

Changes and continuities in South Africa's higher education system, 1994 to 2004

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The purpose of this chapter is to trace and describe the major changes that have taken place in South African higher education over the past decade, to explain why these changes were introduced into the higher education system, and to examine briefly the future consequences of such changes for the sector and its constituencies. In examining changes in higher education, it will also be necessary to identify continuities in the national system, since what remains constant is as important a reflector on change and its pretensions in any social system - but especially in the case of post-apartheid education.

There is a multitude of changes that have transformed higher education in South Africa. Some of these are small and gradual changes, initiated from within institutions; others have been large-scale changes initiated from without, that is, through government and donor interventions. It is very clear that while continuities remain, the higher education system does not resemble the distortion, upheaval and fragmentation that marked the sector at the start of the 1990s. In my review of the policy, planning and political landscape, I propose that the ten most important changes in higher education have been the following:

1. The changing size and shape of higher education;
2. The changing meaning of autonomy and accountability;
3. The changing nature of higher education providers (private higher education);
4. The changing character of student distribution and characteristics in higher education;
5. The changing organisation of university management and governance (new managerialism, councils);
6. The changing roles of student politics and organisation;
7. The changing models of delivery in higher education;
8. The changing notion of higher education - between free trade and the public good;
9. The changing value of higher education programmes (the rise of the economic sciences and the decline of the humanities); and
10. The changing nature of the academic workplace.

Each of these changes is related to the other, and reasonable analysts might arrive at a slightly different list of key experiences that have transformed the sector. What cannot be denied, though, is that these ten events are at least among the most important not only in terms of immediate impact on higher education but also in relation to long-term effects on the system of higher education provision. Each deserves further description and analysis.

The changing size and shape of higher education

The founding policy document on higher education after apartheid is the report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) - *A Framework for Transformation* - that was produced by 13 commissioners whose terms of reference included advising the Minister on 'the *shape* of the higher education system ... in terms of the types of institutions' and 'what the *size* of the higher education system should be' (NCHE 1996: 266, emphases added). Little happened until July 1999, following the appointment of the second post-apartheid Minister of Education. In his *Call to Action*, the Minister announced that:

The shape and size of the higher education system cannot be left to chance if we are to realise the vision of a rational, seamless higher education system ... The institutional landscape of higher education will be reviewed as a matter of urgency in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education. This landscape was largely dictated by the geo-political imagination of apartheid planners. (DoE 1999)

On 5 March 2001 the Minister released a National Plan for Higher Education that argued that '... the number of public higher education institutions in South Africa could and should be reduced' (DoE 2001: 87). In December 2001, a National Working Group appointed by the Minister released its report, *Restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa*, and recommended the reduction of higher education institutions (universities and technikons) from 36 to 21 through the specific mechanism of mergers, listing the specific institutions in various provinces to be targeted for merging.

A parallel process was followed for colleges of education, through a Departmental Technical Committee appointed in September 1997 and that

delivered in the following year a document called *The Incorporation of Colleges of Education into the Higher Education Sector: A Framework for Implementation* (DoE 1998). It is this committee that recommended the option of incorporation or autonomy for colleges with the proviso that 'an autonomous College ... to be financially viable [it] would require a minimum enrolment of 2 000 students'(1998: 15).

The provincial reaction to the so-called Framework Document was swift as the 'rationalisation' of colleges started to take effect. The number of colleges was reduced from 120 (80 000 students) to 50 (15 000 students) by the start of 2000 (CHE 2001: 22) and to 25 'contact institutions' holding 10 000 students (and 1 000 staff) by the end of that year (2000). Another 5 000 students were registered in two distance colleges (with 500 staff): the South African College for Teacher Education (SACTE) and the South African College for Open Learning (SACOL).¹ Both these distance colleges were absorbed into the University of South Africa (Unisa).

This happened so quickly that the Minister's National Plan for Higher Education then declared quite boldly, if prematurely, '... that Colleges of education were rationalised and *successfully incorporated* into the higher education system with effect from January 2001' (DoE 2001, emphasis added).

