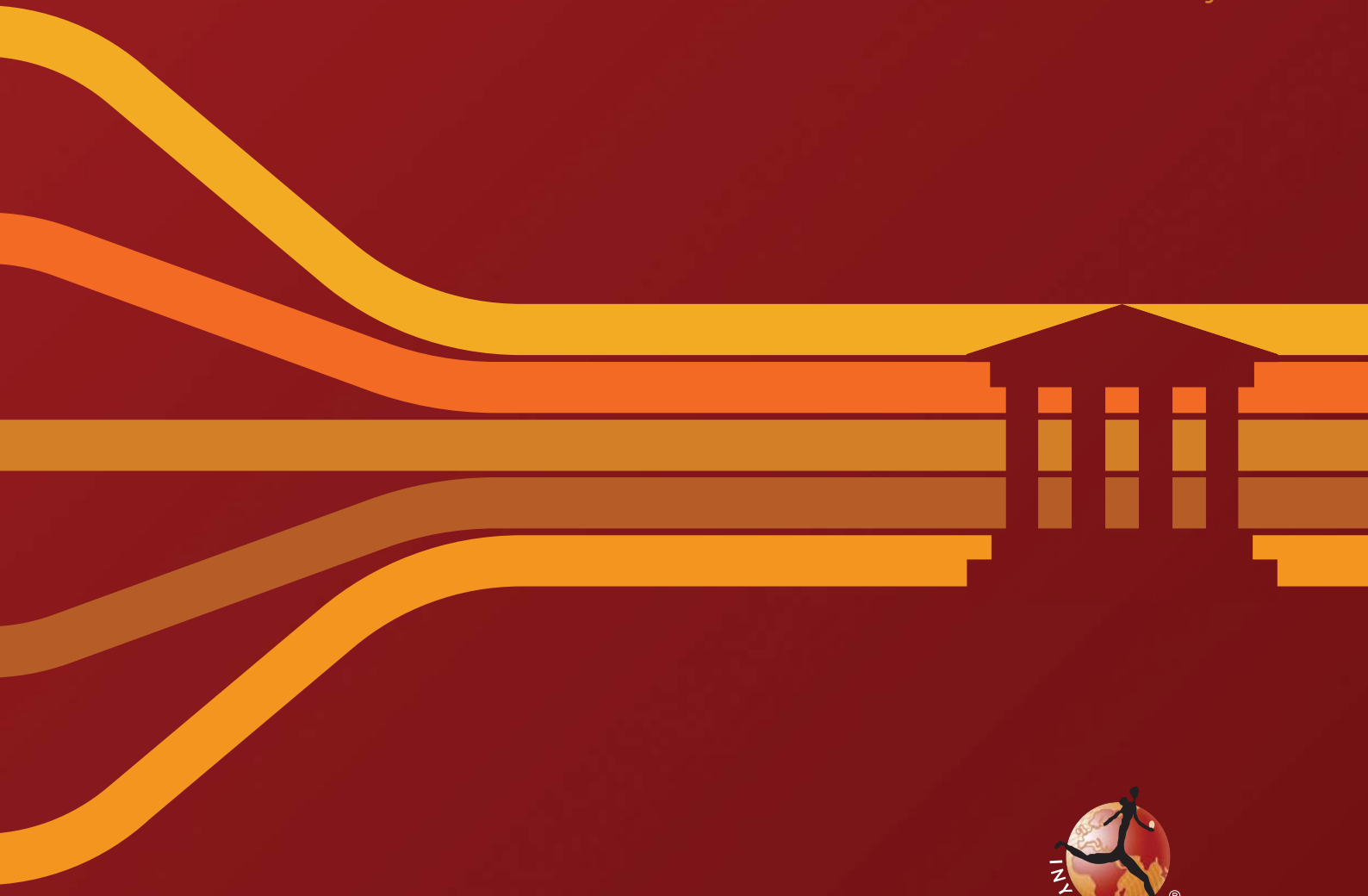
# Student Access and Success:

## Issues and Interventions in South African Universities

Thandi Lewin and Monica Mawoyo



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THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

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Published by Inyathelo: The South African Institute for Advancement

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First published | February 2014
ISBN NUMBER: 978-0-9921960-7-3

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This research and report was made possible with the generous support of The Kresge Foundation.

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# Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to thank all those who contributed to this research. In particular, we would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to the 32 research participants who were interviewed for the study. The participants are all extremely busy individuals who gave up their time willingly and discussed their views and experiences openly with us. We are grateful for their generosity.

The researchers would also like to sincerely thank the Research Advisory Group appointed to provide input on the literature review, research process and findings, and draft report. This group was comprised of professionals who gave generously of their time and expertise to advise us on this piece of work. Their inputs were very useful and we appreciated their positive support to us as researchers and for the project in general.

Thank you to the transcribers who kept to our tight deadlines for the project.

We would also like to acknowledge the administrative and research support that Ludene Achouri gave to this project. Her assistance throughout the project was invaluable to us. Sincere thanks go to Melanie Judge, who provided project management, support and guidance at all stages and whose ideas enriched both the process of the research and the content of the report enormously. Thanks also go to Gaby Ritchie and Shelagh Gastrow for their inputs and support throughout the project. The assistance of other Inyathelo staff members at various points is also greatly appreciated.

We would like to thank The Kresge Foundation for funding this research. Any opinions, findings, conclusions and recommendations are our own and cannot be attributed to the funder.

Thandi Lewin and Monica Mawoyo

# Glossary of terms

**Articulation gap:** The disparity between the learning requirements of higher education programmes and the knowledge and competencies of students entering universities. This disparity is caused by differences in teaching and learning between high school and university.

**Cohort studies:** Longitudinal studies that track the performance of groups of students enrolled in specific courses in institutions. Cohort studies can be based on one institution or across institutions nationally.

**Enrolment planning:** The official term used to describe the process of engagement that takes place between institutions and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), specifically focusing on the enrolments permitted at each institution.

**Epistemological access:** A term coined by Wally Morrow to describe how to understand and work with "academic ways of knowing" required in universities. These ways of knowing may differ according to institution although there are generally broadly accepted ways of knowing and functioning within universities.

**Graduation rate:** The total number of students graduating as a percentage of total enrolled students for a particular year.

**Low:** Numerically small.

**Participation rate:** Participation in higher education enrolment expressed as a percentage of the 20 - 24 year-old national population group.

**Poor:** Pertaining to low socio-economic status.

**Scholarship of Teaching and Learning:** Scholarly inquiry into student learning to encourage reflective practice aimed at improving teaching. Research findings are made public to encourage debate and wider dissemination of scholarly inquiry into student learning.

**Socio-economic status:** Extent of an individual's family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and social status in the community.

**Student engagement:** The extent to which students devote their time and energy to educationally purposeful activities.

**Throughput rate:** Percentage of a cohort of students who complete their registered qualification within the prescribed or an extended time period.

**Underprepared:** Primarily used here to describe students whose high school preparation presents challenges to them when they first enter university. Aspects of underpreparedness include not being able to speak the language of instruction at university fluently, which affects verbal and written communication, and not having the ability to manage learning independently.

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AD | Academic Development |
| CACH | Central Applications Clearing House |
| CHE | Council on Higher Education |
| CPUT | Cape Peninsula University of Technology |
| DET | Department of Education and Training |
| DHET | Department of Higher Education and Training |
| DOE | Department of Education |
| DVC | Deputy Vice-Chancellor |
| ECP | Extended Curriculum Programme |
| FET | Further Education and Training |
| HDHET | Higher Diploma in Higher Education and Training |
| HELTASA | Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa |
| HEMIS | Higher Education Management Information System |
| HEQC | Higher Education Quality Committee |
| HEQSF | Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework |
| HESA | Higher Education South Africa |
| LMS | Learning Management System |
| NBT | National Benchmark Test |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NEET | Not in Education, Employment or Training |
| NPC | National Planning Commission |
| NPHE | National Plan for Higher Education |
| NRF | National Research Foundation |
| NSFAS | National Student Financial Aid Scheme |
| PMG | Parliamentary Monitoring Group |
| QEP | Quality Enhancement Project |
| RAG | Research Advisory Group |
| REAP | Rural Education Access Programme |
| SAAIR | Southern African Association for Institutional Research |
| SAIDE | South African Institute for Distance Education |
| SAQA | South African Qualifications Authority |
| SES | Socio-economic status |
| SIGs | Special Interest Groups |
| SOTL | Scholarship of Teaching and Learning |
| TDG | Teaching Development Grant |
| TIMSS | Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study |
| UNISA | University of South Africa |
| UoTs | Universities of Technology |

# Executive summary

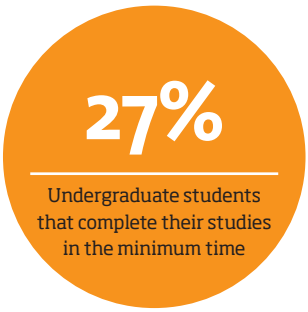
This study, funded by The Kresge Foundation and commissioned by Inyathelo: The South African Institute for Advancement, provides an overview of access and success in the South African university system. It addresses these issues at the level of policy and social context, and at the level of institutional practice. The study was conducted through a broad literature review and a set of interviews with mainly Academic Development (AD) professionals in South African universities.

The major research questions were as follows:

- How is access and success work defined in the South African higher education system?
- What is the policy context within which access and success work takes place?
- What are the main types of activities that constitute access and success work, both within and across institutions, and who carries out and supports these activities?
- What are the key debates in the AD environment and how do these manifest in the work being done?
- What are the main themes framing access and success work, including the challenges and gaps identified?
- What data on student success are being collected at system and institutional level, and how is it being used?

South Africa has relatively low participation rates in higher education in relation to its own policy goals and other comparative developing countries. Participation rates are also highly inequitable, a legacy of apartheid discrimination in education. Graduation and throughput rates are low, so although access to higher education has increased, the outcomes of particularly undergraduate education are a matter of serious concern within the higher education community. Recent cohort studies show that only 27 percent of undergraduate students complete their studies in the minimum time and that only about half of the students entering higher education will ever graduate (CHE, 2013a).

Access in this report is understood not simply as formal access to university but more broadly encompassing issues of "epistemological access". Equally, success is not merely understood as graduation from an academic programme, but encompasses issues of quality, employability and personal growth.




Equity and success rates are a major concern of post-1994 policy in higher education, and policy is one of the major drivers of change in this area. State funding to universities, including targeted funding for the improvement of teaching in higher education, plays an important role

State funding to universities, including targeted funding for the improvement of teaching in higher education, plays an important role in transformation related to access and success.

in transformation related to access and success. Planning and quality assurance mechanisms are also relevant to the improvement of student success rates. In 2013, a number of shifts took place, re-focusing policy and related mechanisms on the improvement of teaching and learning within universities for better success rates. These include a new draft policy on the Teaching Development Grant (TDG), the outline of the process for the new Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) on teaching and learning of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and a proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform released by the CHE.

Factors influencing access and success at university are complex and multi-dimensional and are presented conceptually for the purposes of this report in a diagram on page 41. Social factors influencing access and success includes schooling background, socio-economic status, race and gender, and the social context of learning. Academic factors influencing access and success are presented in this report as student and staff-related, and include issues of pedagogy, language, and literacy, teaching and assessment practices, and curriculum structure.

Drawn from a literature review and discussions with respondents, the report presents a range of interventions designed to enhance student access and success. The emphasis is on AD interventions. These are grouped into five major areas of work:

1. **Transition and entry:** centred on transition, admission and first-year experience.
2. **Social support:** clustered in programmes under the banners of psychosocial support and mentoring.
3. **Teaching and learning:** comprised of programmes that provide better learning opportunities. These include infrastructure improvement, extended curriculum programmes, Supplemental Instruction, tutoring, support for writing, literacy, and numeracy, and systems for early detection of students who are struggling academically.
4. **Research:** aimed at influencing evidence-based decision-making for improvement.
5. **Professional development:** centred on professional development including induction programmes, courses and workshops, and research support.

Overall, there is evidence of a substantial range of programmes and activities within institutions aimed at student success. Many but not all of these programmes are linked to AD departments within universities.

Constraints on AD work in universities are highlighted in this report, drawn primarily from the research interviews conducted for this study. A number of issues arose, including those relating to:

- the staffing, resourcing and intellectual development of teaching and learning work
- the appropriateness of teaching infrastructure, curriculum structure and development

- the ways in which institutions use data and conduct research for planning purposes
- a complex set of issues relating to attitudes towards teaching and the status of teaching and learning, which are linked to both leadership and structure within institutions.

The report proposes a number of priority areas for future action to improve access and success rates in South African universities. These priorities have been grouped into nine themes:

- enhancing the status and practice of teaching
- supporting scholarship in teaching and learning
- improving curriculum development and teaching practice
- using technology to support teaching
- building data and research capacity
- ensuring enabling policy frameworks
- improving infrastructure for teaching and learning
- growing a new generation of AD professionals
- addressing institutional structures and integration.

Overall, the range of suggested areas for priority action reflect the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of access and success work within universities. While universities cannot impact on all the factors influencing student success, they can pay serious attention to the quality and status of teaching and learning. This is identified in this research as the core issue requiring action and attention. As changes in the national policy environment and the voices of leaders in the AD sector show, despite the overwhelming social challenges that have led to persistent inequities and a poor-performing university sector, there is much that can be done to create positive shifts.

