

# *The state of higher education in South Africa: From massification to mergers*

Jonathan Jansen

## *Introduction*

The policy ambitions of the South African government for higher education can be distinguished by two landmarks: the optimism of massification in the mid-1990s, and the reality of mergers almost ten years later. Whereas massification signalled a possible expansion of higher education opportunities, mergers mean a contraction of higher education institutions. While massification assumed greater student demand on the 36 public institutions of higher education, mergers represent (in part) a response to the unexpected and rapid decline in qualifying students from the school sector. And while massification left institutional identities relatively unscathed, mergers were deployed as a direct intervention to recast institutional landscapes. To understand the state of higher education in 2003, it is important to trace briefly the origins of massification and then to discuss in more detail the evolution of merger thinking in South Africa.

## *Higher education during the 1990s: the problems and the promises*

The post-apartheid government inherited a deeply divided higher education system. A developing nation of slightly more than 40 million people had a stunning array of post-school institutions: 21 universities, 15 technikons, 150 technical colleges, 120 colleges of education - alongside a large number of police, nursing and agricultural colleges, among others. The 36 public institutions of higher education divided into 21 universities and 15 technikons. This set of 36 institutions could - at least in terms of origins - be divided into 11 white universities and ten black universities, and eight white technikons and seven black technikons. Another division would yield seven white Afrikaans universities and four white English universities.<sup>1</sup> And while there has been a slow but inevitable deracialisation of former white institutions, principally in

the distribution of students, higher education remains visibly marked by racially skewed staffing patterns, resource disparities, differential research productivity, gross differences in student pass and progression rates, and resilient symbols of dominance and traditions of exclusion (see DoE 2001a; Government of South Africa 2002; Mabokela 2000; Mabokela & King 2001; Cloete et al. 2002).

How would this legacy be confronted? A 'programme of transformation' was announced through *Education White Paper 3* that would develop specific strategies for equity and redress, democratisation, development (including the building of human capacity), quality, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability (DoE 1997). From an institutional point of view, the interpretation of these principles and commitments was generous:

Much was expected to change in the academic profession in South Africa following the election of a black government in 1994. Staff equity profiles suggested that the number of black and women academics would increase significantly. Everyone expected that black institutions would receive redress funding to compensate [them] for decades of underdevelopment. Academics anticipated that salary levels and working conditions would improve. Others expected improvements in research output. (Koen 2002: 405)

Such expectations were not without foundation since policy promised 'ear-marked funds for institutional redress ... that would redress inequities and deficiencies experienced in particular by historically disadvantaged institutions' (DoE 1997: 28).

Yet very little changed in terms of these indicators of higher education transformation in South Africa, despite the heady optimism of the *White Paper on Higher Education* and its institutional interpreters; and there was no large-scale bail-out funding for historically disadvantaged institutions. It is important to realise, though, that the optimism of the early to mid-1990s was based on the expectation of dramatic growth in student demand for higher education i.e., massification. It is important to understand also the collapse of this national development ambition and its displacement over time with an all-pervasive discourse of mergers.

---

*Great expectations I: massification*

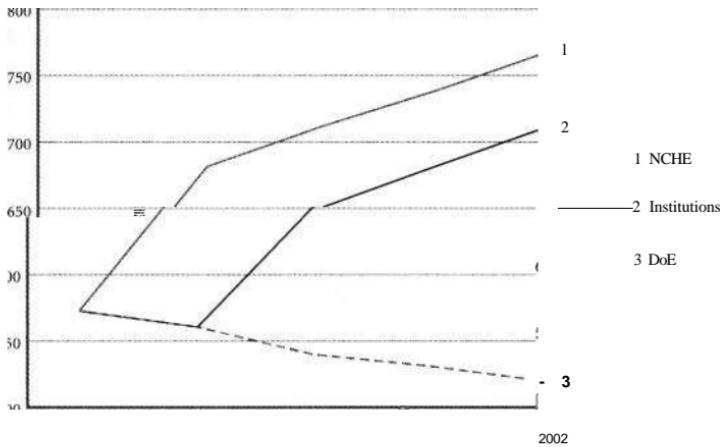
In a remarkably short period of operation (1995-96), the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) produced a report that laid the groundwork for higher education policy in South Africa. According to one of its key authors:

The central proposal of the NCHE was that South African higher education should be massified. Massification was the first proposal that attempted to resolve the equity-development tension since increased participation was supposed to provide greater opportunity for access (equity) while also producing more high-level skills that were necessary for economic growth. (Cloete et al. 2002: 97)

Definitionally, massification assumed an absolute growth in student enrolments as well as a more egalitarian distribution of students in higher education - one that reflected the race and gender profile of the population.

mean that the absolute number of students in higher education did not gradually increase after the late 1980s (Cooper & Subotsky 2001);<sup>2</sup> what matters for the purpose of this analysis is that the expectation of massive demand by students and, in particular, non-traditional students (black), did not happen. The NCHE predictions of student growth and massification were completely off target (see Figures 13.1, 13.2 and 13.3).

Figure 13.1 *Head-count university plus technikon enrolment projections, 1995-2002 (000's)*



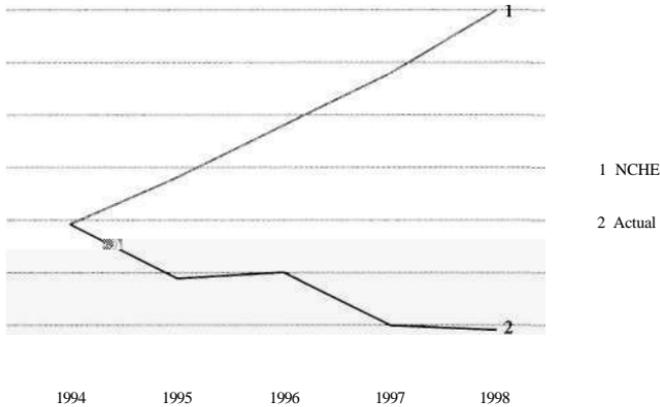
Source: Cloete & Bunting (1999)

In 1997 there were 21 000 fewer students enrolled in higher education than predicted in the NCHE report, and about 140 000 fewer than predicted by 1999 for the sector as a whole. What is much more striking, though, is the differential impact of the national decline in enrolments, with historically black universities severely affected by the decline, even as enrolments increased in former white universities and technikons. It is this dramatic drop in enrolments in black universities (among other factors) that lies at the root of the institutional decay and instability in these institutions in the mid- to late-1990s.

The decline of massification as a national development project eventually gave way to the emergence of merger thinking as a dominant project of the post-apartheid state. But the history of merger thinking has to be carefully traced since it was by no means mutually exclusive to the massification project; it did,

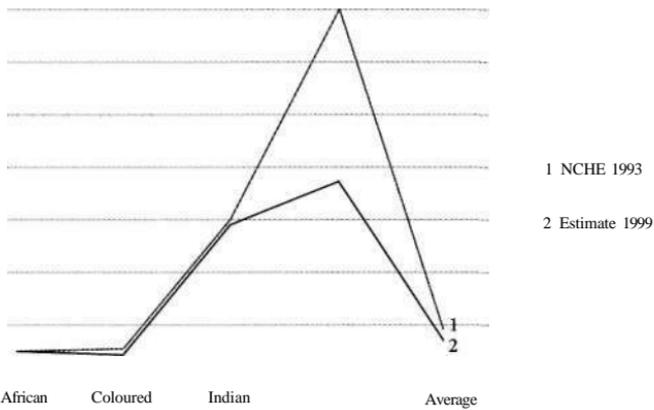
however, signal a difference of emphasis in the policy and planning initiatives of the post-apartheid government.

**Figure 13.2** School-leavers obtaining full matriculation exemption ('000s)



Source: Cloete & Bunting (1999)

**Figure 13.3** Gross participation rates, based on age group 20-24



Source: Cloete & Bunting (1999)

*Great expectations II: mergers*

The founding policy document on higher education after apartheid is the report of the *National Commission on Higher Education: A Framework for Transformation*, 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).<sup>3</sup> In other words, the language of size and shape already had its origins in this base document.