At the start of 2003, colleges of education had all but disappeared from the higher education landscape as a result of either being closed down or, in the case of a few, being incorporated into universities and technikons. At the same time, the merger of universities and technikons had been finalised after an intensive political process, with a specified schedule for each of these events. The Cabinet approved the following mergers and incorporations:²

- The University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville;
- The University of the North-West and Potchefstroom University;
- Technikon Pretoria, Technikon Northern Gauteng and Technikon North-West;
- The University of Fort Hare and the East London Campus of Rhodes University;
- The incorporation of the Vista University campuses into specified universities and technikons in the region where each campus was located, for example, the incorporation of the Mamelodi Campus of Vista University into the University of Pretoria;

- The University of Port Elizabeth and Port Elizabeth Technikon;
- The University of the North and the Medical University of South Africa;
- The University of the Transkei, Border Technikon and the Eastern Cape Technikon;
- Rand Afrikaans University and Technikon Witwatersrand; and
- Cape Technikon and Peninsula Technikon.

In a relatively short period of time, therefore, the higher (and further) education landscape in South Africa altered dramatically: 21 universities became 11 institutions; 15 technikons became five 'stand alone' technikons and six comprehensive institutions (combinations of universities and technikons); 150 technical colleges became 50 merged technical colleges. And 120 colleges of education eventually became (at the time of writing) only two colleges of education, with the rest either incorporated into universities or technikons (about 30 such incorporations) or 'disestablished'. And these two remaining colleges of education would also be incorporated into the proposed Institutes of Education for Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape. In short, **306 separate** institutions for post-school education were radically reduced to at best **72 remaining** institutions - not counting the ongoing restructuring of nursing and agricultural colleges. This dramatic alteration of the post-school institutional landscape is the single most important change in higher education (broadly defined) and requires explanation.

The changing meaning of autonomy and accountability

The concept of autonomy has always been contested in South African higher education. It was the rallying call of especially the white English institutions during the days of apartheid when their liberal credentials insisted on the right to decide on the admission of students to their universities. While autonomy was the public rallying-point for student admission on a non-racial basis, this extended to the right to decide what and how to teach in line with institutional orientations in much of the Western world. In short, much of the history of South African universities was preoccupied with asserting autonomy against the constant interventions of the apartheid state to regulate and maintain racially- and ethnically-separate universities. Occasionally, this assertion of autonomy was also made by the English universities in relation to black students who demanded that conservative academics be denied

speaking rights on such campuses; the most prominent case being that of the Irish academic Conor Cruise O'Brien. And at other times, the insistence of mainly black academics that the international academic boycott of white South African universities should be honoured, met with the same assertions of autonomy by the English universities. This concept of institutional autonomy was embedded in TB Davie's classic formulation of academic freedom as 'our freedom from external interference in who shall teach, what we teach, how we teach and whom we teach' (cited in Du Toit 2001).

In the 1990s, however, the concept of autonomy was fiercely juxtaposed with the requirement for accountability, driven, this time, by the emergent post-apartheid state. Within a few years of the newly-established democracy, a range of external policies created new demands on universities which were regarded in many quarters as leading to an erosion of autonomy. Government required a reformatting of academic qualifications that were assembled along the lines of the new National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Government indicated that the subsidy formula for funding universities would privilege certain academic subjects or disciplines and, in this way, discourage others. Government required a process of quality assurance that pushed for explicit declarations of performance in academic enterprise. Government required mergers and incorporations of higher education institutions, with dramatic implications for staffing, students and programmes. Government required order in institutions which provoked new legislation - unheard of in apartheid days - in which a Minister of Education could displace an academic leader and appoint an administrator to run a university. In a short period of time, government had intervened quite directly in higher education institutions both to restore order in organisation but also to require compliance with a new regime of academic regulations. This raised muted and sometimes fierce charges against government on the basis of infringing on institutional autonomy. The response from governmental authorities was that autonomy was never meant to be absolute, and that accountability for public resources was an important part of the equation.

This interventionist position of government was not the only source of change to the meaning of autonomy in higher education. As Andre du Toit points out, the transition from academic self-rule to a new managerialism has as much to do with 'the practices and policies of the new class of

professionalised university managers' (2001: 5) as it has with external intervention by the democratic state. Unfortunately, Du Toit underplays the impact of trans-national and state regimes on institutional behaviour. As Philip Altbach observes in other contexts,

Government authorities make it clear to university officials that continued good relations, budgetary allocations, and research funds depend on the appropriate academic and political behaviour on the part of the faculty. (2000: 270)

But Du Toit is correct in pointing to institutional choices that also infringe on concepts and understandings of autonomy. This will be explored further in discussions on the changing academic workplace.