It is proposed here that with political will and leadership to address the major weaknesses in teaching and learning, enhanced collaboration across the sector, improved understanding of the ongoing trends and developing the necessary capacity for meaningful change, the problems in the South African university system can be turned around.

While universities cannot impact on all the factors influencing student success, they can pay serious attention to the quality and status of teaching and learning.

# 1 Introduction

Inyathelo: The South African Institute for Advancement, on behalf of The Kresge Foundation, commissioned this research report. The study provides a broad overview of the access and success work done at and across South African universities and the context within which it is taking place.

Issues relating to student access and success in South African universities dominate the higher education policy landscape. The problems of low participation and low student throughput rates are, arguably, the single biggest challenge facing the South African public higher education system. These low rates raise significant concerns about the productivity of the system and the high costs to government and institutions. Importantly, it also raises substantial equity issues. Despite the overall demographic changes to the student bodies of South African universities, low graduation and throughput rates still affect black students - particularly those from poor backgrounds - in large numbers (Scott *et al*, 2007; CHE[1], 2013a).

Low graduation and throughput rates occur in the context of a struggling but growing post-school system which needs to accommodate the educational requirements of enormous numbers of young unemployed people (nearly 3 million in 2007). The current Further Education and Training (FET) college system functions inadequately and enrols fewer students than the university system. This leads to the "inverted pyramid" of enrolments, as policy goals anticipated greater enrolments in vocational training than in universities. It means the system – combined with low throughput at all levels – is not meeting the educational needs of young people, a growing economy and a rapidly changing society (CHET, 2009).

Issues of access and success are addressed in higher education policy and in numerous programmes located within and across universities.

Issues of access and success are addressed in higher education policy and in numerous programmes located within and across universities, as described in this report. There are also substantial literatures addressing access and success in South African higher education, and a significant community of academics and researchers investigating the causes and solutions to these problems. The work in this field has developed over the past three decades.

1 The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is a statutory body set up by the 1997 Higher Education Act to advise the relevant minister on matters of higher education policy, to monitor and report on higher education and to develop and manage a quality assurance system for higher education.

It must be recognised that "access" is not simply about providing a place for a student to study at university. Rather, access is conceptualised within the AD environment in more complex ways that concern the kind of environment and curricula necessary for "epistemological access". This term, coined by Wally Morrow, describes "access to the academic ways of knowing that sustain the universities" (Boughey and Niven, 2012). Conceived of in this way, access allows students to participate fully and effectively in higher education. Equally, success is not merely about graduating from an academic programme, although this is relevant to individual students, institutions, and the higher education system as a whole. Success also relates to the quality of the programmes and the teaching of these programmes, the kinds of skills and attributes with which students leave university, including their preparedness for the world of work and their ability to enter employment as successful graduates.

Debates about access to and success at university – i.e. access with success – have been a central concern of political and policy debates in the university sector since 1994. Indeed, concerns about the low success rates of white students in South Africa's universities were expressed during the apartheid era (Akoojee and Nkomo, 2007; CHE, 2013a). This report focuses on the period since 1994.

As the Council on Higher Education's (CHE) theoretical overview of student access and performance shows, university access and success has "become one of the most controversial fields in studies of higher education in South Africa"; overall the issues being grappled with are "ideologically problematic, conceptually complex and deeply embedded in the struggle for social justice and global competitiveness" (CHE, 2010: 53).

This report traces the debates and discourses relating to access and success work at two major levels: that of the social and policy context within which universities operate, and the level of work taking place at universities themselves. These two levels of analysis are intricately connected, as universities are social institutions that operate within a particular social-political-economic context, but also impact on that context through the work that they do. These levels provide a way of analysing the different structural and cultural conditions that impact on students who aspire to enter and achieve in higher education.

At institutional level, the project chose to focus on a particular field of activity, that of Academic Development (AD). In South Africa, AD refers to a range of initiatives relating to teaching and learning improvement, including academic staff development. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the CHE defines AD as follows:

> A field of research and practice that aims to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning in higher education, and to enable institutions and the higher education

AD refers to a range of initiatives relating to teaching and learning improvement, including academic staff development.

> system to meet key educational goals, particularly in relation to equity of access and outcomes. Academic Development encompasses four interlinked areas of work: student development (particularly foundational development and skills provision), staff development, curriculum development, and institutional development (HEQC, 2007:74).

This report recognises the substantial and multidimensional range of factors impacting on university access and success. However, the focus on AD is informed by the understanding that the development of teaching and learning within universities is arguably the foremost area of work that could improve the current situation of worrying educational outcomes in the university sector. It is also the primary field of work that universities can have an impact on.

The project recognises the important links between AD and the availability of high-quality data on access and success and therefore also examines this area of work, although to a more limited extent. There are many other areas, interconnected with AD work, aimed at effecting change in access and success. While some of these areas are described in this report, they have not been the focus of intensive study. Teaching and learning is not restricted to AD units – however, in most institutions a significant amount of centralised planning, support and intellectual work is centred in AD units, particularly relating to access and success.

This report should be read as a snapshot of current work in a particular field.

This is a broad and complex area of study, with scholarship produced over the last 30 years in South African universities. The report does not attempt to provide a detailed summary of this extensive field of scholarship but rather a general overview of the main themes. While it is not a comprehensive mapping of activities across the sector, it reflects a range of work aimed at deepening meaningful access to and success in universities, and identifies key challenges and gaps. This field of scholarship and practice develops all the time and in many ways quite rapidly. This report should be read as a snapshot of current work in a particular field and not as an in-depth exploration of every aspect of access and success.

The report is structured in the following way. The methodology section outlines the research questions and the selected methods of investigation. The report then goes on to describe the key features of the current situation, as it relates to access with success in universities. Following this, the report traces the policy context within which access and success work takes place. The next two sections outline, firstly, the non-academic social factors that impact on this area and, secondly, the primarily academic matters related to this field. Despite being approached separately in the report, the diverse influences on access and success are recognised as being interconnected. The report then describes the range of interventions taking place across the university sector, drawing both from the relevant literatures and from interviews conducted for the study. Some constraints

on university-based access and success work are then discussed, with reference to interview data. The final section focuses on drawing out the major priorities for future action identified through this research project. In summary, Table 1 provides an outline of the structure of the report.

Table 1: Outline of report structure

| Report Section | Contents |
|---|---|
| 2 | Methodology |
| 3 | Understanding university access and success in the South African context |
| 4 | Tracing access and success through policy |
| 5 | Non-academic factors affecting access and success |
| 6 | Academic factors influencing access and success |
| 7 | Interventions to improve success |
| 8 | Constraints on Academic Development work |
| 9 | Priority areas for future activities |
| 10 | Conclusion |

# 2 Methodology

## 2.1 Research process

### 2.1.1 Overview

Broadly, the study set out to address the following key research questions:

- How is access and success work defined in the South African higher education system?
- What is the policy context within which access and success work takes place?
- What are the main types of activities that constitute access and success work, both within and across institutions, and who carries out and supports these activities?
- What are the key debates taking place in the AD environment and how do these manifest in the work being done?
- What are the main themes framing access and success work, including the challenges and gaps identified?
- What data on student success is being collected at system and institutional level, and how are the data being used?

The methodological approach taken in the study was chosen for two major reasons. The first relates to the time available to undertake the study, which necessitated a targeted set of interviews, supported by a broad literature review, as the most effective way of gathering overview data on the system. Secondly, a deliberate decision was made to interview a particular set of university staff that are involved in strategic decision-making and programme implementation in the broad area of teaching and learning/Academic Development. This decision was motivated as follows: although the factors influencing access to and success within universities are multiple and complex, academic factors relating to teaching and learning policy and practice within universities are the primary site of intervention to improve student success rates.

The Research Advisory Group provided opportunity for engagement with AD professionals and others working in student access and success.

The Research Advisory Group (RAG), appointed in consultation with The Kresge Foundation, comprises practitioners and researchers who are leaders in the field in South Africa and represent a range of institutions. The RAG provided opportunity for engagement with AD professionals and others working in student access and success. It served as a forum for discussion of the literature review and research findings, and provided input on how to improve on and finalise the report.

The members of the RAG are:

- Nasima Badsha
- Prof Chrissie Boughey
- Prof Vivienne Bozalek
- Dr John Butler-Adam
- Dr Rubby Dhunpath
- Patricia Gibbon
- Jennifer Glennie
- Prof Diane Grayson
- Prof Brenda Leibowitz
- Dr Matete Madiba
- Dr Muki Moeng
- Assoc Prof Vimal Ranchhod
- Dr Francois Strydom
- Prof Moloko Sepota
- Prof Jennifer Clarence-Fincham
- Valindawo Dwayi
- Prof Cheryl Foxcroft
- Prof Ian Scott

To answer the research questions, three core activities were undertaken: a literature review, a desktop review of AD programmes at the 23 public universities in the country[2], and interviews with heads of AD and selected heads of institutional planning.

**23**

Public universities at which AD programmes were reviewed

## 2.1.2 Literature review

To draw out key themes, the researchers conducted a literature review of the relevant policy documents and academic literatures relating to access and success at universities in South Africa. Resources comprised a range of policy documents, journal articles, books and research reports.

## 2.1.3 Desktop review of Academic Development programmes

To gain a good understanding of the range of activities taking place within the AD field, the researchers undertook a desktop review of institutional websites, specifically AD web pages. Besides providing an introduction to the activities taking place in different institutions, the desktop review was useful in preparing the researchers for the interviews. Reading the institutional activities before the interviews helped prepare the researchers for meaningful engagement with the respondents and also highlighted issues that needed further probing during interviews, for example clarification about size of units. Further explanations of services and activities were sought during interviews. Data for 22 universities

2 In 2013 the higher education system included 23 public universities and two national institutes of higher education. The latter are not included in this study. Two new universities, the University of Mpumalanga and Sol Plaatje University, begin operating in 2014.

The study had an interest in understanding the primarily academic interventions designed to support and improve student success, while acknowledging the many other influences on student success.

were available through desktop review, and although the level of detail varied for each institutional AD website, the data obtained were useful for framing interview discussions. The data were also rich in exposing the various interventions that AD units implement across the country.

## 2.1.4 Interviews

The study had an interest in understanding the primarily academic interventions designed to support and improve student success, while acknowledging the many other influences on student success. This is why the primary group targeted for interview participation was the group of senior managers within the 23 public universities, responsible for AD or teaching and learning units.

Further to this, the project had an interest in the national picture of student success and the policy environment influencing teaching and learning in the higher education sector. Hence the interviews included four respondents who were able to comment on policy developments at a national level. A small group of institutional planners were also interviewed to help understand better how institutions are thinking about and utilising data in support of student academic success. Five respondents were interviewed from this group.

In total, 30 interviews were conducted. Invitations to participate in the research project were sent to heads of AD units at all 23 universities. Of this number, 18 were able to participate, constituting 78 percent of the sample, which is good enough to provide a broad overview of institutions. These institutions comprised four comprehensive universities, four universities of technology and 10 traditional universities. At three of the universities, two separate interviews were conducted because of difficulties getting both key people to one interview, and two other interviews included two participants.

In summary, Table 2 maps out the number of interview respondents:

Table 2: Overview of interviews conducted

| Respondents | Number interviewed |
|---|---|
| Heads of Academic Development units/centres and nominees. | 23 |
| Institutional planners/heads of institutional planning | 5 |
| Policy and higher education experts | 4 |
| **Total** | **32** |

The interview was semi-structured, based on 11 questions informed by the core research questions and the literature review. The interview questions are included as Annexure 2 of this report. Semi-structured interviews were the preferred option because they enabled use of standard questions for all respondents to ensure relevant information for comparative data analysis. However, the approach to the interviews was adapted to suit the respondents. For example, some respondents preferred to provide an overview of the issues that the interview questions were addressing, and talked freely about these issues, while others preferred a question and answer approach, and some a conversational approach.

Interviews were conducted telephonically and face-to-face. As far as possible, face-to-face interviews were preferred, and 20 of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. Telephonic interviews were conducted only when face-to-face interviews could not take place. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed.

Quotations from the research interviews appear indented and in italics in the text and are integrated throughout the report. Individual respondents are not identified by name but are referred to in a broad sense as "AD professional", "Planning professional" or "Policy professional", depending on their role.

Quotations from the research interviews appear indented and in italics in the text and are integrated throughout the report.

## 2.2 Data analysis

Interview data was coded using thematic codes. Fourteen primary thematic codes were developed, and secondary codes were developed from these. The 14 primary codes are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Main analysis codes

| Primary thematic code | Description |
|---|---|
| rol | Role of interviewee |
| int | Interest of interviewee |
| fact | Factors affecting academic performance |
| inter | Interventions |
| intrcol | Intra-institutional collaboration |
| intcol | Inter-institutional collaboration |

Thematic coding is a form of qualitative analysis which involves recording or identifying passages of text or images that are linked by a common theme or idea allowing you to index the text into categories.

| Primary thematic code | Description |
|---|---|
| Imp | Programme/intervention impact |
| driv | Work drivers |
| polcon | Policy constraints |
| polen | Policy enablers |
| con | Constraints on AD work |
| impr | Work needed to improve student success |
| dat | Data used for planning |
| Res | Research activities |

Each primary theme code then carried subsidiary secondary level codes. An example is provided in Table 4 below for code "fact" (Factors affecting academic performance).

