, actual policy developments in the period between 1997-2003 can be categorised in the following way: Key policy developments directly referring to the establishment and implementation of national policy instruments: 50%; policy-making directly related to core functions of higher education: 44%; and policy initiatives related to the role of higher education: 6%. This mirrors closely the weighted and re-aggregated assessment of responses by institutions as illustrated in Table 1, and thus reinforces the interpretation, that the variations between historically-disadvantaged and historically-advantaged types of institutions can be explained by different institutional contexts and historical trajectories.

Given that historically-advantaged institutions and sectoral bodies have in most cases had an advantage in participating in national policy-making, they may have experienced more the ‘bias’ in policy-making towards addressing the troubles of contested institutions (many of which are historically-disadvantaged universities). In turn, this may explain further their perception that consultation in the preceding period has been ineffective and of the “lip service” variety. Although not entirely happy with all policy developments, the sectoral body advocating the interests of historically-disadvantaged institutions expressed more readily satisfaction with the relationship between state and sector in the period from 1997-2003. This could be because government has had to tread warily around the possibility of alienating HDIs as a constituency

with high expectations of it, and has therefore made special efforts to find channels – formal or informal - for consultation or negotiation.

The apparent “match” that has been highlighted here between retrospective responses on policy development and actual policy outputs needs to be qualified to the extent that the detailed narratives of policy achievements could likely be divergent, even if their emphasis is similar. A high-level example suffices to illustrate the point. Institutions, their sectoral bodies, and policy analysts speak much of policy overload and the need for a co-ordinated implementation plan; the state, on the other hand, would no doubt anticipate a measure of congratulation for having given effect to radical system change through focus across a range of policy levers over the last five years. Narrative differences such as this one are part of the rich texture of a policy-making environment. They highlight the criticality of principled, substantive, open and ongoing conversations between the role-players in higher education policy-making if the forward-looking goals of each grouping are to be achieved. The point is all the more pressing given that the role-players themselves place increasing emphasis on the role of higher education in supporting the reconstruction and development of South African society.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

This research project has sought to give an account of the perceptions of key role-players in higher education policy-making, to reflect on the achievements of policy at a systemic and institutional level in the period 1997-2003 and to provide an outlook for the future. Moreover, it has sought to assess the role of different actors and circumstances, as well as active and passive choices that have shaped the current state of the higher education system. Respondents focused less on assessing the extent of what has been achieved in relation to what was intended or on the achievability and value of policy goals than was initially anticipated in the conceptualisation of the research. Yet the responses still provide clues as to what we have achieved in the pursuit of building a single national higher education system that is equitable, characterised by quality teaching, learning and research programmes, attu

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that will ultimately be able to “normalise” after the ructions of apartheid and the turbulence of the early years of transition. If the system can consolidate, co-ordinate and prioritise policy change, and stabilise itself round the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community service, then it will be in a far better position to respond to issues of global competitiveness, rapid knowledge and technology expansion, and sustainable social and economic development. However, it is important to remember that getting to this point of stability remains a goal to be worked towards; in between stretches the complex terrain of mergers, and both institutions and policy analysts have pointed to the risks and contestations they imply for both the system and institutions. Only effective sectoral representation and genuine consultation between state and sector can see the sector safely through this landscape.

Second, it is clear that the system is concerned with achieving a balance between public accountability and institutional autonomy, as evidenced by the energy of the debate around the manner in which the state exercises steerage of the system. Although apparent differences in the perceptions of historically-disadvantaged and historically-advantaged institutions may suggest that HAIs’ claims of infringements on institutional autonomy might be exaggerated, these should not be discarded lightly. Even the disagreement expressed by some institutions with regards to certain policy developments (especially mergers) may be viewed as warranted to a degree, given that policy attention over the past five years has tended to deflect from the core business of higher education. Yet more salient points can and should be made: As the system begins to take shape, some tempering in the state’s approach to steering may be anticipated; the “overdrive” that has bordered in some respondents’ view on interference may gear downwards. It has been reiterated that institutions must own their public accountability and hold to the constitutionally enshrined principle of academic freedom. This might require, however, a more pronounced role for institutional Councils as the trustees of the public good and of Senates as the defenders of academic freedom.