It is not the intention of this review to re-enter the debate on autonomy and accountability; rather, the goal is simply to argue that the concept of autonomy is now, more than ever, up for grabs. How institutions settle, especially after the radical altering of the institutional landscape, will determine what meanings will be assigned and challenged when (if at all) the question of autonomy is again on the agenda. To conclude, underlying all the striking physical and programmatic alterations to higher education has been the shifting meaning of autonomy; this change cannot be underestimated in terms of what it means for 'the academic estate' (Altbach 2000).

The changing nature of higher education providers

The data is suspect, but the growth in private education institutions in South Africa has been quite dramatic since the 1990s. The number of private schools increased from 518 in 1994 to around 1 500 in 2001 (Hofmeyr & Lee 2002), while more than 100 000 students are now registered in 145 private higher education institutions (Mabizela, Subotsky & Thaver 2000). This flooding of the South African market for higher education, long dominated by public institutions, compounded (and may even partially explain) the problem of completely unexpected declines in the enrolment fortunes of public universities. The judgement of private higher education is less severe than a few years ago as more reliable data suggests that:

- The private provider market is more heavily concentrated in the further rather than higher education sector;

- The private providers concentrate their efforts on a restricted curriculum (often low-level commercial and business courses) and therefore represent less of a threat to public higher education than initially thought;
- The private provider market was in fact expected to grow - at least from the perspective of the 1996 National Commission on higher education; and
- The private provider growth is completely common to development trends in other countries - without dramatic declines in public sector fortunes.

Nevertheless, this varied but successful, emergent economy of private higher education transformed the higher education landscape in South Africa. The response of the state has been somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, several actions were taken to regulate the growth and quality of the sector by requiring registration, accreditation and quality assurance of both private providers and the programmes they offer. At the same time, foreign as well as local higher education institutions continue to be registered despite the acknowledgement of the limited interest in 'a relatively narrow range of programmes that are economically lucrative' (DoE 2001: 65). The ambivalence can in part be explained in the context of the ongoing debates on free trade as a subject that includes higher education and that forms the subject of negotiations in the WTO (World Trade Organisation) and GATS (The General Agreement on Trade in Services), all of which have strong implications for developing countries like South Africa (Sehoole 2002).

Another way in which the logic of private higher education has played itself out in the South African market is through public-private partnerships. In such cases:

- The public institution registers the students and provides materials, while the private provider pays for tuition and carries administrative costs.
- The students have limited access to the facilities of the public institution even though the state subsidy eventually accrues to the public entity.
- The private entity structures the fees and decides on the loan distribution, with limited financial exposure on the part of the public institution.

According to one study, six public institutions in 2000 claimed a total of 24 000 full-time equivalent (FTE) students whose primary registration was with a private provider (Cloete, Fehnel, Maassen, Moja, Perold & Gibbon 2002:160). Once again, government signalled that it would institute a stronger

regulatory and monitoring environment with respect to public-private partnerships, especially in the delivery of distance education programmes.

What this all means is that the dominance of a limited number of public sector institutions offering contact tuition has changed dramatically in the past ten years under review, and the future landscape with respect to private providers will depend crucially on governmental behaviour with respect to international private and national public forces on higher education as a whole.

The changing character of student distribution and characteristics in higher education

In the recent history of South Africa, a constant refrain was the problem of access to higher education by especially black students. Between 1990 and 1994, however, both the historically black and white universities and technikons experienced a sudden rush on higher education institutions. In this brief period, the historically black universities expanded by 28 000 (37 per cent) and their white counterparts by a total of 10 000 (or 8 per cent).³ This sudden expansion masked three other realities at the time. First, the fact that gross participation rates remained low, standing at 9 per cent for black and 13 per cent for coloureds. Second, that participation rates were highly unequal by apartheid constructed 'groups', standing at 70 per cent for whites and 40 per cent for Indian South Africans. Third, th

- Black student enrolments had increased by 10 000 (100 per cent) in historically white, English-medium universities;
- Black student enrolments had increased by 56 000 (1 120 per cent) in historically white, Afrikaans-medium universities; and
- Black student enrolments had increased by 49 000 (490 per cent) in historically white technikons.