Table 4: Secondary level analysis codes

| Secondary thematic codes | Description |
|---|---|
| factlan | Language factors affecting academic performance |
| facttra | Transition from high school to university |
| factlar | Large classes |
| factski | Lack of required academic skills |
| factfin | Financial factors affecting performance |
| factund | Underpreparedness affecting performance |
| factfam | Lack of family support affecting performance |

| Secondary thematic codes | Description |
|---|---|
| factmot | Lack of motivation affecting performance |
| factcam | Campus culture affecting performance |
| facteng | Poor student engagement affecting performance |
| factadm | Admission policies of different universities |
| factlec | Factors to do with lecturers |
| factcur | Curriculum-related factors |
| factepis | Epistemological access |
| facttech | Technology-related factors |
| factequ | Equity-related issues |

The codes were developed iteratively using the constant comparison method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Researchers conferred on the codes, as they used initial codes to process the codes, until all potential codes were exhausted. The unit of analysis for the interviews was a meaningful chunk of response, which can be constituted by a phrase, a sentence or several sentences.

Both researchers checked each other's coded scripts to ensure levels of consistency with the coding. The interview data was triangulated with the desktop review data, where possible. This triangulation mostly included probing respondents to expand on or verify information from desktop research in the interviews, as explained earlier. Conversely, where interview data appeared limited, a fuller picture of interventions was obtained from the desktop research.

## 2.3 Limitations of the study

### 2.3.1 Literature review

It should be noted that university access and success is a vast and complex field that goes to the heart of the core work of universities, touching on

most areas of university practice and scholarship. There are many different levels of expertise in the system, expertise in research and analysis, and expertise in practice, all of which are broadly represented here. Significantly more time would be required to review, interrogate and reflect on the full range of literature that is available on access and success. As a result, the canonical literature constitutes the most significant portion of what was reviewed, and a broad synopsis of this literature is offered to frame findings from the interviews and desktop review. It is also important to note that in conducting the literature review, it was observed that there is a strong representation in published research of formerly white universities. The literatures with a focus on historically black institutions are minimal.

Postgraduate access and success rates are addressed in more recent policy documents, such as the Green Paper for Post-school Education and Training and the National Development Plan (NDP), which have a concern with the need to grow and improve research output, emphasising universities' roles in a knowledge economy. However, postgraduate access and success is not a primary focus of this report.

### 2.3.2 Interviews

The interviews conducted were between 1 – 1.5 hours long, which is limited time given the extent of the work that institutions are undertaking. However, it is recognised that there are competing demands on AD professionals' time and, as far as possible, desktop review data were used to provide information to fill the gaps that were left by interviews.

## 2.4 Validity and reliability

Hammersley (1990) describes validity as "the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers" (1990: 57) and reliability as the "degree of consistency with which instances are assigned the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions" (1992: 67). In this study *descriptive validity*, which pertains to full and accurate recording of data, was achieved for interviews through full transcriptions of all the interviews that were conducted. The detailed description of the methodology and the presentation of codes used for analysis are aimed at addressing reliability issues.

Descriptive validity, which pertains to full and accurate recording of data, was achieved for interviews through full transcriptions of all the interviews that were conducted.

*Interpretive validity*, the ability of the research to make interpretations of data, was addressed through the development of thematic codes, agreed on by both researchers, which were used to interpret *all* interview responses. The codes provided a rigorous methodology for interpreting data and provided an opportunity for researchers to validate each other's coding.

While interview poses a validity and reliability risk, it can be assumed that this risk was lowered in this study as respondents were talking about their own programmes. Desktop data were also available to verify what was highlighted in interviews, particularly in relation to the types of interventions.

# Understanding university access and success in the South African context

# 3

## 3.1 Access

Access and success are primary concerns of university systems throughout the world. Admitting and graduating students, and doing so in the best possible way, is the core business of universities. In South Africa, as elsewhere, access and success are profoundly linked to the social and political context within which universities operate, and must be understood in historical terms. The inequities reflected in South Africa's education system are well documented and relate to a long history of racialised education provision in which opportunities for black students and, in particular, black students[3] from poor backgrounds were severely limited and differentiated. Until the early 1990s, black students entered higher education in very low numbers, and primarily did so through racialised access to particular institutions (Bunting, 2002; Akoojee and Nkomo, 2007; Badat, 2009).

Until the early 1990s, black students accessed higher education in very low numbers, and primarily did so through racialised access to particular institutions.

In the early 1990s, a massive expansion of black student enrolment in higher education occurred (Bunting, 2002; Boughey, 2007; Letseka, Cosser, Breier and Visser, 2009). Overall numbers of students in South African universities increased from 495 356 in 1994 to 938 201 in 2011. Forty percent of these students are in distance modes of study, 85 percent of those at the University of South Africa (UNISA) (DHET, 2012; DHET, 2013a).

Black student numbers increased from 55 percent in 1994 to 81 percent in 2011. More particularly, African student numbers grew from 43 percent in 1994 to 67 percent in 2010 (DHET, 2012; DHET 2013a). Despite the significant growth in student numbers over this period, and a positive increase in the participation of black students overall, trends of participation in higher education still reflect past patterns of inequality.

**938 201**

Overall numbers of students in South African universities in 2011

Participation rates show the percentage of a particular group represented in higher education enrolment as a percentage of the 20-24 year-old national population in that group. Participation rates are low by international standards for equivalent middle-income countries (DOE, 1997; NPC, 2011). The overall participation rate is currently 17 percent (NPC, 2011). This is also lower than the national target set in policy documents: 20 percent in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (DOE, 2001).

3 This report uses the racial descriptive categories black, African, white, Indian and coloured. The latter four racial categories are used in South Africa today to monitor change in many aspects of social life, including education. Black is used in this report to describe those who were classified as black, coloured and Indian during apartheid.

The inequity here is still stark. African and coloured students participate in higher education at a rate of 14 percent and 15 percent respectively, in comparison with 46 percent of Indian and 57 percent of white students (CHE, 2012). This raises significant social justice issues and, as has been argued, fundamental questions about who is gaining meaningful access to universities (Scott *et al*, 2007; CHE, 2013).

There is a shortage of candidates entering universities with the necessary school-leaving qualifications in mathematics and science, which are gateway subjects.

Scott *et al* (2007: 24) also point out that there is a shortage of candidates entering universities with the necessary school-leaving qualifications in mathematics and science, which are gateway subjects to identified areas of scarce skills such as engineering, science and business/management. African participation is also disproportionately low in these key programmes. Participation rates are a key focus of new policy. The Green Paper for Post-school Education and Training (DHET, 2012) proposes a participation target rate of 23 percent by 2030, while the NDP sets a participation target rate of 30 percent by 2030. These different proposals may be resolved by the release of the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training, approved for release in late 2013, but not yet available at the time of finalising this report. Whatever the actual targets, however, it is clear that participation in higher education must increase. Given the huge racial disparities in participation, access will remain a significant focus of policy and political discussion for some time to come.

## 3.2 Success

While university access remains a problem in a context of poor standards in the schooling system, and limited post-school options for students, student success poses a significant challenge. Quantitative measures of success show that the university system in South Africa remains inefficient and inequitable.

The Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) data produced by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) currently include two sets of figures for examination: graduation rates and success rates. Both sets of data are used as a proxy for measuring the performance of universities with regards to student success.

Graduation rates are a calculation of the number of graduates divided by a headcount enrolment for a particular year. Cosser and Letseka (2009:1) point out that:

> In the absence of cohort studies tracing a group of students from first year to graduation, which would provide an accurate picture of the throughput rate, graduation rate remains a proxy for throughput.

This is a complex terrain, given that it is popularly misunderstood. A recent Independent Newspapers article used the overall national graduation rate of 15 percent (which includes the distance institution UNISA) incorrectly

to create the impression that only 15 percent of students at South African universities graduate (Mtshali, 2013). This is a discussion point between universities and DHET, with some universities claiming the institutional data released by the DHET is incorrect and a misrepresentation of the graduation rate as an indication of success (Mbabela *et al*, 2013). However, in the absence of longitudinal cohort studies, and while graduation rates do not take into account fluctuations in enrolment or the different durations of various programmes (CHE, 2010), the graduation rate is accepted as a proxy for success rates (DHET, 2013a).

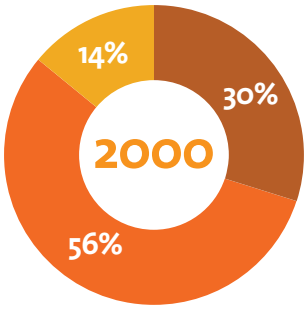
2011 Average Success Rate

It has been widely noted that the graduation rates in South Africa's public university system are too low in comparison to higher education systems elsewhere (DOE, 2001; Scott *et al*, 2007; DHET, 2011; CHE, 2013a). The latest figures show that South Africa's average graduation rate is 15 percent. The target set in the NPHE – formally the guiding policy document for universities – is 25 percent on average for three-year contact programmes and 15 percent for undergraduate distance programmes. It was subsequently revised downwards in 2004 to 22.5 percent and 13.5 percent respectively (Cosser and Letseka, 2009). The NDP sets a target of an overall 25 percent undergraduate graduation rate by 2030, although the Green Paper on Post-school Education and Training does not propose a target for graduation. The latest statistics show that only two institutions met the ideal graduation rate of 25 percent in 2011, with some institutional graduation rates as low as 14 and 15 percent (DHET, 2012).

Another method of measuring throughput is "success rates". Success rates, as defined by the DHET, are determined by calculating Fulltime Equivalent (FTE) passes in a particular category of courses as a proportion of the FTE number of enrolled students for each category of courses (DHET, 2013). The DHET publishes weighted average success rates for contact and distance students separately (given that distance students normally complete over a longer period of time). The 2011 statistics show an average success rate of 79 percent for contact students and 69 percent for distance undergraduate students. Strikingly, success rates between white and black students, in particular African students, are significantly different. On average, the success rates of African students are 10 percent below those of white students (DHET, 2012). As noted in the NDP, university success rates in South Africa are relatively low compared to similarly developed countries (NPC, 2011). It is also acknowledged in the 2012 green paper that funding will need to be kept up to continue the improvements in the success rates of students, which have certainly improved – from 69 percent in 2004 to 74 percent in 2009 (DHET, 2012).

As noted in the NDP, university success rates in South Africa are relatively low compared to similarly developed countries.

Cohort studies are another way of quantitatively measuring success, allowing for a more accurate picture of student throughput rates. In 2005, the Department of Education (DOE) published a cohort analysis of the 2000 entering undergraduate cohort. These figures have been widely used in studies of student retention and attrition (e.g. Letseka *et al*, 2009, Scott *et al*, 2009, CHE, 2010). More recently, the CHE has published statistics drawn from cohort data of undergraduate students entering in




Analysis of year 2000 cohort of undergraduate students

Students who had graduated after five years
Students who had left institutions without graduating
Students who were still registered after 5 years

2005 (CHE, 2012). The 2005 and 2006 cohort figures have been analysed in depth as part of the CHE's newly released *Proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa* (CHE, 2013a). It allows for comparison with the earlier cohort studies, as well as a reflection on what the situation looks like after the university mergers and incorporations (see footnote 6, p.32). In this study, the focus of analysis is on the "cohort completion rate", a longitudinal measure of the percentage of a student intake/cohort that graduates (CHE, 2013a). Cohort analysis is not yet regularly published at a national level although, as one policy professional indicated in an interview for this study, this may soon change.

Together these cohort studies provide a disturbing picture of the problems of student access and success. These studies expose the links of these problems to both the schooling sector and the labour market. They highlight the serious concerns about continued inequity in patterns of participation in and pathways through higher education.

Cohort studies highlight the serious concerns about continued inequity in patterns of participation in and pathways through higher education.

From the cohort data it is clear that, coupled with low participation rates, South Africa has high attrition (or low retention) rates. Significant numbers of students do not complete university study, and very few complete degrees in the minimum time set. Of the year 2000 cohort of students, only 30 percent had graduated after five years of study, while 56 percent had left institutions without graduating and 14 percent of students were still registered after five years (Scott *et al*, 2007). The figures improve slightly when South Africa's major distance institution UNISA is excluded. Nevertheless, 38 percent of students had still left institutions without graduating and only 50 percent of students had graduated within five years (Scott *et al*, 2007). Scott *et al* speculate that even with about 10 percent of students in this cohort transferring to other institutions (as suggested by the DOE at the time), and about 70 percent of transferring students and those still in the system eventually graduating, the cohort completion rate would increase from 30 percent to only about 44 percent (Scott *et al*, 2007).

Again there is a significant equity issue, with notable differences between black and white students. Among black students in contact programmes, across all qualification types and areas of study, the black completion rate is less than half the white completion rate (Scott *et al*, 2007; CHE, 2013a).