However, the NCHE was careful to defer any specific proposals on institutional restructuring, holding that over a period of time the number of institutional types required would become clearer. The emphasis in the NCHE was on institutional differentiation that would, in the aspirations of the Commission, be attained through governmental requirements for institutional missions, 'programme mix' and the regulatory authority of the new national qualifications framework. In addition, faith was expressed in statutory regional structures that could be 'consulted on the planning needs of the region, mergers [and] rationalisation ...' (1996: 198). In short, against the background of a predicted expansion of enrolments, an expressed faith in the authority of regulatory means for achieving institutional differentiation, and a clear commitment to voluntarism through regional collaboration among institutions, the NCHE's approach to the subject of mergers is rather underplayed - almost invisible - in the more than 400 pages submitted to President Mandela in July 1996.

Where the subject of mergers does feature in the NCHE report it is in the context of the colleges, a focus no doubt inspired by the earlier release of the National Teacher Education Audit in 1996, which suggested high levels of inefficiency and low levels of quality in the college sector (Hofmeyr & Hall 1996). According to the NCHE, the authorities should determine which colleges are needed and it contemplated the possibility of merging several colleges to constitute a new university or technikon, with the proviso that 'the merger should be multi-disciplinary, involving colleges from more than one field...' (NCHE 1996:156). If anything, the NCHE report allowed for the possibility of more rather than fewer universities, with merger activities restricted to the college sector. But it is safe to claim that the overwhelming emphasis of this substantial document was not on mergers, and certainly not on university mergers. The tone was set, rather, for institutional differentiation.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, the subject of mergers did not enjoy prominence in the subsequent *White Paper on Higher Education*. The paper contains an isolated reference to the possibility that '... planning [which] may lead to institutional mergers and closures' (DoE 1997: 2.45) and the promise that:

Incentive funding will be available on a selective basis to support the costs involved in regional collaboration among institutions which aim to consolidate, merge, share or otherwise collectively improve the efficient use of their facilities and resources for teaching, research or community service. (4.59)

The first substantial reference to an imminent institutional restructuring process only emerged in July 1999, following the appointment of Prof. Kader Asmal as 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)

The Council on Higher Education (CHE), a statutory body that advises the Minister, was approached to provide advice on the reconfiguration of the higher education system. In December 1999 the CHE responded with a memorandum to the Minister, *Towards a Framework and Strategy for Reconfiguring the Higher Education System in South Africa*, in which a task team was proposed to deliver on this reconfiguration exercise. In January 2000 the Minister bluntly spelt out the brief of the task team:

a set of concrete proposals on the shape and size of the higher education system and not a set of general principles which serve as guidelines for restructuring. I cannot over-emphasise the importance of this point. Until and unless we reach finality on institutional restructuring, we cannot take action and put in place the steps necessary to ensure the long-term affordability and sustainability of the higher education system. (CHE 2000: 2)

The task team was constituted in February 2000 and on 7 April of that year it produced a discussion document that offered a differentiated system of higher education based on institutional types, distinguished by various levels, types and durations of qualifications offered, eg. two-year qualifications offered in one kind of institution and four-year bachelors' degrees offered in other kinds of institutions. Strikingly, there is no reference in this document to institutional mergers but, rather, to institutional differentiation. Nevertheless, in a May 2000 press statement, the Minister made the point that the task team exercise was not 'targeted at closing institutions ... On the contrary, the reconfiguration exercise is key to preventing closure of those institutions that are experiencing serious difficulties' (CHE 2000: 8).

In July 2000 the CHE task team presented its report. In the final chapter on 'National Steering and Planning', the task team:

advances a number of recommendations on the size of the system in relation to the number of institutions, closures, combinations and funding [and] provides examples of possible combinations that could create a more rational and coherent higher education landscape. (CHE 2000: 51)

Here, for the first time, the spectre of 'combinations' of institutions is explicitly discussed and elaborated beyond the hitherto more vague terms such as 'restructuring' or 'reconfiguration'. But what did the task team mean by 'combination'? It is unclear, but at the time it did not appear to be synonymous with mergers, as the following extract from the report suggests:

Institutional combination must not be viewed as a threat but as an opportunity to reorient and revitalise higher education in pursuit of important social and educational goals. However, *the combination of institutions - whether through mergers or other mechanisms - will be demanding processes.* (CHE 2000: 55, emphases added)

At the same time, a literal reading of the CHE report instructs that *combinations* are intended to reduce the number of institutions without closing them. The wording is slippery: '... the task team recommends reducing the absolute number of higher education institutions. This does not necessarily imply closing institutions' (CHE 2000: 56). But it goes on to say that:

although Section 25 of the *Higher Education Act* [of 1997] makes provision for closure of institutions, the task team recommends

that there should be no closures. The task team recommends reducing the present number of institutions through combining institutions. (CHE 2000: 56-7)

The task team then took the bold step of listing 'examples of possible combinations' (2000: 60), warning that 'these are not meant to be exhaustive. They must not preclude the Minister identifying other possible combinations' (2000: 63) that could achieve the national goals for higher education.