These radical and rapid shifts in the demographic spread of students can be attributed to changes in the external environment. Such changes include the unexpected decline in the number of qualifying high school graduates eligible for especially university-level studies (see South African University Vice-Chancellors Association 2001); the unexpected competition from private higher education providers, albeit in limited fields of study; the expected compliance with national goals for equity in student (and staffing) enrolments; the need for institutional survival - especially on the part of black universities - since state subsidies were largely dependent on student enrolment (and progression); and an unexpected but logical shift in the public mind in favour of vocationally-oriented training.

These demographic shifts will be further advanced by the mergers planned for higher education in the sense that universities and technikons will be combined in some cases (such as the Rand Afrikaans University and Technikon Witwatersrand), and former white and black universities in other cases (such as the Universities of Durban-Westville and Natal).

Against this backdrop, the problem for South African higher education will not be race - at least not in a black majority state. The new problems will be the background class and regional character of students as urban institutions are strengthened and deracialised while rural universities remain marginalised in terms of institutional capacity, racial character and class status. The problem for urban institutions, on the other hand, will be the complex task of transforming institutional cultures in ways that are more inclusive and accommodating of the statistical diversity of their student populations.

The changing organisation of university management and governance

The collegial model of faculty organisation and faculty-university relations dominated the character of universities in South Africa for much of its recent

history. Deans were appointed by, responsible to, and defenders of their faculties. Faculties decided on which curricula they wished to launch based principally on the intellectual merits of a particular disciplinary or subject direction. The academic department was the basic unit of scholarly life within the university - responsible for teaching, research and community outreach. The administrative functions of the university were highly centralised, enabling the dean and his or her Heads of Department to concentrate on the academic functions of the faculty. The scholar-dean, whose function was academic leadership, was never in question. Faculty members pursued cooperation with other departments or faculties on a purely voluntary basis; there was no iron requirement for co-ordination or co-operation. Students passed or failed on the basis of academic decisions within the faculty, and these decisions were seldom queried from outside of the academic world of the department. It was understood that faculties and departments worked in the interests of their students, and made such decisions on the basis of time-honoured academic standards. Professors professed; deans led; councils governed; administrators administered; and students studied.

And then things changed. By the mid-1990s, a sea change in university management and governance had taken place. Many observers have documented the elements of this change but it includes the following:

- The institutional prominence of centralised and strategic planning covering all aspects of university life. The elevated status and pervasive discourse of 'strategic planning' was in part provoked by governmental expectations of 'three-year rolling plans' and the need to monitor and attain institutional performance against planned outputs.
- The decentralisation of core administrative functions in the direction of faculty and departmental units. Such functions include finance and budgeting, planning, facilities (in multi-campus institutions), personnel management, student administration, marketing and communication, and quality assurance.
- The expansion and concentration of executive management on a centralised basis, effectively changing the roles of deans and directors from academic leaders into executive managers. A new language of affirmation accompanied these organisational changes. For example, vice-chancellors became chief executive officers and deans became executive deans. A critical shift in this environment was that deans were now appointed by 'management' rather than by their colleagues.

- The expansion of the functions of councils of universities and technikons as they became much more involved in the management of institutions, compared to their traditional governance role with respect to institutional policies. This created considerable conflict in many institutions as the line between management and governance became blurred through the activism of otherwise distant councils.

These changes in governance and administration at institutions dramatically changed the social relations on campuses between staff and students, between academics and administrators, between university managers and their external communities, between government and institutions. These changes are further explored in later discussions on the changing academic workplace.

The main point for now is to record the emergence of a new administrative and managerial architecture in higher education during the late 1990s which significantly altered not only the physical organisation but also the social character of universities.

The changing roles of student politics and organisation

One of the most distinctive features of the anti-apartheid resistance since the 1960s was the prominent role of students and student organisations at schools and universities. Many of the political leaders in government, for example, rose to prominence through their student activism after the 1970s. Students were well organised and connected to major political movements inside and outside South Africa. Students lived simple and often dangerous lives in their daily battles against the apartheid regime and its representatives on university campuses. Students played very prominent roles in institutions, with the capacity to mobilise mass resistance with relative ease and to focus the attention of 'comrades' on burning social and political issues of the day. Students worked closely with staff unions and academics as a common battlefield against government and unsympathetic administrators. In the process, students generated considerable respect within the broader community and acknowledgement from the liberation movements for their bold stance on matters of injustice and inequality.