The aforementioned 2013 CHE report P*roposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa* shows that 27 percent of students graduate in the prescribe time period. By the end of this period, 40 percent of students have already dropped out of their programmes of study. Performance is weak across the different programme types, including three-year and four-year professional degrees, with the worst performance in three-year diplomas and in specific areas of study: engineering, science and professional commerce degrees (CHE, 2013a). These figures are based on the completion rates of the 2006 cohort.

The 2006 data show that first-year attrition rates are still high. Although the racial disparities are still evident, a slight decrease in African attrition rates may be attributed to the growth of extended curriculum programmes. Estimated final attrition rates[4] are 55 percent for all qualifications and all institutions, with only 35 percent of students overall graduating within five years. If UNISA is excluded from the completion rate data the estimated final attrition rate comes to 45 percent, with 48 percent overall graduating within five years (CHE, 2013a). Even highly selective professional degree programmes do not have high completion rates, although health and social science professional degrees do have slightly better figures (CHE, 2013a).

As these studies indicate, if both participation and throughput rates are taken into account, i.e. combining access with success, South African universities are only catering effectively for about five percent of young African and coloured South Africans (Scott *et al*, 2007; CHE, 2013a):

> The major racial disparities in completion rates in undergraduate programmes, together with the particularly high attrition rates of black students across the board, have the effect of negating much of the growth in black access that has been achieved (Scott *et al,* 2007, p19).

Indeed, the system is not responding to its stated goals of improving equity and social cohesion:

> The persistence of substantial inequalities in both participation and success means that the benefits of higher education continue to be inequitably distributed (CHE, 2013a: 52).

Comparing the earlier cohort study (Scott *et al*, 2007) with the more recent data in the CHE report shows that there is "little appreciable change to the overall patterns" (CHE, 2013a: 48). There is some improvement in the performance of individual programmes. In the case of African students an increase in five-year completion rates is evident, although the report cautions that this has "come from a low base" (CHE, 2013a: 51). African and coloured students' five-year completion rates are still under 50 percent in a majority of programmes, with a gap between white and African on average still showing the white rate 50 percent higher than the African rate (CHE, 2013a).

Only about half of students entering universities as undergraduates complete their degrees at all.

There are several observations to be made about this cohort data. It is clear that few students complete their qualifications in the minimum set time, which prompted the above-mentioned CHE report exploring the possibilities of a new undergraduate curriculum structure. It also confirms what the graduation and success rates point to: that overall, only about half of students entering universities as undergraduates complete their degrees at all, although data are not currently available to show whether some complete at other institutions or over a longer period of time.

4 An estimate of "the percentage of the intake that will never graduate" (CHE, 2013a: 45).

Even cohort data are limited, in that they do not improve our understanding of the reasons for low student success, high dropout rates, and slow completion times. Indeed, throughput rates only provide a snapshot of the performance of a system and of the institutions within them. They do not reveal the complex set of factors influencing student success or provide any insight into the quality of the educational experiences of South African university students:

> [Q]uantitative measures of throughput fail to reflect the intricacies of social conditions and the teaching and learning process (CHE, 2010:6).

Cohort data are only the starting point for analysing throughput and retention/attrition trends.

Cohort studies are also, at this stage, unable to track students coming back into the system. Such studies do not take into account the problem of dropout or stopout as explored, for example, by Breier (2009) in relation to students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). There is some evidence that students change courses, change institutions, and return to their studies at different points (Scott *et al*, 2007). Therefore, cohort data are extremely useful for identifying success trends in South African universities but are only the starting point for analysing throughput and retention/attrition trends.

In summarising the performance patterns, the CHE report also notes that these kinds of persistent poor performance patterns

> cannot be attributed simply to student deficits or poor teaching, and will not change spontaneously. Moreover, it cannot in any simple way be attributed to affective and material factors; similar or worse conditions are present in other sub-Saharan African countries without such poor outcomes. Rather, the indications are that the under-performance must be systemic in origin (CHE, 2013a: 53).

# Tracing access and success through policy

# 4

## 4.1 Overview

Issues of access and success are addressed adequately in policy. Equity is explained in the 1997 White Paper on Higher Education Transformation as follows:

> The principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. Applying the principle of equity implies, on the one hand, a critical identification of existing inequalities which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination or disadvantage, and on the other hand a programme of transformation with a view to redress. Such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals and institutions (DOE, 1997: 11).

Equity is a major consideration in South African higher education policy, given the sector's history of race, class and gender inequity. This has led to a significant focus on redress, both at individual and institutional levels. The 1997 white paper focuses on "equity of access" and "equity of outcomes" – on improving access to university for those previously excluded and providing the conditions for all students to succeed. As the 1997 white paper acknowledges:

Transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment.

> Ensuring equity of access must be complemented by a concern for equity of outcomes. Increased access must not lead to a "revolving door" syndrome for students, with high failure and dropout rates (DOE, 1997: 22).

Although a concern for social justice is evident as a dominant theme of post-apartheid higher education policy, there is a growing focus on the efficiency of the system – in particular on equity of outcomes, as measured by retention and throughput:

> Massive investments in the higher education system have not produced better outcomes in the level of academic performance or graduation rates. While enrolment and attainment gaps have narrowed across different race groups,

> the quality of education for the vast majority has remained poor at all levels. The higher education therefore tends to be a low-participation, high-attrition system (NPC, 2011: 273).

The Green Paper for Post-school Education and Training highlights improvement of throughput rates as "the top strategic priority of university education" (DHET, 2012). The most recent policy documents emphasise efficiency:

> Institutions need to be efficient, characterised by higher knowledge productivity units, throughput, graduation and participation rates (NPC, 2011: 267).

The joint discourses of equity and development are evident throughout post-apartheid policy documents pertaining to higher education, and the tensions are acknowledged (DOE, 1997). It is recognised that South African universities must address equity at all levels, while also becoming responsive to the national economic and social context. Responsiveness to development needs includes the university's role in producing graduates with the requisite skills for the South African economy, which means a focus on areas of scarce skills needs and on the quality of graduates in all fields. Universities are also expected to increase research activities to contribute to a growing knowledge economy (NPC, 2011; DHET, 2012).

Access and success within this context has increasingly become part of skills and efficiency discourses, with policy focused on controlled growth in the system, targeting areas thought to be essential for economic growth, and improving success in the form of higher graduation and throughput rates (Badat, 2009). Improving knowledge production through growing research capacity has also been sharply in focus, and affects the need to improve postgraduate access and throughput (DHET, 2012).

The economic rationale for higher education development comes through strongly in the NDP:

> Helping people to develop their skills and enhance their capabilities is an essential part of a sustainable strategy for tackling poverty. The national economy benefits when there is a critical mass of highly skilled people as the current skills shortages have raised the cost of many vital skills (NPC, 2011: 294).

The economic rationale for higher education development comes through strongly in the NDP.

The demand for high-level skills and responsiveness to the labour market, which increasingly dominates the South African policy landscape, is in constant tension with the "social justice" functions of higher education. The scope of this report does not allow space to explore these debates. However, it must be noted that there is significant literature on the role of universities in creating a more socially just society (Singh, 2001; Dison and Walker, 2008; Badat, 2009; Leibowitz, 2012). This is a response to economic determinism, even though social justice considerations are included in policy statements about the purposes of education, as shown in this quote from the NDP:

> Education, training and innovation are not a solution to all problems, but society's ability to solve problems, develop competitively, eliminate poverty and reduce inequality is severely hampered without them (NPC, 2011: 262).

Badat (2009) explores these tensions in higher education policy in the South African context, showing that "the transformation agenda in higher education is suffused with paradoxes":

> An exclusive concentration on social equity and redress can lead to their unadulterated privileging, at the expense of economic development and quality. This could result in the goal of producing high-quality graduates with the requisite knowledge, competencies and skills being compromised, and a slower pace of economic development. Conversely, an exclusive focus on economic development, quality and "standards"... could result in equality being delayed, with no or limited erosion of the racial and gender character of the high-level occupational structure (Badat, 2009:462).

The transformation agenda in higher education is suffused with paradoxes.

Despite a consistent theme of social justice in higher education in South Africa, Badat argues that in an era of globalisation, neoliberal thinking has become "hegemonic". This is shown in the way that ideas of development are reduced to economic indicators and the role of market forces in shaping work in higher education (Badat, 2009). The global rankings of higher education institutions could also be seen as part of this commodification of universities as they encourage universities to focus their performance on areas that can be effectively ranked and that limit the measurement of the impact that universities can have on social justice (Jansen, 2013).

Badat (2009) argues that the challenge for actors in higher education is to accept these tensions and focus on balancing competing goals and confronting the necessary trade-offs. In fact, as Scott argues, the "equity" and "development" agendas are not achievable without one another (Scott, 2012: 23). The CHE report *Proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa* argues that the performance figures of the higher education system show how equity and development are "integrally linked", given the likelihood that development goals cannot be reached without improving equity. The report concludes that:

> ...[T]he goals of equity and development - seen for a long time as being in competition - have thus converged (CHE, 2013a: 52).

The NPHE, which operationalises the principles and vision of the 1997 white paper, put in place the primary policy drivers for a unitary higher education system and the mechanisms for achieving greater efficiency. In the NPHE, the equity goals of the white paper are more strongly translated into instrumentalist goals, so that achieving equity is a component of the provision of necessary skills for the economy. The NPHE sets in place strategies for improving equity in relation to efficiency indicators, such as

Higher education institutions' three-year rolling plans must indicate strategies, timeframes and targets for improving throughput.

greater throughput and graduation rates. Higher education institutions' three-year rolling plans must indicate strategies, timeframes and targets for improving throughput of students (DOE, 2001). These drivers include:

- the policy itself
- the requirement for institutions to submit three-year rolling plans and their processes of enrolment planning
- the funding mechanisms to be introduced to "steer" the system (including the use of earmarked funds to meet particular policy objectives, in particular to meet equity goals)
- and a regulatory framework for higher education which includes quality assurance mechanisms.

These policy mechanisms are now discussed with relevance to access and success.

## 4.2 Targeted funding

Student access and success concerns are fundamental to the funding framework, with a focus on teaching inputs and outputs and earmarked funding for foundation and extended programmes. Until this funding became available in 2004, there was little sustained resource commitment for institutional AD work (Boughey, 2007; Scott, 2010).

A new funding framework for government support to universities was put in place in 2003. Its aim is a transformed system, as expressed in the 1997 white paper and the NPHE. A ministerial review committee has conducted a revision of the funding formula. The recommendations are still to be released. Through the funding framework the Minister of Higher Education and Training is expected to issue annual statements signalling forecasted funding for the system. The funding framework is structured to steer equity in the system, particularly to redress historical institutional imbalances, and to support improved teaching and research. Thus, the block funding[5] is based on a calculation of both teaching inputs and outputs, and the research production of institutions, with particular funding for institutional redress. In addition, earmarked funding is provided for particular development projects, such as the provision of funds to poor students through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and funding AD in institutions through funding to foundation programmes in universities (DOE, 2006).

The funding framework has been criticised from different angles, but two criticisms are particularly relevant here. The first is that despite policy intent to offer redress funding for historically under-resourced institutions and campuses, the funding formula effectively treats all institutions the

5 State funding to universities consists of two types of grants: block funding and earmarked funding. Spending of block grant funding is decided on by university councils and management, whereas earmarked funds are intended for specific purposes.

same. Differentiation of the university system is accepted in policy, in particular most recently in the Green Paper for Post-school Education and Training (2012) and the NDP, but how funding will support differentiation is not clear. Historically disadvantaged or black institutions (more correctly campuses)[6] have arguably continued to find under-resourcing hard to overcome. Historically white universities (particularly those that have remained largely unaffected by the mergers and incorporations) appear as the highest research producers and tend to have the highest graduation and success rates, and the highest proportion of staff with PhDs. Undifferentiated funding has allowed them to maintain their advantage in an increasingly competitive system, where policy and funding have assumed homogeneity among institutions, rather than the *de facto* differentiation that already exists (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012). The burden of weaker institutions is significant as they have to compete with stronger institutions for students and staff. In particular, disadvantaged institutions enrol higher numbers of working class black students who require funding to support their studies and are often underprepared for university study because of their schooling background. These factors affect university performance overall. In addition, despondency among staff at historically disadvantaged universities has been reported, leading to a failure to carry out key academic responsibilities, particularly in relation to teaching (Boughey and McKenna, cited in Bozalek and Boughey, 2012).

Historically white universities, particularly those that have remained largely unaffected by the mergers and incorporations, appear as the highest research producers.

The funding framework is criticised for being "biased towards rewarding research outputs at the expense of teaching" (DHET, 2012: 46), because of the high output value given to research production. This is thought to have pushed research production at the expense of improving teaching, but also to advantage research-intensive universities over those whose primary focus is on undergraduate teaching. This is relevant to student success, given the primary importance of improving teaching.