In response to the CHE report, the Minister released a *National Plan for Higher Education* on 5 March 2001 CHE s0.0al0.024 Tc( gyul) Tj0 Tc(d) T32.13

provision of higher education ... including institutional mergers...' (DoE 2001b: 4). In December 2001 the NWG released its report, *The Restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa*, and recommended the reduction of higher education institutions from 36 to 21 through the specific mechanism of mergers, listing the specific institutions in various provinces to be targeted for merging. To achieve these specific merger goals, the NWG drew attention to the critical ingredients of political will on the part of government, additional financial resources - 'including the removal of current debt burdens' - institutional commitment, clear targets and time-frames, and a 'social plan' to deal with the inevitable human resource implications (DoE 2001b: 9).

In late April 2002 the Minister finalised his own proposals, based on the technical report of the NWG, and took these to the Cabinet for approval, with the focus on implementation of the final merger recommendations. With a few modifications on the Minister's proposals, the Cabinet approved the following mergers and incorporations (Asmal 2002):

- 9 The University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville.
- 0 The University of the North-West and Potchefstroom University.
- 0 The Technikon Pretoria, the Technikon Northern Gauteng and the Technikon North West.
- 0 The University of Fort Hare and the East London campus of Rhodes University.
- 0 The incorporation of Vista University campuses into specified universities and technikons in the region where each campus was located, eg. the incorporation of the Mamelodi campus into the University of Pretoria.
  - o The University of Port Elizabeth and the Port Elizabeth Technikon.
  - o The University of the North and the Medical University of South Africa.
  - o The University of the Transkei, the Border Technikon and the Eastern Cape Technikon.
- 0 The Rand Afrikaans University and the Technikon Witwatersrand.
- 0 The Cape Technikon and the Peninsula Technikon.

But there was another development in higher education that paralleled the general emergence of policy-thinking on mergers in higher education; this parallel process (already mentioned briefly) concerned the colleges of nursing, agriculture and education. While the first two (nursing and agriculture) are ongoing processes of merger deliberations, the colleges of education have enjoyed a fairly long and arduous journey to their current incorporation

status. This line of development has to be traced separately from the general narrative, in part because three of the case studies involved colleges of education being incorporated into universities, and in part because the college narrative sheds light on the incoherence of policy and planning in the early years of transition.

Since 1910 at least, the jurisdiction of colleges has been contested between central government and the four provinces, a contest that was eventually settled by housing colleges in racially segregated provincial authorities under apartheid (Hofmeyr & Hall 1996). It was left to the post-apartheid *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act* (No. 108 of 1996, Schedule 4) to make all tertiary education a 'national competence'. The legal implication for colleges in terms of the *White Paper* (1997) and the *Higher Education Act* (No. 101 of 1997, Section 21.2) was that colleges could either be established as autonomous institutions or as subdivisions that would be incorporated into an existing university or technikon.

This status for colleges was not anticipated, however, in the first National Teacher Education Audit released in 1996 (Hofmeyr & Hall 1996). The audit made three points about college governance. First, that the status of colleges must be resolved, noting that 'the dominant view in the college sector is that colleges should be national institutions of higher education' (1996: 84). Second, that appropriate autonomy should be devolved to colleges, which would then establish their own councils and senates. And third, that colleges should break their isolation through strategies that include 'affiliation by colleges to universities through schemes of association' (1996: 85).

It was left to the first Minister's NCHE (1996) to contemplate the incorporation or reorganisation of colleges into existing universities and technikons, a recommendation that was acted on through policy (the *White Paper* of 1997) and the law (the Act of 1997), as indicated earlier.