But the emergence of a new and democratic government in 1994 threw student focus, organisation and mission into considerable disarray. For example, the focus of student organisation, especially in historically black institutions,

shifted from protests against an illegitimate government to demands for unrestricted access to higher education, expanded financial aid to needy students, and relief from personal debt to the institutions.

But what followed after the election of the new government was a period of ambivalence on the part of the state, from 1994 to 1998. It was this period of ambivalence towards students and student organisations that would create considerable instability during the mid- to late 1990s. Student organisations and their leaders were feted by their institutions with everything from personal cellphones, car allowances, impressive offices, full or partial fee remissions, representation on most if not all key committees of the institution, and a general status and wealth unheard of in the student movements of the 1970s and 1980s. It was also during this period that universities were reluctant to come down hard on students without the ability to pay; institutions dug deep into their accumulated reserves - sometimes with sound motives - not only to accommodate needy students but also to raise the remuneration of the lowest-paid administrative staff. At this point, students and unions became very powerful organisations, a key example being institutions like the University of Durban-Westville (UDW). Many institutions - like the University of the Western Cape and other HDIs (historically disadvantaged institutions) - really did expect a massive bail-out from the state on the basis of their historical disadvantage.

The consequences were disastrous. Institutions with healthy reserves (like UDW) went into massive debt. Student organisations became a major drain on institutional resources - continuing to demand the kinds of excesses institutions could no longer afford. Students insisted on 'bail-out' from debt and unlimited access to their constituencies. Unions joined the fray, insisting on better remuneration for their staffing constituencies despite this declining resource base in the institutions. These events disrupted institutions on a scale not seen since the 1970s. University vice-chancellors experienced their highest turnover in years; senior administrators lived through periods of unprecedented stress; some campuses became completely unworkable, with extremely violent acts from inside and outside these institutions. A newly-elected, democratic government stared down on a set of institutions - many of which had become completely ungovernable - and found its very authority, if not legitimacy, threatened by an unstable, volatile higher education sector.

And then things changed. Government took a strongly interventionist stance on students and student organisations and their responsible institutions. A stream of political messages required that students pay fees; that university and technikon managements were responsible for collecting such fees; that only academically-deserving students from poor backgrounds would receive funding; and that disruption would not be tolerated. But in addition to these persistent and subtle political messages, a new set of legislation was created that empowered the Minister of Education to replace vice-chancellors with 'Administrators' in the event that the institution was unable to manage itself. Institutions were held directly accountable for institutional performance in terms of indicators such as efficiency, equity and effectiveness. These were specified terms of reporting in the mandatory 'three-year rolling plans' which had to be submitted to government. This combination of politics, legislation and performance measures enforced on institutions a stronger managerial responsibility towards student organisations. This had two effects. First, it provided institutional managers with the political support they needed to require specific behaviours from their students and student organisations. Second, and as a consequence, it moderated student organisational behaviour towards greater discipline and conformity within the new managerial environment. This regulation of student organisation and behaviour is a most important shift in institutional life over the past decade.

The changing modes of delivery in higher education

Before the 1990s, higher education institutions acted according to clearly defined roles. The contact institutions offered contact instruction and the designated distance education institutions offered what was for many years a form of correspondence education. The two distance education institutions were Unisa and Technikon South Africa, the latter concentrating on vocational education programmes.

But during the 1990s a group of traditionally contact institutions started to expand their instructional programmes into various kinds of distance education. Between 1993 and 1999, distance education headcount enrolments in traditionally contact institutions grew by 492 per cent: from 14 000 to 69 000. The strongly-entrepreneurial Afrikaans universities in particular, sensing a market within the rural areas of South Africa, started to work with private

entities to deliver programmes that would advance the career prospects of, especially, practising teachers and school leaders. This market niche appeared to be poorly served by institutions like Unisa. The private-public partnerships that spawned this opportunity worked with considerable success for universities like Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, Potchefstroom, the Rand Afrikaans University and the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg). The private partners provided an efficient mechanism for registering students and collecting fee payments on site, while at the same time enabling the contact institutions to concentrate on the delivery of instruction, field support and examinations.