The Teaching Development Grant (TDG) is a key component of the government funds disbursed to public universities, and was first distributed in 2004. It is an earmarked grant, and all universities are now eligible for funds under this grant. When it was first distributed, the grant was only given to institutions needing the greatest improvement in teaching. The DHET believes that all universities "need teaching development funds to maintain and improve the quality of their teaching outputs" (DHET, 2013b). Based on an analysis of the 2005 undergraduate cohort, the new draft policy on the TDG states that the current situation

> is indicative of a social system generally, and a higher education system specifically, that is unable to effectively support and provide reasonable opportunity for success to its students (DHET, 2013b).

6 After a series of mergers and incorporations of universities that took place in the mid-2000s resulting in the current 23 universities, the historically advantaged/ historically disadvantaged split does not always accurately apply to institutions that were merged. The split now relates more to differences across campuses in some cases.

The draft policy for the TDG acknowledges the many causes of student success patterns in the system, but concludes that

> efforts to support teaching and learning, whilst having a positive impact at some institutions, have also not had the desired systemic impact (DHET, 2013b).

The perceived impermanence of TDG funds creates instability in the system.

It also acknowledges that the absence of a policy to guide the TDG in its earlier phase is a possible contributing factor to this lack of impact, as institutions have used the funds in different ways. The perceived impermanence of the funds creates instability in the system (DHET, 2013b). Although criteria for the TDG have been in place since 2012, a more comprehensive policy is thought to be necessary.

The new draft policy therefore sets out clear principles for the use of the TDG funds and articulates clearly what they can and cannot be used for. Its purpose is

> to enhance student learning in ways that lead to improved learning outcomes through a sustained focus on improving the quality and impact of university teachers, teaching and teaching resources (DHET, 2013b).

There are four key areas within this overall purpose:

- ensuring a greater chance of learning success for students from previously marginalised groups
- promoting a scholarship of teaching and learning
- enhancing the status and importance of teaching at universities
- enabling the development of a stronger academic pipeline (DHET, 2013b).

In this way the policy intent is linked to existing policy goals and to the need for systemic change in the area of teaching and student success, placing teaching at the heart of what universities must do. Key shifts in the new cycle of funding are:

- three-year allocations of funds, to address the relative instability associated with the funds
- clear guidelines for spending, with flexibility built in to allow for institutional priorities to be identified
- a link to a Teaching Development Plan at each university
- greater focus on monitoring of the grants.

Priority programmes of the next grant cycle include:

- a focus on lecturer development
- tutorship programmes and mentorship of next generation academics
- programmes to enhance the status of teaching at universities
- a focus on research into teaching and learning (DHET, 2013b).

During interviews, many respondents talked about the importance of the TDG for their work. These funds have proved crucial in several institutions for supporting AD work, extended programmes and other initiatives related to teaching and learning.

The TDG is generally felt to have been an important driver of change in many institutions. Nevertheless, the funding is inadequate to cover all the costs of teaching development and not all institutions have received these funds in the past. Previously the TDG only went to the less successful universities. This has, however, changed:

> *What is different though is in the past we received it (funding) annually. Now we are receiving it in three-year tranches, so we have been able to plan... to have a more stable staffing arrangement* (AD professional).

The TDG is generally felt to have been an important driver of change in many institutions.

The DHET plans to change monitoring of how the grant is used, with a focus on teaching development across the post-school sector and building departmental capacity to properly analyse and monitor the use of development funds. The new policy is also intended to build in a certain amount of flexibility so that institutions can make decisions about key institutional priorities, without allowing the funds to be used for activities not directly beneficial to teaching and learning. The DHET is considering the creation of a national reference group of experts drawn from various spheres of the higher education sector. It would assist the department with analysis of where or how funding is being utilised and how to direct it more effectively.

The TDG, despite the constraints raised, has had an important impact on the sector. It allows institutions adequate funds to build their work in teaching and learning and, where staff or expertise is limited, to bring in additional expertise. In some institutions this includes:

- appointing faculty student advisors
- tutoring
- accessing technologies for learning
- tracking and improving the systems and scholarship of teaching and learning
- developing innovations in teaching
- supporting writing centres and projects.

Each institution uses the grant differently, depending on their structures and particular needs. However, it has been essential for a majority of institutions, as the kinds of programmes that it has enabled through funding would be difficult to bring to a close. In several institutions it has been a strong enabling factor in allowing institutions to increase their staffing of AD work. This can be shown because institutions report directly on what programmes the TDG funds have been utilised for. According to several respondents, it has also been a key enabler of change. It has made institutions pay attention to teaching due to the funds attached to strategy. Overall, funding has been an important enabler of AD work, in

particular because of the lack of consistent funding in the past. The change to the length of the grants will now allow institutions to permanently employ some temporary staff, which may improve staff motivation and commitment to work.

As already mentioned, the new TDG draft policy focuses strongly on professional development of academic staff and teaching. No less than 25 percent of the grants will be required to be spent on professional development activities.

> *While there are prescriptions and limits on particular areas of spend there is also a fair amount of discretion built in for institutions (*AD professional).

The TDG also allows funds to be used for research and designing new teaching approaches and practices:

> *We wanted to make sure that they could do research with this money... to improve understanding of where the blockages are... Why are these students not making it? ... What kinds of interventions should we be dealing with? ... We need a better understanding of that so that you can actually create structured interventions that try to deal with the actual evidence that tells you what is going on where* (Policy professional).

The TDG also allows funds to be used for research and designing new teaching approaches and practices.

A modification in the new TDG policy is also to concentrate less on throughput rates and more on success rates, because of the difficulties in seeing where transfers might be taking place in the system. One respondent feels that this recognised how complex it is to monitor a system based on actual graduation rates alone:

> *To keep financially sustainable and if the funding formula starts to shift towards more output, you're going to have systemically very big problems if your focus doesn't become teaching and learning* (AD professional).

## 4.3 Planned enrolments and programmes

Enrolment planning[7] developed from a concern about matching student enrolment with available resources, linking student enrolment to national human resource needs, and improving quality, primarily measured by improved throughput and graduation (DOE, 2005). Enrolment planning is

7 The official terminology used to describe the process of engagement that takes place between institutions and the DHET, specifically focusing on the enrolments permitted at each institution.

linked to the provision of state funds to public higher education institutions. The cohort studies discussed above highlight the substantial cost to the state of high dropout rates, with student input subsidies wasted because of poor student outcomes (Cele and Menon, 2006; CHE, 2013a). As one of the respondents points out:

> *We can expand the university sector no end... but students are stuck in the system all over the place and we keep on having students come in and stay for a year and go out again* (Policy professional).

Enrolment planning remains a key mechanism for the state, in engagement with universities, to impact on access and success issues. Enrolment planning is also an important part of the process of engagement between institutions and government and an essential mechanism for making student success a national priority.

Enrolment planning is an essential mechanism for making student success a national priority.

It is imperative to guard against rapid enrolment growth unless it is matched by additional resources. Increasing enrolments without new investment will be detrimental to the long-term stability and sustainability of the higher education system, as well as to the quality of offerings (DOE, 2001:24).

## 4.4 Quality assurance

National quality assurance processes are the responsibility of the CHE, through its permanent committee the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The HEQC was set up by the Higher Education Act (1997) and its responsibilities are to accredit programmes for higher education, audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions, promote quality assurance in higher education and coordinate with other sector assurers, and to develop quality capacity in the system (HEQC, 2008: 6).

**1997**

Commencement of the Higher Education Act 101

In its founding document the HEQC made specific links with the 1997 white paper, and put forward a conceptualisation of quality as "fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation within a fitness of purpose framework based on national goals, priorities and targets" (HEQC, 2001: 9). By linking the idea of fitness for purpose to the goals of the 1997 white paper, the HEQC linked quality specifically to the socio-political imperatives for change in the higher education system:

> [I]ts contribution to quality assurance resides in making explicit in its criteria and operating systems the notion of "fitness of purpose" as a constitutive element of the definition of quality, and in attempts to link quality and quality assurance to the socio-political objectives of higher education as much as to its intellectual purposes (HEQC, 2008: 18).

Institutional audits have been guided by the links between achievement of quality and transformation.

McKenna and Quinn explore the extent to which quality, positioned as transformation and eliminating inequality, is understood in two different institutions that underwent institutional audits. They describe transformation, as fitness for purpose, as being about improving equity in participation in higher education and being responsive to economic needs and the construction of a new society (McKenna and Quinn, 2012:1033). Drawing from institutional audit documentation, they show how quality as transformation is linked to the audit system, which includes issues of access and success.

In the two institutions transformation in the quality process was understood differently: in one transformation was viewed as separate from quality, and in the other transformation was understood simplistically as compliance. They argue that ideas of transformation as presented in the audit documentation were "lost in translation" in both institutions (McKenna and Quinn, 2012: 1042). It is apparent therefore that the links between quality and equity require further engagement.

Institutions were given improvement plans and a period of time to implement these.

It has been agreed by the HEQC that the next cycle of quality assurance will focus on teaching and learning issues, as a direct response to the concerns about poor success rates and the importance of teaching for creating meaningful access and supporting success (CHE, 2011). The first cycle took the form of institutional audits, which took place between 2004 and 2011. Institutions were given improvement plans and a period of time to implement these. Reports are still being received by the CHE on these improvement plans. Part of this process is to ensure that institutions have adequate institutional quality assurance plans and systems in place. Teaching and learning is still a very broad focus for quality assurance and enhancement and the CHE has endeavoured to narrow down the focus of this project and its key framework, as informed by a detailed analysis of the recommendations from the previous audit cycle:

> *So that's why we've specifically said that we're looking for enhanced student learning in order to produce more graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable* (Policy professional).

The CHE has recently announced its plans for this next cycle in the form of its Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), commencing in 2014, which will focus on

> [t]he enhancement of student learning with a view to producing an increased number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable (CHE, 2013b).

This second cycle will have four key focus areas of enhancement: university teachers; student support and development; the learning environment; and course and programme enrolment management (CHE, 2013b).

These four areas combined encompass a broad range of activities with an overall focus on improving student success. The proposed initiative will involve an initial period of institutional submissions to the CHE, a period of analysis and feedback to institutions and then a collaborative process working on improvement projects, including research projects, symposia and working groups. It is planned deliberately to encourage collaboration across institutions, given the need for "collective impact", and to build on a strong theoretical and evidence base (Grayson, 2013). As Grayson (2013) points out:

> The problem is too big, too complicated, too important for fragmented, individualistic or *ad hoc* approaches.

The expected outcomes of the QEP include benchmarks and codes of good practice for undergraduate provision, policy recommendations, tools and resources for promoting student success, research, and communities of practice (Grayson, 2013). The final framework for this project has been published (CHE, 2013b) so that institutions can prepare their initial submissions.

The new policy on the TDG discussed above and the new QEP of the CHE demonstrate a movement towards recognising the significance of teaching and learning development in the South African higher education system. This recognition is being backed up by policy, funding and monitoring and a strong articulation between these different elements in the system:

> *I also think it's good that the HEQC is now going to focus on teaching and learning. That together with the Teaching Development Grant… I think all of these things can just come together….* (AD professional).

> *So within our system there's a very nice confluence of things starting to happen* (AD professional).

A key area of focus of the QEP is on the professional development of university teachers. The issue of whether formal qualifications are necessary will be explored. The new audit cycle proposed by the CHE is also seen as an opportunity to draw on good practices from other quality enhancement processes in different parts of the world. The final framework was presented to deputy vice-chancellors (academic) in November 2013 and the requirements given to institutions.

A key area of focus of the QEP is on the professional development of university teachers.

The CHE and DHET have been in discussions about the ways in which the changes to the TDG policy and the QEP might articulate and how the two bodies can work together to fundamentally address teaching and learning challenges. Both bodies have been consulting with institutions. The many complementary aspects of the two sets of processes include the focus on collaborative work, as it is likely that funding will be set aside in the

new cycle of TDGs for cross-institutional work. There is excitement among many AD professionals about the possible alignment between the new TDG policy and the QEP process.

The QEP, as it had yet to be formally articulated, was not a topic of discussion in the interviews. However, concerns were raised that any new process would have to ensure that the accountability mechanisms are adequate to compel institutions to focus on significant changes to teaching and learning. As Boughey (2007:10) notes:

> Relocating AD work within a concern for quality offers the opportunity not only for that work to be validated, but also for structural change to take place. This would allow for further development of the field itself and enhance its potential to contribute to resolving issues related to teaching and learning which have long plagued the system.

# Non-academic factors affecting access and success

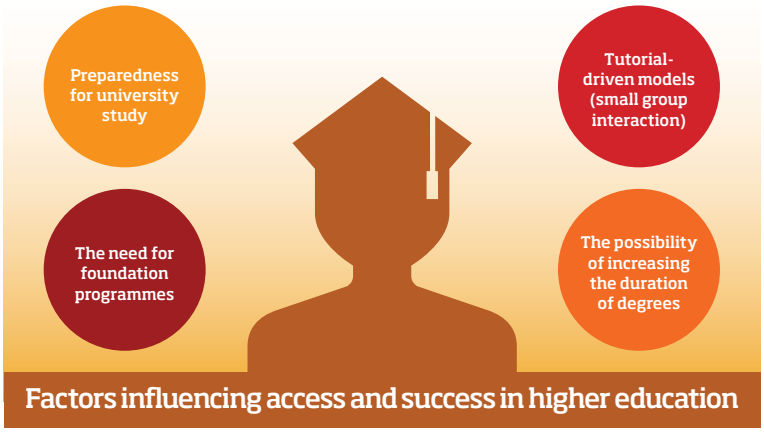
# 5

As emphasised in the earlier discussion on cohort studies, the available data illuminate what is going on in the system. However, the data are not useful for explaining the reasons why students struggle academically, take a long time to complete their degrees, and drop out in such large numbers. There is substantial evidence of other social and economic factors that impact on student participation in higher education. Factors influencing throughput are listed in the Green Paper for Post-school Education and Training (DHET, 2012). They include:

- preparedness for university study
- the need for foundation programmes
- tutorial-driven models (small group interaction)
- the possibility of increasing the duration of degrees.