The implementation of these provisions was left to a departmental Technical Committee appointed in September 1997, which in 1998 delivered a document called *The Incorporation of Colleges of Education into the Higher Education Sector: A Framework for Implementation*. 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' (DoE 1998: 15). For the purposes of this study, the anticipated organisational arrangements are most interesting:

There are different structural arrangements possible within the option of incorporation into an existing higher education institution. The college may lose its identity completely and either become a faculty or be absorbed into an existing faculty of the higher education institution. Alternately, the college, while being juristically and administratively part of the higher education institution, retains by agreement, rights and powers beyond those of the usual academic components of a higher education institution, and is recognised as a special case among such components ... The Act... does not require uniformity in intra-institutional structural arrangements. (DoE 1998: 15)

The provincial reaction to the so-called 'framework document' was swift. By the start of 2000, the number of colleges had been cut from 120 (80 000 students) to 50 (15 000 students) (CHE 2000/2001). By the end of the year that number had been reduced to 25 'contact institutions' holding 10 000 students (and 1 000 staff). Another 5 000 students were registered in two distance learning colleges (with 500 staff) - the South African College for Teacher Education (Sacte) and the South African College for Open Learning (Sacol).<sup>4</sup>

The next step was the publication of a Government Notice (No. 1383, 15 December 2000), which served as a Ministerial Declaration of Colleges of Education as Subdivisions of Universities and Technikons. This notice provided a *Schedule* that specified for each province the college of education and the receiving institution of which it would be a subdivision.

Almost simultaneously, the DoE and the employee bodies of college staff signed the *Framework for the Management of Personnel in the Process of Incorporation of Teacher Education into Higher Education* (Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council Resolution 2000). This agreement held that all college employees 'shall be absorbed by the relevant provincial Education Department' (Public Service Bargaining Council 2000:3) and that all new posts created by the receiving higher education institution would first be advertised on a vacancy list 'restricted to personnel currently or formerly appointed or seconded by the Department to a College of Education ...' (2000: xx).

Earlier, at the negotiations of the Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council, the employee parties had apparently requested an independent body, the Joint Education Trust (JET), to facilitate the implementation of this agreement with respect to personnel employment conditions and data generation

on students, programmes, property, plant and finances. In August 2000, the College Fund, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contractor, funded JET on behalf of the Department of Education to play the role of external agent to facilitate the incorporation of colleges of education into the higher education system. In September 2000, JET produced *A Guiding Manual for The Incorporation of Designated Colleges of Education in Higher Education*, which spelt out tasks to be undertaken by JET in facilitating the process of incorporation.

In January 2001, after the framework document had been signed, the JET wrote to college rectors with the promise of facilitation and a checklist of responsibilities to be completed 'towards the finalisation of the incorporation process'. The subsequent progress on incorporation during 2001 and into 2002 assumed very different pathways, and unfolded at very different speeds and with markedly different effects in the various college-into-university incorporations. It is these uneven processes, and their effects, that this study seeks to explain. In doing so, the case studies yield less buoyant findings than declared by the most recent investigation into higher education: 'The National Working Group has further noted that colleges of education were rationalised and *successfully incorporated* into the higher education system with effect from January 2001' (DoE 2001b: 18; emphasis added).

This is how a more or less literal and official narrative of events relating to mergers in higher education - from the *White Paper* of 1997 through to the NWG Report of 2002 - reads. As a narrative it is conscious of its limits in capturing the intense and influential contestations that lay behind and between the move from one report to another, or from one moment in the restructuring process to the next; and of Throgmorton's (1993) 'tropes' - those rhetorical devices in a policy document that propose explanations, inspire public visions and recommend actions - that give policy 'its contingent meaning, and thus its power, from a particular audience, time, place and articulation' (Fischer & Forester 1993: 11).

### *Unscrambling the rationale for mergers*

Staying with the official narrative for the moment, a critical question is why these mergers were contemplated in the first place? The CHE task team, the Ministry's National Plan and the NWG all hold to the same basic motivation, which is repeated in the National Plan as 'the basis for assessing combinations

If institutions' (DoE 2001a: 89). Put directly, a merger can be deemed as successful if, among other things:

- it enhances access and equity goals for both staff and students;
- it enables economies of scale through the creation of larger multi-purpose institutions with more efficient uses of buildings, facilities and human resources;
- it overcomes the threat to institutional viability in terms of student numbers, income and expenditure patterns, and management capacities;
- it creates new institutions with new identities and cultures that transcend their past racial and ethnic institutional histories and contribute to their deracialisation.