Third – and possibly the most encouraging conclusion of the research with regards to substantive aspects of the White Paper vision – the principles of equity and quality have been steadily internalised by institutions. This is not to deny that much substantive work remains to be done in both these critical areas, or to suggest that every implication of the enterprise has been grasped. Yet the frequency and persistence observable in respondents’ references to equity and quality concerns – regarding both retrospective and prospective policy developments - provide strong evidence that national policy and legislation are on the way to achieving their goals.

Finally, there is a clear recognition by all role-players of the social role of higher education. A significant number of references – often passionately worded - were made to the importance for the country that higher education responds to national development needs. The sector's determination to make its contribution in support of sustainable economic growth is buttressed by strong voices calling for a higher education plan to support economic development and black economic empowerment, to engage in cross-sectoral dialogue and to forge partnerships between higher education and the public and private sectors. This in itself constitutes an argument for higher education to take up its role in supporting substantive democracy and the goals of a transforming democratic society.

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***All policy documents and CHE publications mentioned in this report can be requested electronically or in print (if available) from Mr. Zizi Mlonyeni, Resource Officer, Council on Higher Education, and/or downloaded from <http://www.che.ac.za>***

**APPENDIX 1: KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS 1990-2003**

INITIATIVE/ PROCESS	EVENT/ACTIVITY/PRODUCT	OUTCOME/S
ANC-aligned, mass movement National Education Co-ordinating Committee initiates development of policy proposals	Establishment of a 'civil society' initiative – the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) (1990 -1992).  Publication of a report	Feeds into ANC policy initiatives and policy statements
Policy development by the ANC and ANC-supporting formations	Policy proposals developed by the Union of Democratic University Staff Associations (UDUSA), Education Policy Unit (University of Western Cape) and other formations  ANC 1994 policy statement on higher education	Feed into ANC policy development  Establishes principles and values for further policy development
Establishment in 1995 of National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) to investigate all aspects of HE and make policy recommendations	Publication in 1996 of the NCHE Report,	NCHE Report feeds into Ministry of Education policy and legislative development processes
Ministry initiatives in 1997 to develop Green Paper on HE, White Paper on HE and legislation	Release of Green Paper  Release and adoption of  Release of a Bill on Higher Education and eventual adoption of the , No. 101 of 1997	Green Paper feeds into White Paper  White Paper feeds into the Higher Education Act  New legal framework for HE that shapes Ministry regulations
Public call for nominations to (CHE) (1998)	Establishment of the CHE to advise (on request and proactively) the Minister on all matters related to HE , to undertake quality assurance activities through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), to report annually to Parliament on the state of HE, to monitor achievement of policy goals, to convene an annual consultative conference of national stakeholders and to contribute to HE development through publications and conferences	CHE undertakes an expanding range of activities related to its mandate through a Secretariat of 35 persons
National and institutional initiatives around planning (1998 onwards)	Development by Ministry of institutional planning guidelines	Development by institutions of strategic and three-year institutional plans
Ministry initiative to develop new goal-oriented funding policy framework (1998 onwards)	Development by Ministry of draft funding policy framework documents  Publication by Ministry in 2001 of	Public response and work towards a final funding policy

INITIATIVE/ PROCESS	EVENT /ACTIVITY/PRODUCT	OUTCOME/S
	Ministry seeks advice from CHE on equalisation of C values in subsidy formula	CHE advises to equalise and Ministry accepts advice
Requirement for HE qualifications to be registered on NQF, and for programmes to be restructured in outcomes based format (1997 onwards)	Extensive curriculum and programme restructuring	All HE qualifications interim-registered on NQF and developed in outcomes based format
Ministry initiatives around private higher education (1998 onwards)	Development of guidelines and manuals for the registration of private HE providers  Amendment in 2000 and 2001 to the Higher Education Act  Development of draft regulations for registration of private HE providers	Registration of all private providers of HE  New regulatory framework for private HE through regulation of April 2003
Requirement that all new HE programmes be accredited as condition of provision and public funding support (1998 onwards)	Development of interim frameworks, processes, criteria and structures for the accreditation of programmes	Processing of and decision making on new programmes by HEQC; processing of and decision making on re-accreditation of conditionally registered programmes of private HE institutions
Initiative to institute national quality assurance (1999 onwards)	Work towards establishment of an infrastructure for HEQC and the launch of HEQC  Development of policy framework for quality assurance in HE  Work towards new system, criteria, processes, guidelines and manuals for programme accreditation in consultation with stakeholders  Work to establish system of self-evaluations and institutional audits in consultation with stakeholders	HEQC formally launched in 2000  Release of draft and final policy: HEQC on quality assurance  Release by HEQC of and thereafter finalisation of a new accreditation system for implementation in 2004  Release by HEQC of & thereafter criteria for Institutional Audits  Institution of pilot audits of two public and one private institution in late 2003, with audits to begin in late 2004  One day visits by HEQC to all public HE institutions and a sample of private institutions around work of the HEQC and internal quality management