The green paper also recognises the calibre and workload of academic staff as relevant to student success, as well as financial problems, living conditions, nutrition, and academic infrastructure (DHET, 2012). Scott (2012a:33), however, criticises the green paper for its failure to adequately focus on graduate output rather than just access, and that

> ...it is consequently largely silent on analysing the main factors constraining success and efficiency in the sector, and hence on what it would take to effectively realise the vision of higher education that the DHET espouses.

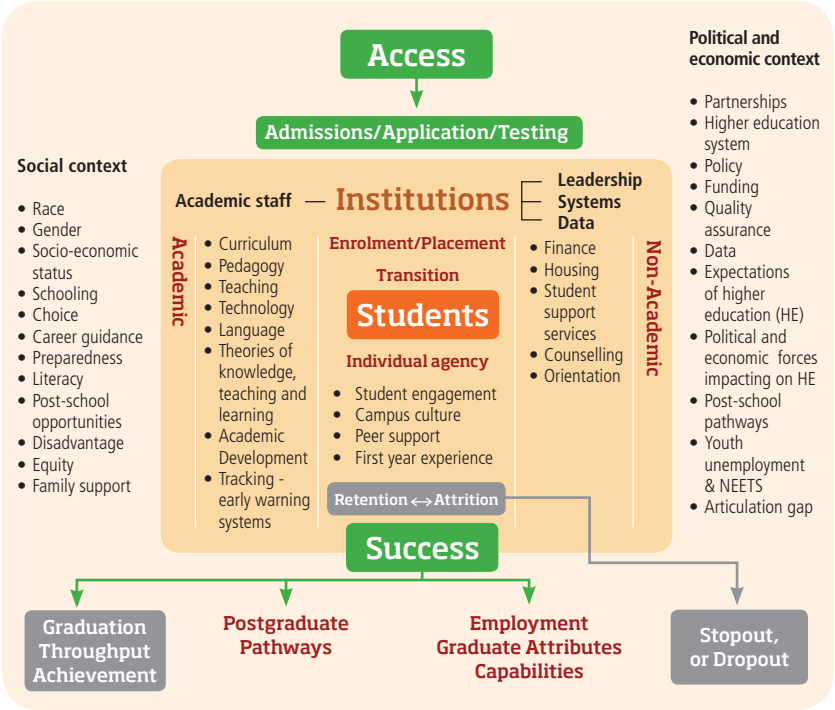



Factors influencing access and success in higher education

There is substantial evidence of other social and economic factors that impact on student participation in higher education.

The figure below conceptually maps the factors affecting access and success.

Figure 1: Factors affecting student access and success




As can be seen from the diagram above, the factors affecting student success are complex and multi-dimensional. The sections above have focused largely on the external factors affecting access and success, appearing in the outer box. However, as the central box shows, the institutional context is of primary importance once access to university is achieved.

Once a student has a place at a university, a combination of academic and social integration is necessary for their success. The factors that impact on student success are grouped below into two major areas: non-academic (section 5 in this report) and academic (section 6), though it is recognised that these are inter-related. These many factors that impact on success in higher education, "operate in their own backgrounds and within the higher education environment, and… variously facilitate or inhibit integration" (Jones *et al*, 2008: 68).

Once a student has a place at a university, a combination of academic and social integration is necessary for their success.

The Rural Education Access Programme (REAP) is an organisation that supports students from poor, rural backgrounds to access and succeed in universities. It works across a range of institutions. In 2008 it published a study of factors that facilitate success and identified a complex range of elements, arguing that a "package" of needs must be taken into account in supporting this group of students (Jones *et al*, 2008). We draw on this understanding to explore the many factors that affect student success.

## 5.1 Financing higher education study

The provision of financial assistance to students in higher education has been a significant component of strategies to widen participation in higher education. Funding has been increased to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), set up by an act of Parliament in 1999 to assist the poorest students in the system. University education in South Africa is not free, although the current Minister of Higher Education and Training (HET) is considering ways in which fee-free higher education can be progressively introduced for students from low socio-economic backgrounds (DHET, 2012; Ministry of HET, 2013). In fact, universities rely on government subsidy, third-stream income and student fees for their financial viability. As the government funds available for universities have reduced in recent years (DHET, 2010), student fees have continued to rise, putting considerable pressure on students and those who fund them. In its first 10 years of operation the NSFAS funded 659 000 students in universities, distributing more than R12 billion in financial aid (DHET, 2010). If the funding provided through the NSFAS predecessor TEFSA (the Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa) is included, the amounts increase to over R25 billion in loans and bursaries to nearly 1 million students over a period of 21 years to 2012 (NSFAS, 2012). There is no doubt as to the importance of the NSFAS in increasing access to higher education for poor students. In 2013/14, government funds to NSFAS will amount to R5.769 billion, of which R3.693 billion is for loans and bursaries to universities (Ministry of Higher Education and Training, 2013). The scheme works in partnership with the financial aid offices of the 23 public universities, through a combination of loans and bursaries, and uses a means test for identifying the students most in need.

**659 000**

Students funded by NSFAS in its first 10 years of operation

However, the provision of financial aid to students from low socio-economic backgrounds has faced several constraints. Despite increased funding, the quantum of funds available continue to be insufficient to meet the need (DHET, 2010) and this is in the context of a 20 percent decline in the share of the budget going to higher education between 1996 and 2008 (DHET, 2010). In addition, the NSFAS Review, completed in 2010, highlights the low performance of NSFAS students, with a 48 percent non-completion rate among NSFAS-funded students, and attributed this in part to systemic flaws in the funding model of NSFAS. The NSFAS Review also underlines problems with the ways in which allocation formulae are increasing inequality between institutions, and how

Despite increased funding, the quantum of funds available continue to be insufficient to meet the need.

- dilution of funds in some institutions reduces amounts to individual students
- underfunding has increased institutional debt
- the means test system is open to abuse
- students who do not fit the minimum income levels, yet still cannot afford university, are not able to access funding.

The report also shows other administration-related challenges, including poor loan recovery (DHET, 2010). NSFAS allocations are limited and many struggling students do not meet the criteria. Allocated amounts are inadequate to meet the full needs of all students (Jones *et al*, 2008; Letseka *et al*, 2009; DHET, 2011). This is significant, given how important it is to student academic success to have access to the right level of financing to meet basic needs.

The NSFAS Review finds that despite the fund's success, it was hampered by serious organisational and administrative challenges (DHET, 2010). A turnaround plan is being implemented (Ministry of HET, 2013).

Relative to students not funded by NSFAS, higher numbers of NSFAS-funded students achieved qualifications and are retained in the system.

Studies show that addressing student poverty and funding needs are essential to improving access and success in university (Chisholm *et al*, 2009; Letseka *et al*, 2010; van der Berg, 2013). A study of a Carnegie Corporation-funded scholarship programme for women shows that student-funding initiatives are a necessary, but not sufficient, factor in student success (Chisholm *et al*, 2009). Letseka *et al* (2010) demonstrate that lack of finance was the most important reason provided for students leaving higher education prematurely, and conclude that poverty was "the most important issue" to be addressed in remedying student dropout rates. More recently, in response to concerns about success rates of students funded by the NSFAS, Servaas van der Berg analyses the cohort data of NSFAS-funded students and finds that, relative to students not funded by NSFAS, higher numbers of NSFAS-funded students achieved qualifications and are retained in the system (van der Berg, 2013). First-year dropout is also higher among non-NSFAS students. Van der Berg speculates that controlling for factors such as programme and institutional differences, the NSFAS advantage "arises from a stronger incentive [among NSFAS students] to complete their studies" (p.11). This supports the conclusion that a state-funded financial aid scheme is a positive policy intervention.

There is also evidence that even when students have formal financial support, there are several other financial challenges facing those from poor backgrounds when entering university that affect their ability to succeed. These include application fees, which sometimes prevent students from applying altogether, or from applying to more than one institution. The complication of accessing funding to study may preclude students from being able to pay registration fees (Jones *et al*, 2008). Other financial challenges that potentially affect students' ability to participate effectively at universities include finding affordable accommodation, paying for living expenses (such as food), and affording study resources such as equipment and books (Jones *et al*, 2008). Poor students are affected by financial problems at home, which can interfere with their ability to concentrate on their studies (Jones *et al*, 2008). Other research also presents evidence of these factors. Chisholm *et al* (2009) show how students on a fairly comprehensive scholarship programme sent some of their stipend money home to help their families. These studies and others demonstrate how profoundly socio-economic class affects student success, both as a prior condition to accessing education and in being able to access the right level of resources to enable effective university study.

> Sufficient financial resources to enable students to live above mere survival mode, and fully engage both academically and in campus life, can thus be considered a vital underpinning condition for academic and social integration, and ultimately student success (Jones *et al*, 2008:7).

Funding alone cannot ensure success, but without it, many students do drop out. While it is frequently presented as the main reason for dropout, research in other countries shows that it often masks other factors (Tinto in Letseka *et al*, 2009). The NSFAS Review itself notes the importance of students on financial aid receiving appropriate academic support (DHET, 2010).

## 5.2 Living conditions

In South Africa, student housing and access to food, although closely related to finance, are recognised as significant factors in student success (Jones *et al*, 2008). *The Ministerial Committee Report on the Review of the Provision of Student Housing at South African Universities*, released in 2011, opens with the following statement from the minister:

> The provision of accessible, decent, safe and academically conducive student accommodation in South African universities is of great importance to the quality of the higher education system and the success of our students, especially those from a rural and poor background. Many of our students, particularly those studying in our historically black institutions, have been living in very poor conditions and this has often hampered their ability to succeed (DHET, 2011:xii).

Although there is little specific research in this area in South Africa (DHET, 2011), there is a large body of research from other countries that suggests a positive link between residence life and student academic success (DHET, 2011). International research shows that living on campus can improve student retention, particularly for students who might be identified as at risk, and shows a link with improved academic performance. In addition, this research shows higher levels of social integration and adaptability to campus life among students who live in campus housing (DHET, 2011). International literature finds living in residence important for first-year students, which is the point at which dropout rates are particularly high – both internationally and in South Africa (DHET, 2011). As one vice-chancellor commented at a discussion funded by The Kresge Foundation:

Living on campus can improve student retention, particularly for students who might be identified as at risk.

> And residences are not just places where you live or eat - they have increasingly become places which provide the scaffolding for your academic project (The Kresge Foundation, 2011).

Data analysis at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) conducted since 2007 illustrates that students in residence perform on average 5 - 6 percent better than students not in residence (correspondence with Trish Gibbon, November 2013).

Driven by a specific interest in issues of access and equity, redress and academic success, the student housing report makes several recommendations relevant to improved access and success. This includes the need to improve access to university accommodation for poor working class and rural students and for all new first-year contact students. The report also recommends greater regulation and monitoring of private student accommodation. It notes considerable variation in the quality of student housing, making recommendations about the improvement of residence infrastructure, as students live in "squalid" conditions at some institutions. Importantly, the report also makes several recommendations about student funding for accommodation, including an emphasis on the importance of adequate funding for housing and meals within the NSFAS allocations for student living expenses (DHET, 2011).

A number of institutions acknowledge hunger and poor nutrition among university students as a problem that needs addressing (DHET, 2011; Jones *et al*, 2008). Most institutions are unable to provide accommodation to large numbers of their students, but some recognise the need for feeding schemes – such as the "no student hungry" scheme at the University of the Free State (UFS) and the Meal Assistance Programme at UJ.

Students may be affected by hunger and poor living conditions, which can manifest in worry and stress.

During interviews, many respondents mentioned poverty as a fundamental constraint to student success. Numerous students in universities do not have adequate financial support to cover all their needs. They may have funds to cover fees but lack the necessary additional funds to obtain study resources and textbooks. They may be affected by hunger and poor living conditions, which can manifest in worry and stress. Such circumstances are not conducive to studying well.

Further research needs to explore issues of segregation and discrimination in residences on the basis of race, gender and sexuality. This follows concerns raised by the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (DOE, 2008), set up partly in response to a shocking racist and sexist incident in the Reitz residence of UFS.

The student housing report shows that, due to the significant increases in enrolment, the huge demand for student accommodation is not matched by an increase in student accommodation. It argues that effective and decent accommodation is necessary for student success. In addition, it notes that most of the growth in student numbers has been "young, black, low income, first generation university entrants" (DHET, 2011:xiv) who cannot access affordable decent accommodation in sufficient numbers.

> Spending one's first year at university in a well-led, well-managed, well-governed and well-maintained residence improves one's chance of graduating on time (DHET, 2011:xiv).