The official rationale for mergers was not shared by all stakeholders in higher education. To some, like the Association of Vice Chancellors of Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (ASAHDI), the mergers represented a deliberate attack on historically black universities, on poor and rural students, and on the cultural and intellectual legacy of the historically black universities.

The South African University Vice Chancellors Association (SAUVCA), while noting common aspirations for mergers (like equity), offered a very different rationale for institutional mergers (Kotecha & Harman 2001). To SAUVCA, the official rationale for mergers sought to:

- resolve the high maintenance costs per student of some institutions;
- remove differences in perception of quality among higher education institutions;
- prevent closure of institutions that are not financially viable;
- redress the dilemma of low management capacity in some institutions.

The organisation also had the impression that the rationale had been written to justify decisions that had already been made rather than to explain them. The perceptual divide is significant. For one set of actors the mergers seek to deal with dysfunctional institutions which, it so happens, are the historically black institutions carrying the disadvantage of apartheid (*Business Day* 07.03.02). For another group of persons, the mergers represent one of the key strategies for creating 'the new system of South African institutions and not a collection of disparate historically white or black institutions' (Asmal 2002).

The problem partly with these readings of policy is that they are based on a literal reading of official documents on the one hand, and with a preferred interpretation of emphases on the other hand. Critics of mergers stress the

national development commitments of the *White Paper on Higher Education* and, indeed, its commitment to redressing the plight of the historically disadvantaged institutions. Little attention is assigned to the symbolic meanings of policy as distinct from its implementation logic within educational

It is equally clear that universities are not only being called on to play a strategic role in meeting national development goals such as human resource capacity, but also to train this new cadre of scientists and technologists to enable global competitiveness. This dual focus on building capacity and increasing competitiveness fits perfectly, of course, with global demands on higher education in the third world (see World Bank 2002).

The strategy for pursuing these goals was the reconfiguration of the higher education landscape, *not* the retention of institutions that were inefficient (in terms of the utilisation of state resources) or ineffective (in terms of delivery on national development goals). What propelled the state in actively pursuing this relatively dormant agenda<sup>5</sup> were two critical factors that threatened to undermine this ambition for global competitiveness and national development.

The first factor was the dramatic decline in student enrolments in higher education. This decline impacted directly on the already vulnerable historically black institutions, struggling with financial deficits, high failure rates, managerial ineffectiveness and poor students unable to pay for higher education (Habib 2001; Jansen 2002a). If the absolute decline in high-school graduates was a reality for all institutions, it was a disaster for black universities in that, increasingly, middle-class and above-average black students were drawn to the former white institutions. The net effect of this shift was to place already weak and fragile black universities in a precarious position in terms of funding and, as it turns out, future survival.

The second factor was the dramatic incline in institutional instability during the mid- to late-1990s. Black institutions were embroiled in a vortex of student revolt, staffing conflicts, managerial ineptitude, unstable councils and senates, and a general failure of the leadership of universities and technikons to effectively manage this instability (Durand 1999a, 1999b; Nhlapo 2000; Saunders 1999; Skweyiya 1998). In the meantime, deficits soared and education quality nosedived even further. Under a post-apartheid government this was not only a political embarrassment but a development crisis (Habib 2001). This led to a rapid rewriting of legislation allowing government to not only launch several commissions of inquiry but also to appoint a series of administrators for the interim management of these unstable institutions.

The focus of this governmental strategy, from an institutional point of view, was race-blind, in that the aim was to deracialise all institutions and to create a smaller number of high-quality, non-racial institutions. This is what critics

of restructuring fail to understand: that the recasting of the institutional landscape was never about retaining pockets of black institutions on the one hand, and islands of white institutions on the other. In this respect, the decision not to merge Fort Hare was a reluctant compromise on the part of government, given the intense opposition from leading politicians within the ruling party, based on the historic and symbolic role of the University of Fort Hare in the previous century. Rather than nourish black institutions simply because of their racial and historical status, the focus of government was on opening up and accelerating access of black students and staff into high-quality institutions. For this reason the unrelenting pressure from activist groups - like ASAHDI - on the sentimental issue of what one of its leaders calls 'native issues',<sup>6</sup> is unlikely to alter the path of institutional restructuring. This will not be easy, though, since the emotional rhetoric around the preservation of black institutions and the black working classes strike a sensitive chord among powerful figures in the ruling elite.<sup>7</sup>