INITIATIVE/ PROCESS	EVENT /ACTIVITY/PRODUCT	OUTCOME/S
	<p>Initiation of quality promotion and capacity building initiatives and move to establish a Quality Assurance Innovation and Development Fund</p> <p>Project established to develop processes and criteria for reviewing and re-accrediting all Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes in consultation with MBA providers</p> <p>Project on quality assurance of research</p>	<p>systems of institutions</p> <p>Formation of national HEQC Quality Assurance Managers Forum</p> <p>Establishment of a Teaching and Learning project to promote quality through developing good practice guides on a range of issues</p> <p>Training of audit chairs and panel members, programme evaluators and HEQC staff</p> <p>Undertaking of re-accreditation of about 50 MBA programmes at over 20 institutions using panels of specialist local and international evaluators</p> <p>Development of frameworks and criteria for quality assurance of research</p>
<p>Initiative in 1998 to consolidate and extend student financial aid to needy students</p>	<p>Passing of the of 1999</p>	<p>Creation of a body to implement support for needy students</p> <p>Funds enlarged annually and support about 200 000 needy undergraduate students</p>
<p>Initiative (1998 onwards) to develop a system to monitor and evaluate the achievements of policy objectives in HE</p>	<p>Monitoring Task Team (later: Project) established by the CHE with funding from Ford Foundation; establishment of a national reference group and production of a draft conceptual framework</p> <p>Work on the design and implementation of the monitoring and evaluation system in 2003, in consultation with stakeholders and HE experts. Feasibility Study (2003) and production of</p>	<p>Presentation of</p> <p>at the biennial conference of SAARDHE 2003</p>
<p>Initiative in 1999 to develop new academic policy for the structure, duration and nomenclature of qualifications and programmes</p>	<p>Production in 2001 by CHE of</p>	<p>Public comment and steps towards finalisation by the Ministry of in 2003</p>
<p>Initiatives to bring colleges (education, agricultural and nursing) into the national higher education system</p>	<p>Task Team to effect incorporation of all education colleges into universities and technikons</p>	<p>No more independent colleges of education - incorporated into universities and technikons</p>

INITIATIVE/ PROCESS	EVENT/ACTIVITY/PRODUCT	OUTCOME/S
(1998 onwards)	Task Teams to examine agricultural and nursing colleges	Reports produced - no final decisions on future
Initiatives on restructuring the HE institutional landscape (1999 onwards)	<p>Ministry request to CHE to provide advice on restructuring the HE institutional landscape</p> <p>Release of CHE report (2000)</p> <p>Bill to amend Higher Education Act in 2001 to give the Minister power to set scope of provision by public and private institutions</p> <p>NWG releases its report (2002) - proposes to reduce current 36 institutions to 21 through mergers, though with no loss of sites of provision</p> <p>Ministry considers public submissions and CHE advice and submits proposals on institutional restructuring for Cabinet approval</p> <p>Ministry creates a Merger Unit and releases for merging institutions (April 2003)</p> <p>Ministry requests institutions to submit their proposed programme and qualification mixes and niche areas</p>	<p>Extensive debate generated around proposals and restructuring</p> <p>Ministry response to CHE through its (2001), which initiates mergers of some institutions and establishes a National Working Group (NWG) to investigate and advise on appropriate arrangements to consolidate the provision of higher education on a regional basis through establishing new institutional and organisational forms, including the feasibility of reducing a number of higher education institutions</p> <p>Amendment approved by Parliament</p> <p>Ministry releases its own slightly modified proposals on institutional restructuring and requests advice from CHE and public comments</p> <p>Government approves in late 2002 Ministry proposals to reduce the 36 public institutions to 21 through mergers and incorporations</p> <p>New 'comprehensive' institution created through the mergers of a university and technikon</p> <p>Ministry processes submissions and releases for comment its proposed qualification and programme mixes and niche areas for institutions</p>
Initiative in 2000 around language policy for HE with request from Ministry	CHE produces policy advice report for Minister in 2001	Ministry releases in late 2002, based essentially on the CHE