Another shift in delivery happened within both contact and distance education institutions as a result of the impact of technology on teaching, learning and assessment. The advances in technology enabled contact institutions to offer a range of alternative modes of delivery that included web-based programmes that students could access with or without face-to-face contact teaching. In some cases, therefore, the web-based or 'telematic' programmes were simply used to create a complex of instructional opportunities and resources that complemented the formal lectures or seminars. In other cases, such programmes served as the exclusive means for receiving instruction. Such technologies also enabled distance education institutions to make regular contact with distance students through, for example, electronic mail. This has already spawned an interest in exploring the potential of mobile phones (which appear to be owned by an overwhelming majority of rural teachers and principals, for example) for maintaining contact with distance education students, given the unreliable record of traditional mailing services in rural areas.

The consequences of these shifts in modes of delivery include the following:

- The definitional line between contact and distance education institutions became increasingly blurred, with experts in these fields beginning to talk about a continuum at which extremes sit conventional correspondence courses and pure face-to-face tuition. As it turned out, in the new century there were very few institutions that did not offer 'mixed mode' forms of delivery.
- The viability of the traditional distance education institutions started to be called into question as the common *perception* was that the decline in enrolments at these institutions paralleled the growth in enrolments in the established and traditional contact institutions.

- The policy and financial bases for government subsidisation of these historical institutional types - contact and distance - was thrown into disarray. It was increasingly clear to government that terminating funding of distance education programmes at contact institutions may create 'order' within the higher education system and bolster the fortunes of the flailing distance education institutions. But there was also a sense in government that doing so might interrupt what many experts see as an inevitable global trend towards 'mixed mode' delivery systems - in both types of institutions. Government therefore played a soft hand on the contact institutions, requiring high levels of quality, strong statements of articulation with the institutional vision and programme profile, better systems of support to distance education students, and careful decisions on 'capping' programmes deemed to be oversubscribed - such as education management.

What is clear is that the 'pure' institution types of the 1980s are a thing of the past. The combination of technological advances in teaching and learning and the entrepreneurial flair of some institutions has completely altered the traditional missions and forms of delivery in higher education. While there are still core missions that are distinguishable among former contact and distance institutions, the changing demands on institutions and the new opportunities offered by technology might eventually erode the certainties of institutional typologies in the coming decades.

The changing notion of higher education - between free trade and the public good

There is a powerful view emanating across the world that higher education should be regarded as simply another form of economic trade. At the very least, this means that private international institutions should have the liberty of accessing education markets without strict governmental regulations or trade barriers. In other words, higher education and Levi jeans would enjoy the same status as products of trade which should be transacted under the same conditions of international exchange. There are powerful bodies advancing this view, including the WTO, and this movement is being debated most strongly in Europe and North America, but with strong resonance within South Africa. A number of studies have been commissioned by the South African Universities'

Vice-Chancellors' Association, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and the Centre for Higher Education Transformation - all with the aim of clarifying the meaning and implications for legislation, policy and practice within higher education.

Already the space provided for private higher education institutions from Europe, Australia and the United States, for example, has created niche markets that continue to alter the landscape for universities and technikons in South Africa. The most immediate, tangible consequence is competition for the best students - something which clearly impacts on weaker institutions more than on stronger ones. The rise of such institutions partly explains the growing interest of public institutions in business education, with the result that new business schools have emerged since the 1990s as prominent components of public higher education. The marketing of such programmes has also altered enrolment patterns dramatically in larger universities, with considerable

stories of chaos and disruption in schools; teacher education was the single largest field of enrolment in post-school education prior to the 1990s; and

- The declining numbers of graduates from the school system; this would impact on humanities faculties directly because the weaker students (with many exceptions, of course) tend to end in the 'soft disciplines'; with fewer students coming through, there is gr

talk about co-operation, the dominant impulse among academics is to compete for programmes, students and therefore jobs. Universities now have marketing directors to recruit students and sometimes staff, something unheard of in the 1980s. Large budgets are set aside for marketing, communication and publicity on a scale not yet seen.