But this focus was not only averse to nurturing inefficient black institutions, it was also committed to retaining efficient white institutions; this logic was already established within *White Paper 3*, without (understandably) racial referents:

Despite the negative consequences of the apartheid legacy, some higher education institutions have developed *internationally competitive research and teaching capacities*. Their academic expertise and infrastructure are national assets. It would be detrimental to the national

the inefficient rural institutions (mainly black universities) were earmarked for merger with highly efficient urban institutions (mainly the former white universities). The reasoning of government and its advisory body, the CHE, was not to destabilise already efficient institutions, except to require some minimal adjustments to counter the political charge of leaving white institutions untouched. Such small adjustments include, for example, the former white universities losing specific programmes (like dentistry at Stellenbosch University going to the University of the Western Cape) or incorporating small entities (like the University of Pretoria being required to incorporate the small college campus of Vista University in Mamelodi, Pretoria).

Finally, this standpoint explains why the highly inefficient colleges of education were closed (and the few effective ones incorporated into universities), effectively removing 80 000 student teachers from the system; and why 150 technical colleges were merged, literally overnight,<sup>9</sup> into only 50 new institutions to deal with the high costs of generally inefficient technical schools.

In sum, the idea was to strengthen the competitive position of the urban and former white institutions while at the same time dealing with the inefficiencies of rural and black institutions through closure, merger or incorporation.

### *Implications for the nation*

What does this mean for the nation? First, it means that South Africa will have a smaller number of institutions with a much narrower quality range than in the past. These institutions will be mainly the former white universities and technikons that are dominant in the urban areas and which will become deracialised in terms of staffing, students and culture so that over time their racial birthmarks will be eroded. What remains in question is the pace of this transformation in former white institutions; this will depend on the quality of leadership, in terms of commitment and strategy, within such institutions. This is especially true with respect to changes in staffing and institutional cultures. What also remains in question is whether this transformation will yield on the issue of academic standards or managerial efficiencies, and whether strategies will be pursued to enhance overall institutional standing and competitiveness.<sup>10</sup> It could go either way.

Second, what this also means is that the class character of these institutions will change as more and more middle-class black and white students begin to

populate these urban, former white institutions.<sup>11</sup> These students in general will be academically better prepared than their rural, poor counterparts, especially as the urban white school system becomes more and more deracialised with respect to learner enrolments. This also means that institutional efficiencies will not suffer any significant setbacks - in terms of student pass and progression rates - because of the class and quality of the deracialised student body.

Third, it means that there will be fewer access routes open to rural students wishing to pursue university education *unless* meaningful alternatives are instituted, nurtured and sustained. The closure of inefficient technical colleges and colleges of education, the effective closure of certain universities (like the University of the Transkei), and the merger of black universities (like the University of Durban-Westville) with former white institutions, effectively means that poor, under-performing students who often scraped through higher education, will in effect have fewer opportunities for such access because of the tuition structure of the more competitive institutions and the higher levels set for admission to such institutions. It will be crucial to the credibility of restructuring efforts (and the legitimacy of government itself) that quality access institutions and programmes be set in place (without creating any new ones) to enable rural black students eventually to enter higher education well prepared for the task. In this scenario, the quasi-welfare status of many historically black universities and the pretence of offering university-level education to the struggling graduates of a dysfunctional school system will eventually be terminated. In the long run, there is no alternative but to improve dramatically the quality of school education so that more and better-prepared high-school graduates, especially from rural areas, are delivered to the higher education system.

### Notes

- 1 The distance education institutions, the University of South Africa and Technikon South Africa, were controlled by the white administration of the so-called House of Assembly during the apartheid days, even though they could enrol black students outside of the permit regulations, given that the students were off-campus.
- 2 These three illustrations are drawn directly from Cloete & Bunting (1999).
- 3 This section of the paper borrows liberally from the introductory chapter to a recent book that I edited, *Mergers in Higher Education: Lessons learned in transitional contexts* (Jansen 2002a).