## 5.3 Socio-cultural and systemic factors

Many universities provide a full range of student support services to assist with social integration into university life and with the psychosocial aspects of engagement with academic life. These include various orientation programmes, counselling and career guidance programmes, peer support mechanisms within faculties and residences and other interventions related to life skills, as well as more practical services such as healthcare on campus (Jones *et al*, 2008).

The work of REAP shows that while it is often assumed within institutions that students will use services because they are available, this is not always the case. In addition to a lack of information about the kind of services available, poor rural students may be stigmatised for using some of the services, particularly when seemingly asking for help (Jones *et al*, 2008).

The need for infusing adjustment issues into curricula, so that life skills taught are directly connected to academic experience, has shown to be successful in some contexts. Schreiber and Davidowitz (2012) describe a life skills development programme designed to support adjustment of students in a science foundation programme. It shows that addressing psychosocial issues such as coping with stress and managing workload directly, using small group methodologies, is successful when integrated into students' academic lives.

It is often assumed within institutions that students will use services because they are available. This is not always the case.

From their review of the literature, Jones *et al* suggest principles for addressing social integration into university as part of a "package" of effective support to disadvantaged students. In particular, they suggest the need to integrate student support and academic work across an institution. This work should be complemented by the development of formal monitoring and tracking systems, focusing on "at risk" students and prioritising the first year of study. Critically, staff development should be an integral component of efforts for effective student support at all levels (Jones *et al*, 2008:73).

## 5.4 Institutional cultures

Social integration into university is an important component of becoming a successful student. Adapting to university life is difficult for all students, for example becoming independent and coping with new forms of social interaction and academic engagement. These challenges can be particularly daunting for students who find the dominant culture of universities socially alienating (Jones *et al*, 2008; CHE, 2010).

Institutional culture has become a ubiquitous term in the South African higher education sector, understood as impacting on a complex range of transformation imperatives. It is deeply linked to historical context, staff and student demographics, language, resources, institutional identity and institutional structures and ways of doing things. As Jon Higgins argues:

> Institutional culture has become a buzzword in recent discussions of higher education in South Africa. Indeed, as references to it proliferate, there is a growing sense that institutional culture may well be the key to the successful transformation of higher education in South Africa. Or – to frame the matter as forcefully as do many recent analysts – it is simply the massive fact and bulk of institutional culture that may be the main obstacle in the way of the successful transformation of South Africa's higher education system (2007:97).

Institutional culture is also used to identify "whiteness" in university cultures, which black students often experience as alienating.

Institutional cultures are increasingly mentioned as influential in understanding student success or attrition. While the concept of institutional culture is contested (CHE, 2010), it is well documented that the cultures of institutions affect student integration and performance (Letseka *et al*, 2010; CHE, 2010, Leibowitz *et al*, 2012). The concept is also used to identify "whiteness" in university cultures, which black students often experience as alienating. The experiences of black and poor students in the higher education system, particularly in former white institutions, are fairly well documented (Mabokela and King, 2001; Soudien, 2008; DOE, 2008; CHE, 2010).

A focus on institutional cultures recognises the importance of adapting institutions to overall changes in student bodies, to responsiveness to educational preparedness of incoming students, and to their social and cultural backgrounds. It recognises the institution's role in facilitating academic and social integration, without assuming that institutions can remain the same.

Issues relating to institutional culture reported in the literature include student–staff relationships (also between students and administrators), the social spaces of learning, language, etc. It is, however, more important to examine the interaction between the socio-cultural and academic aspects of university life than to reference institutional culture as a separate factor to be independently changed:

> The history and the contextual realities of a university influence students' academic performance. Institutional resources, cultures, internal politics, everyday academic practices and the particular ways in which universities interpret and respond to broader societal challenges, combined, play a role in influencing students' chance of academic success (CHE, 2010:168).

A respondent who highlights her institution's emphasis on student attachment to the institution sums up the importance of institutional culture for student success:

> *[W]e use various models [to promote student integration]. One of the models is an attachment model where we make sure that the student attaches to the institution and attaches to the new goals and attaches to the new and the different quality of being in the world – we don't want them to know more, we want them to be something different when they come out. So we want them to attach to the institution; that means that they feel at home here, that they feel entitled to services, that they feel responsible to the institution, that they feel engaged in the institution. So that's an attachment issue; we want them to attach to the institution* (AD professional).

# 6 Academic factors influencing access and success

Research on student access and success in South African higher education has identified multiple relevant academic factors. These are discussed below in two broad categories: student-related factors and staff-related factors.

## 6.1 Student-related aspects

The CHE's *Higher Education Monitor 9: Access and Throughput in South African Higher Education: Three Case Studies* (2010:30) identifies student-related aspects affecting success as including

- the notion of "underpreparedness" or students not being academically "strong enough";
- issues of students' prior learning and language skills;
- students' approach to learning, and their attitude and expectations;
- a diminished learning culture or students taking less responsibility for their learning; and issues of the students' life and other pressures such as personal, social, financial or family matters.

The theory of pedagogic distance provides descriptive and explanatory power for a discussion of the academic difficulties that students face within universities.

Boughey (2012) cautions against explanations of poor student success based on a deficit model, which blames failure squarely on students and their inability to rise above the multiple difficulties. Such an outlook leads to a poor response to the difficulties underpinning failure. More useful is a complex analysis of the challenges that students experience, which locates them in context. In this regard, the theory of pedagogic distance provides descriptive and explanatory power for a discussion of the academic difficulties that students face within universities. It also explicates the multifaceted nature of these challenges, related to pedagogy, privileged knowledge, language and large classes.

The theory of pedagogic distance is useful in explaining the ways in which these factors affect student success. Jansen, Tabane and Sehlapelo (2010) propose that the theory of pedagogic distance

> explains the gap between teaching expectations and learning achievements as a function of separateness or disconnectedness. This distance is not necessarily geographical or physical, although this is an added dimension in the specific context of distance education. In conventional higher education classrooms, pedagogic distance has at least five dimensions: emotional, political, pedagogical, linguistic and physical (2010:98).

The multiple dimensions of pedagogic distance are pedagogy, contextualised knowledge, language, and large classes. These dimensions characterise the relationship between the lecturer and the student and to a large extent contribute to success or failure, depending on how these are mediated by the student or the lecturer. Successful mediation by students enables them to gain epistemological access.

### 6.1.1 The articulation gap

Schooling plays a central role in preparing students for university study. In South Africa the poor quality of the majority of public schools is now widely acknowledged. One of the ways of determining this quality has been to assess South Africa's performance against international studies such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), an international evaluation of the mathematics and science knowledge of fourth and eighth grade students around the world. South Africa performs far worse than other African countries whose expenditure on education is lower (OECD, 2008; Yeld, 2010; CHE, 2013a). Results of studies such as the TIMSS show the levels of educational inequity in South Africa by highlighting the massive differences in performance between former white schools and former African schools. The latter were previously under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education and Training (DET), the apartheid authority controlling schools for black children. DET schools were deliberately underfunded and staffed with poorly trained teachers (Yeld, 2010). The differences in school achievement in South Africa, and the imperative for creating a more equitable student body in its universities, have led to a great deal of research on admissions and how to predict potential for success at university without disadvantaging students from underperforming schools. The majority of schools do not prepare students well for university. Without alternative admissions policies, many of the more selective tertiary institutions would simply perpetuate inequalities of schooling. As Yeld (2010) points out:

South Africa performs far worse than other African countries whose expenditure on education is lower.

> [T]he admissions challenge in South Africa is exacerbated by three related but distinct factors: a generally very poor school system, massive inequities within that system, and the pervasive and lingering effects of apartheid on educational performance (p.175).

The journey to higher education should ideally start at school with the choice of subjects in Grade 9 and the higher education choices learners can make, based on access to information about universities. However, as Jansen *et al* (2010) argue in their study on how students encounter and negotiate academic lives at the University of Pretoria (UP), some students have no access to information on universities and courses or other opportunities to enable them to gain access to higher education processes, e.g. funding application. Universities perpetuate this situation by focusing their open days at their institutions and not reaching out to schools. Wilson-Strydom (2012) uses the concept of the humpback bridge to describe the relationship between universities and high

schools, arguing that what is on the other side is not known. Schools and universities have no clear view of what the other does. There are many problems that require elaboration, including the low performance in mathematics. As a "gateway" subject (Jansen, 2010), it is required for many university courses, particularly in the science and commerce fields. Even the low percentage of students who do qualify for university study enter institutions underprepared. Because of the concern about the school-leaving examination and its ability to predict strong performance in university, many alternative admissions policies and methods have been developed. Among these are different kinds of institutional tests, which aim to measure potential to succeed in higher education without penalising students for the quality of their schooling experience. These test results are most often used in conjunction with matric exam results, both to admit and place students once they enter university.

In the absence of fundamental change in the schooling system, universities must adapt curricula and teaching methods to cater for the majority of students in the system.

Higher Education South Africa (HESA) started the National Benchmark Tests project (NBT) in 2009. The NBT is a response to the difficulties in identifying the educational needs of students entering university and interpreting the new National Senior Certificate results (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2009). According to HESA, the project primarily detects ways in which universities can respond to the needs of entering students by identifying their core knowledge and skills in three areas – maths, quantitative literacy and academic literacy. The information from the tests is used at both individual and group level (PMG, 2009). Curriculum structure and teaching within universities do not adequately respond to the academic needs of first-time entering students. In the absence of fundamental change in the schooling system, universities must adapt curricula and teaching methods to cater for the majority of students in the system (CHE, 2013a).

Concerns have been raised that the NBT project creates an additional barrier to access for poor students, as some universities have it as an admission requirement. This results in additional costs for students (Kelto, 2013). Another concern is that the NBT is used to "gate-keep" universities and block students from admission, as well as to cast doubt on the quality of schooling provision and assessment standards (PMG, 2009). Whatever the criticisms, the results provide another set of indicators of student preparedness for higher education and can assist universities in properly placing and supporting students once they achieve access.

Following disquiet about the cost of application to university and the lack of career guidance at schools, the DHET plans to set up a national Central Application Clearing House (CACH). It is intended as a one-stop shop for university applications to help students make choices about their study in further and higher education while reducing the costs of university application. It appears that this service is currently limited to a career advisory service provided through the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). It is unclear how soon this service will be fully operational.

School background is used as an indicator in determining admissions to selective universities of students who do not perform well in the school-

leaving examinations. However, the insufficiency of this indicator has been noted in determining the kinds of support that students need to succeed. As Yeld shows from a University of Cape Town (UCT) study, significant differences were found between black and white students even when school background was accounted for. That is, even those black students who attended historically advantaged schools may not perform as well as their white peers. This demonstrates that many other factors impact on success.

Even those black students who attended historically advantaged schools may not perform as well as their white peers.

The inter-group differences can be explained as the result of:

- being educated and assessed in a language other than one's mother tongue
- the length of time students have actually spent in the advantaged school sector
- the impact of institutional culture
- parental levels of education
- issues related to being part of the first generation to pursue formal schooling.

Some students live in townships from which they have to travel long distances to school. Parents may struggle financially to send their children to school and are not necessarily in a position to provide the "cultural capital" that contributes to high educational achievement (Yeld, 2010:183).

Race remains an important marker of access to university and should continue to be considered in university admissions and in investigations about why and how students succeed at university (Yeld, 2010). In particular, alternative admissions procedures "can provide a route into higher education for students seeking to overcome prior disadvantage" (Yeld, 2010:185).

Admissions debates are intensely emotive and politically complex. Recently, the media reported on the opposition to the UCT review of its admissions criteria, in which the university explored measures other than race to identify disadvantage and promote equity in its student body (Davis, 2013; Isaacs, 2013). This has been a central issue in academic debates about improving epistemological access. As the 1997 white paper acknowledges, ensuring equity of access and outcomes

> highlights the need to attend to the articulation gap between the demands of higher education programmes and the preparedness of school leavers for academic study. The effects of Bantu education, the chronic underfunding of black education during the apartheid era, and the effects of repression and resistance on the culture of learning and teaching, have seriously undermined the preparedness of talented black students for higher education (DOE, 1997:22).

The CHE report titled *Proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa* (2013a) focuses extensively on this "articulation gap". The report posits that it is the best way to explain the issue of underpreparedness

The concept of underpreparedness is limited because it is often equated with a "lack of ability".

of students and the structural ways in which university curricula and systems do not effectively cater for the majority of South African students.

Since post-apartheid policy on universities was first made, significant changes have taken place. Structural change in government[8] creates an impetus to develop new policy for post-school education. The creation of the DHET places the following under the responsibility of one department:

- universities
- further education and training colleges (to be renamed technical and vocational colleges)
- adult education and training
- workplace-based skills training.

**3.3m**

Young South Africans between 15 and 24 were NEETs in 2012

New analysis of existing data in 2009 brought the situation of what is now broadly termed post-school education and training into stark focus. This data show that unacceptably high numbers of young South Africans (2.8 million in 2007) between the ages of 18 and 24 were not in employment, education or training, referred to as NEETs (Cloete, 2009). The latest figures from 2012 show approximately 3.3 million young South Africans between the ages of 15 and 24 in this category, making up 31.4 percent of the age group, with a higher prevalence of women[9] (Statistics South Africa, 2012). This situation is described as "not only an educational problem, but constitutes a social and economic disaster" (Sheppard and Cloete, 2009:43).