- There is a much greater sense of vulnerability in the wake of the unprecedented retrenchments and restructuring in higher education during the 1990s. Job security, long an established reality in a higher education system without any strong sense of tenure, is being disrupted. The same holds true for administrative staff as 'outsourcing' becomes a preferred mode of delivering key support services. Although more psychological than real, such vulnerability is also felt among white academics as the demand for employment equity moves from a polite requirement to a punishable offence in institutions.
- There is a much greater sense of the need to perform, the result of a new regime of surveillance in the form of performance management systems, quality assurance protocols and institutional benchmarks on everything from research outputs to pass rates. Academics and administrative staff now have to account regularly and in public on personal and unit performance. And such performance determines not only promotion but also remuneration and retention as an employee.
- There is a much greater sense of the limited resource environment to support key academic and administrative tasks. With more academics and managers now part of the budgetary processes of institutions, and with the declining revenue base in many universities and technikons, there is a sharp institutional consciousness about resource limitations that did not exist in the same ways ten or more years ago.
- There is a much greater sense of responsibility towards students as clients (the language of new managerialism) and as critical resources (the result of declining enrolments) than in the previous decade. Students used to seek a place within a university; now universities seek to offer students a place against the competition, for their very survival depends on strong enrolments.

The academic workplace has changed dramatically and the meaning of such changes in the lives of students and staff is described in terms of disruption, alienation, the loss of community and shared identity, and an increase in

emotional labour (Webster & Mosoetsa 2001). Whether this new culture and context of academic work will be sustainable is unclear, especially in developing countries where changes in political and economic regimes could also change the nature of the academic workplace, again.

Synthesis, reflection and conclusion

If these are the changes, what has remained constant? First, the profile of academic staff at institutions has remained constant. The recruitment and retention of especially leading and promising black scholars will remain one of the most difficult tasks facing higher education, in part because of the financial attractions of the private sector and in part because of the nature of the academic workplace (Potgieter 2002). Second, the knowledge producers in higher education remain largely white and male. As the simple but alarming statistics of the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) demonstrate, not only has research production remained low; it has remained unequal - still favouring researchers who are white, male and ageing (DACST 2002: 53). Without dramatically new modes of training and support for a new cadre of academic researchers, this situation is unlikely to change. Third, the 'institutional cultures' of higher education have remained more or less the same. Institutions still bear their racial birthmarks in terms of dominant traditions, symbols and patterns of behaviour that remain distinctive despite the broader changes sweeping the higher education landscape. These deep-rooted beliefs and behaviours will take some time to change, and compose the subject of several research investigations underway at the time of writing.

Returning to the changes described, how can these shifts be explained as a collective of events? It is impossible to account for these changes outside the global context of higher education developments. As international commentators have warned, it is too easy for South Africans to claim uniqueness when in fact much of what is happening locally has its roots in what is taking place globally. The spread of new managerialism is a reflection and outcome of a broader neo-liberal discourse that has transformed relationships between the state, civil society and universities in major ways throughout the world (Webster & Mosoetsa 2001). The emergence of international private higher education is part of a global sweep of trade in a borderless education environment (Knight 2002; Scherrer 2002). The changing meanings of accountability

and autonomy are as contested in Europe and North America at the present time, as they might be in Africa and Latin America (Altbach 2000). The restructuring of higher education through mergers and other forms of realignment is by no means a South African or even an education phenomenon (Harman & Meek 2002) - even though its local manifestation might invoke apartheid's illogical development as the stimulus for such radical changes.

What, in conclusion, are the consequences of these changes for higher education and its constituencies? First, it means that *social relationships* within institutions are perhaps permanently altered - relationships between students, staff, administrators, and managers. Managerial models of relationships have effectively displaced collegial models long familiar, and comfortable, to institutions. Second, it means the *political relationship* between higher education institutions and government is also permanently altered; it is unlikely that government will withdraw its intervention-oriented disposition now that it has a firm foothold within institutions. Third, it means the *economic relationship* between universities and their competitors has changed, based as it is on a powerful logic of survival and domination. Left to the market, strong institutions will remain strong, and the weak will remain marginalised. But the primary impulse of institutions will be towards competition for standing and resources. The only difference is that the national cast of competitors will increasingly include a world market that has extended its trade liberalisation arguments to include educational services.

Notes

1. All student numbers are cited as full-time equivalent (FTE) students, that is, the subsidy value of a student determined on the basis of courses and contact time. This is typically less than a straightforward headcount enrolment of students. So, for example, SACTE and SACOL had 20 000 students in the late 1990s but this number comes to about 5 000 FTE students because of factors like the registration for single courses by individual students under flexible registration requirements.
2. Press statement by the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, on the transformation and reconstruction of the higher education system, Pretoria 9 December 2002.
3. Much of this data is drawn from the meticulous work of Ian Bunting, in Cloete et al. 2002: 149-180.

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