INITIATIVE/ PROCESS	EVENT/ACTIVITY/PRODUCT	OUTCOME/S
for CHE advice	Minister appoints a group to report specifically on the Afrikaans language in higher education	advice
Initiative around reviewing the NQF in HE (2001)	<p>Ministries of Education and Labour establish a Study Team to review the NQF in education</p> <p>CHE and various HE actors motivate for major changes in the implementation of the NQF in HE. CHE initiates debate on the Consultative Document by means of a CHE Forum</p>	<p>Departments of Education and Labour jointly publish</p> <p>(2003).</p>
Initiative to review co-operative governance in HE (2001)	CHE Task Team conducts investigation in	

## APPENDIX 2: CONSOLIDATED QUESTIONNAIRE

	<b>Vice-Chancellors of Higher Education Institutions and National Stakeholder Organisations</b>	<b>Senior Government Officials of the Higher Education Branch</b>	<b>Higher Education Researchers and Policy Analysts</b>
<b>1.</b>	<p>What are the most important changes that have taken place in HE during the last five years and how do you rate their importance?</p> <p>What do you consider the most obvious drawbacks and problems on your side?</p>	<p>What have been the most important achievements in HE policy during this period?</p> <p>What do you consider the most obvious drawbacks and problems on the government side?</p>	<p>What are the 5 most important changes that have taken place in HE between 1997/8 and 2003?</p> <p>What do you consider the most obvious drawbacks and problems on your side?</p>
<b>2.</b>	<p>What are the five most important contributions that your HEI / organisation has made to policy development and implementation in the last five years?</p>	<p>What have been the most important achievements in HE policy during this period?</p> <p>What do you consider the most obvious drawbacks and problems on the government side?</p>	<p>What are the most important contributions of experts in HE between 1997/8 and 2003?</p>
<b>3.</b>	<p>How do you see your participation in the policy process since 1998?</p>	<p>How do you see government's role in the policy process since 1997?</p>	<p>What are the most important research/theoretical issues explored during the past five years?</p> <p>And, what has been the impact of policy-related academic discourse on policy discourse?</p>
<b>4.</b>	<p>How do you see the role played by other HEIs/stakeholder organisations, government, and policy analysts in the policy process since 1998?</p>	<p>How do you see the role played by HEIs, stakeholder organisations, policy analysts in the policy process since 1998?</p>	<p>How do you see role played by HEIs, stakeholder organisations, and government in the policy process since 1998?</p>
<b>5.</b>	<p>What are the most important policy related issues that you will look into, be active on, in the next five years?</p> <p>What areas of risk do you anticipate?</p>	<p>What are the most important policy related issues for the next five years?</p> <p>What areas of risk do you anticipate, notably in terms of policy implementation?</p>	<p>What are the most important policy debates to be confronted in the next five years?</p> <p>What do you foresee to be the main areas of risk in terms of policy-making and implementation?</p>
<b>6.</b>	<p>What policy-related role do you see for your institution/organisation in the next five years?</p> <p>How do you see relationships with other role players in policy developing?</p>	<p>How do you see the role played by government in the next five years?</p> <p>What degree or mode of steering will the system require to achieve the policy goals?</p>	<p>What policy-related role do you see for researchers, policy analysts and academics in general in the next five years?</p> <p>How do you think relationships between different stakeholders in the policy process will develop?</p>