- 4 All student numbers are cited as full time equivalent (FTE) students, i.e. the subsidy value of a student determined on the basis of courses and contact time. This is typically less than a straightforward head-count enrolment of students. So, for example, SACTE and SACOL had 20 000 students in the late 1990s but this actually comes to about 5 000 FTE students because of factors like the registration for single courses by individual students under flexible registration requirements.
- 5 'Dormant' in the sense that while institutional reconfiguration was prefigured in the 1997 *White Paper on Higher Education*, it was not elevated to the level of policy and planning action until 2000. I hold that the combination of an activist Minister and a set of black universities in crisis, propelled the second Minister of Education in the post-apartheid government to act on these 'landscape issues'.
- 6 Professor Itumeleng Mosala, at the October 2002 Conference on Mergers at the University of South Africa, made the provocative point that 'the native question' had not been addressed in the merger proposals of government.
- 7 Among others, the Premier of the Eastern Cape directly challenged the merits of the merger proposals coming from his senior colleagues in the Ministry of Education; this was striking because of the lack of public dissent within the ranks of senior members of the ANC and through the public media.
- 8 The Gerwel Report was the product of an investigation into the role of Afrikaans in higher education institutions, commissioned by the Minister of Education, Prof. Kader Asmal, and led by Prof. Jakes Gerwel, retired Vice Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape. See *Report to the Minister of Education AK Asmal by the Informal Committee Convened to Advise on the Position of Afrikaans in the University System*. Available at [http://education.pwv.gov.za/DoE\\_Sites/Higher\\_Education/Higher\\_Education\\_Index.html](http://education.pwv.gov.za/DoE_Sites/Higher_Education/Higher_Education_Index.html).
- 9 The fact that colleges of education and technical colleges were closed, incorporated or merged with little resistance, is largely because of the lack of political muscle and institutional status of this component of the post-secondary education sector.
- 10 I have made the point repeatedly in other forums that while former white institutions have generally maintained a high standard of managerial efficiency (especially the universities) and a reasonable standard of academic quality (although this is highly uneven across academic departments), it is by no means world class.
- 11 I am grateful to Mandisa Mbali from the University of Natal for reminding me of this important trend.

### *References*

- Asmal, K (2002) *Press statement by the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, on the Transformation and Reconstruction of the Higher Education System*, 09.12.02. Pretoria.
- CHE (2000) *Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21st Century*. Pretoria.

- Cloete, N, Maasen, P, Moja, T, Perold, H, Gibbon, T & Fehnel, R (eds.) (2002) *Transformation in higher education: Global pressures and local realities in South Africa*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Cloete, N & Bunting, I (1999) *Higher education transformation: Assessing performance in South Africa*. Pretoria: Centre for Higher Education Transformation.
- Cooper, D & Subotsky, G (2001) *The skewed revolution: Trends in South African higher education, 1988-1998*. Cape Town: UWC, Education Policy Unit.
- DACST (1996) *White Paper on Science and Technology: Preparing for the 21st Century*. Pretoria: Department of Arts, Culture, Science & Technology.
- DoE (Department of Education) (1996) *Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- DoE (1997) *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- DoE (1998) *The Incorporation of Colleges of Education into the Higher Education Sector: A framework for implementation*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- DoE (1999). *Call to Action: Mobilising Citizens to Build a South African Education and Training System for the 21st Century*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- DoE (2001a). *National Plan for Higher Education*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- DoE (2001b). *The Restructuring of the Higher education System in South Africa - Report of the National Working Group to the Minister of Education*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Durand, JF (1999a) Investigation of the situation of the Vaal Triangle by the independent assessor, *Government Gazette* No. 19239 (11 September). Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Durand, JF (1999b) Report of the independent assessor to the Minister of Education on Mangosuthu Technikon, *Government Gazette* No. 20485 (17 September). Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Fischer, F & Forester, J (eds.) (1993) *The argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning*. Durham, North Carolina, and London: Duke University Press.
- Government of South Africa (2002) *The National Plan for Research and Development*. Pretoria.
- Habib, A (2001) The institutional crisis of the University of the Transkei, *Politikon* 28(2): 157-179.
- Hofmeyr, J & Hall, G (1996). *The national teacher audit: Synthesis report*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Jansen, JD (ed.) (2002a) *Mergers in higher education: Lessons learned in transitional contexts*. Pretoria: UNISA Press.
- Jansen, JD (2002b) Political symbolism as policy craft: Explaining non-reform in South African education after apartheid, *Journal of Education Policy* 17(2): 199-215.