There have been many debates over a period of time about access and academic performance and how universities should deal with "educational disadvantage" (CHE, 2010). Disadvantage is conceptualised as comprising

- geography (primarily rural students)
- financial disadvantage
- schooling background (poorly resourced and poor performing, mainly ex-DET schools
- language (where the language of tuition is often a second or third language)
- other socio-cultural factors (Jones *et al*, 2008).

In the South African context, students who face a combination of these disadvantages are in the majority (Strydom *et al*, 2010).

Most recently, the aforementioned CHE report argues that the concept of underpreparedness is limited because it is often equated with a "lack of ability" and tends to "mask potential" to succeed. Indeed, it should be understood as "relative" as students are underprepared for "traditional

8 The split of the Department of Education into the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training creates a focus on a broader post-school education and training sector.

9 This data come from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey released by Statistics South Africa. The original CHET data on NEETs come from the 2007 Community Survey and represent 18-24 years olds. Given the different data sources, it is not possible to compare the two data sets.

forms of higher education at present offered in South Africa" but the concept does not take proper account of the structural faults in the education system" (CHE, 2013a:59). In contrast to deficit views of students – still widespread in the system – the concept of an "articulation gap" between the current forms of schooling and higher education in the CHE report means the gaze shifts onto the system itself and its structural inadequacies. It points out that underpreparedness statistically "cuts across the racial divide of South African society" (CHE, 2013a:59). Understanding the issue as relating to all students in the system adds strength to the argument for a systemic lens.

Drawing on Erasmus (2010), Heymann and Carolissen (2011:1390) propose that in South Africa "more sophisticated tools for measuring disadvantage in order to redress inequality in HE are required". They explore the use of "first-generation student" as a tool for enriching understanding of student success, proposing that it is perhaps more inclusive than definitions that rely on race and language alone. However, they caution that on its own it may be too simplistic to approach the difficult topic of student inclusion. To some extent all first-year students, regardless of their class or race backgrounds, are outsiders and face challenges in integrating into a university environment (Leibowitz *et al*, 2009; Mgqwashu in Heymann and Carolissen, 2011).

The role of universities has come under scrutiny in recent years, with the focus on whether institutions themselves are adequately prepared for their students (Jones *et al*, 2008; Dhunpath and Vithal, 2012). The question is how universities themselves can shift to accommodate the diversity of students now studying in the system. Apart from greater emphasis on efficiency in national debates about higher education, attention has also shifted to throughput and retention and much more in-depth concentration on the "material and cultural contexts of higher education transformation" (CHE, 2010:36). The period since 2000 has seen a growth in institutional research, as institutions grapple with changing student demographics and new policy regimes (CHE, 2010).

The role of universities has come under scrutiny in recent years, with the focus on whether institutions themselves are adequately prepared for their students.

The articulation gap is a widespread phenomenon, affecting the vast majority of South African university students. It is clearly understood and recognised by AD practitioners and the programmes that universities offer to mitigate this articulation gap:

> *I don't want to blame the schooling system for the problems we are having here. We have to deal with the students we have... The quality of teaching here has to take into account that there are problems in high school and we need to address those in the curriculum, in the way we teach and the way we assess students* (AD professional).

Respondents regard the articulation gap as having a major effect on the transition from school to university and on what it means to become a successful undergraduate student. Areas of underpreparedness (or "deficit", as some still term it) are broadly related to language, literacy and numeracy skills, and more broadly what could be called academic literacy.

The latter refers to understanding ways of working for an academic degree, proficiency in writing, being able to utilise technological resources, learning how to think and write in academic terms, understanding the workings of particular academic disciplines, and knowing how to use academic resources effectively. Lack of these skills contributes to attrition:

> *And I think what gets people to fundamentally drop out is they don't understand what is expected of them, they don't understand what they need to be doing, and they don't understand what they need to change* (AD professional).

All respondents recognised that the majority of students do not enter universities with most of this knowledge. Gaining epistemological access to university study requires facilitation and support. Epistemological access is understood as the extent to which students are able to and enabled to access the academic workings and expectations of university study, described by one respondent as "scaffolding" and the "discourses of learning".

## 6.1.2 Pedagogical challenges

Students are expected to manage their own learning without the supervision of homework associated with high school.

According to Jansen *et al* (2010), the pedagogical dimension of pedagogic distance denotes the difference in teaching between high school and university. It also refers to the phenomenon of lecturers not regarding their role as monitoring student engagement. Students are expected to manage their own learning without the supervision of homework associated with high school. Some are unable to cope with the transition and drop out or fail.

Numerous studies identify factors that contribute to pedagogic distance, including:

- Lack of family to support the integration and adjustment into university. Most black students are first generation students with no reservoirs of networks with a background in university education (Slonimsky and Shalem, 2006, cited in Letseka, 2008; Jones *et al* 2008).
- Failure to cope with the openness of the university as opposed to the closed nature of the school (Cross *et al*, 2010), which results in students missing lectures, not preparing adequately for tutorials, attending too many parties, drug and alcohol abuse, inability to balance academic and social life, missing tests, poor concentration span, and inadequate preparation for exams (Zulu, 2008).
- Lack of reflective and critical skills needed for academic writing in university (Jones *et al*, 2008).
- Difficulty coping with the increased workload and intensity of work at university, exacerbated by lecturers who do not pace themselves to ease students into the rhythm, and others who take pleasure in informing students that the class would be decimated significantly by the middle of the year (Jansen *et al*, 2010).
- Choosing courses that they do not like because of inadequate information about course contents (Ravjee *et al*, 2010).

- Having many different lecturers with inexplicit and varied expectations, including that it is the student's responsibility to learn what the various lecturers deliver to them.

### 6.1.3 Language challenges

Language as a verbal communicative barrier mostly affects African students.

The linguistic dimension of pedagogic distance refers to the hierarchy that is created between students and lecturers, and among students, due to language differences. Languages of instruction, predominantly English and Afrikaans (in some institutions), create a barrier for African students, especially from rural areas and township schools. Many studies exploring barriers to student success have agreed that language poses multiple learning challenges for students in higher education. Firstly, for most students from township and rural schools, language becomes a verbal communicative barrier, hindering them in developing academic skills like participating in class discussions, learning to express themselves and defend a position, and asking questions in lectures (Cross *et al*, 2010). English is usually a third language to which their exposure at school was insufficient (Jones *et al*, 2008). The inability to speak English also affects social integration (Mawoyo and Hoadley, 2009). Critically, language as a verbal communicative barrier mostly affects African students. Students do not always comprehend lectures in English and/or Afrikaans. This limits their ability to take effective notes, increasing their workload as they have to read what was taught in class to keep up. English lectures are cited as causing difficulties for Afrikaans-speaking students at UP, who indicate that they think in Afrikaans, placing code-switching demands on them during lectures (Jansen *et al*, 2010).

Secondly, language is a barrier in written communication. To submit research-based written assignments, students have to read, mostly English texts, and write logical and concise essays in English. As they do not possess these skills, most students

> tend to follow a series of pervasive patterns in their approach to texts and epistemic practices when they first engage in university study. These are: verbatim reproduction and plagiarism; a tendency to focus on examples rather than on principles; a tendency to write from a highly subjective viewpoint without depersonalising; a failure to pull out arguments in text or cast them; a tendency to include anecdotes as a justification for claims, and to be prescriptive or normative when asked to be analytic (Slonimsky and Shalem, 2006, cited in Letseka, 2008:315).

Not only black students but also white Afrikaans-speaking students face the challenge of language when writing work in English (Jansen *et al*, 2010).

Thirdly, acquiring the discourses of the discipline is a major challenge. Most first-year students and also some in their second year who are used to everyday spoken English find it challenging to acquire academic

discourses. Clarence (2009:20) succinctly sums up the language challenge in higher education:

> Students entering university for the first time do indeed have a language problem, but they are challenged, not by one language but by several languages, each related to a different discipline.


All respondents mentioned language as a student-success related factor – in particular, language as linked to academic literacy. The dominant issue in the majority of institutions is the proficiency of students in English. In some institutions Afrikaans remains the medium of instruction in selected courses but English has become the dominant language of teaching and learning in the system, even in formerly Afrikaans institutions. In one institution the dual language policy was felt to sometimes compound issues of epistemological access.

### 6.1.4 Large classes

Large classes at university create physical distance between lecturers and students and may intimidate students.

Large classes at university create physical distance between lecturers and students and may intimidate students. Their response is usually withdrawal, particularly if they already have low confidence because of language challenges. The physical distance of large classes is also intensified by the fact that most lecturers do not provide opportunities for students to ask questions in a lecture, nor do they follow up on assignments like teachers in school do.

## 6.2 Staff-related aspects

Staff-related issues, as identified in the CHE study on access and throughput (2010:30), are

> outdated or simply different approaches to pedagogy; the attitudes of academic staff; the skills of academic staff in teaching and assessment practices (also referred to as staff 'underpreparedness'); pressures on the time and energy of academic staff, and staff being demotivated by changes in the university.

Several respondents highlight factors relating to the practices of academic staff. In particular, many raise a lack of attention to teaching practice or not thinking actively about teaching practice. This includes poor assessment practices, with initial assessment taking place too late in the year to identify struggling students. A lack of contact time with lecturers, which means that many students do not have direct engagement with academic staff, is a significant concern. It is known that positive student engagement and regular contact with academic staff is an important facilitating factor in student success. Students' engagement with their academic work can be mediated more effectively with regular and positive teaching and academic support.

As one respondent puts it:

> *A factor that really impacts very highly on students' resilience is that they feel and they perform much better where high expectations are created for them, and where they feel that they belong* (AD professional).

A respondent at a different university echoes the point:

> *This is about creating a culture that enables students to attach and engage, and through attachment and engagement, that is what underpins academic performance. We can't expect students to function academically when they feel alienated, when they feel they don't belong here, when they don't understand what their goals are...* (AD professional).

Many respondents acknowledged that a lack of attention to teaching and teaching practice is linked to two factors. First, it relates to how teaching is valued, supported and rewarded within institutions. Academics achieve greater recognition for their research activities and outputs than for teaching and improving their teaching practice. Lecturers are not appointed for their teaching skills but for their knowledge of a particular discipline. This is recognised as a systemic issue:

> *I try to look at who is responsible for ensuring that the systems and processes that address this are put in place, in which case therefore, it's higher education management* (AD professional).

Second, it relates to a concern raised by several heads of teaching and learning units: some academic staff still teach according to their ideal of a "benchmark" student. They do not adequately understand the real learning needs of the full spectrum of their students or what they can do to facilitate epistemological access for students. They attribute deficits in learning to students and expect of students to facilitate meaningful learning:

Some academic staff still teach according to their ideal of a "benchmark" student.

> *They (academics) do not understand that what they (students) need to have is access to the discourse of the discipline...they think that academic literacy is a political thing* (Institutional planning professional).

Describing a programme in which students use digital technology to tell their personal stories, one respondent comments:

> *Sometimes, at the end of these sessions the whole lot of us are in tears to see some of the hardships that the students have overcome to get here. I think if the lecturers know that, it does change that attitude. It makes them very different in the way that they teach. It makes them understand that there have been very real gaps in the students' education... for me the opposite of the deficit model is about finding a constructive way of addressing those gaps...* (AD professional).

Many respondents refer to the importance of students' own attitudes towards learning. This includes the need for student self-motivation, understanding the expectations and engagement expected of them, and taking control over their own learning experience. But they also emphasise the important ways in which institutions, through academic staff, can mediate the acquisition of these abilities.

> *You can say success in higher education is dependent on factors inherent to the individual, things like IQ, motivation, aptitude. Or you can say, which is what I'd argue, the university's particular socio-cultural space, some are advantaged by that space, some are disadvantaged. Overwhelmingly the universities were saying the ability to learn is dependent on factors inherent to the individual student. They weren't accounting for the fact that some students find it more difficult to access the social space. So all the interventions were focusing on the student and they weren't focusing on the wider context in which the student has to operate and challenging that context* (AD professional).

Jansen *et al* (2010) propose the notions of emotional and political distance to explain the way in which lecturers can act as negative social conversion factors for student success. Emotional distance pertains to the way in which privileged knowledge is taught and political distance relates to the level of awareness of diversity among teaching staff.

## 6.2.1 Privileged knowledge

Lecturers can use storytelling to deliver disciplinary facts, or ask for student input from their experiences.

When teaching, lecturers can choose to present abstract terms, which students may not understand. Or they can choose to foster greater connection between the abstract and esoteric and what the students know in their environments, to motivate and inspire a sense of connection among students to what is taught. They can also choose to use only expository methods of imparting knowledge, or become more creative and use other methods students would feel more engaged with. For example, lecturers can use storytelling to deliver disciplinary facts, or ask for student input from their experiences as a starting point of delivering subject matter. When a lecturer does these things, they are displaying an awareness of the learning challenges faced by their students. Leibowitz (in Bitzer, 2009) characterises such pedagogy as advancing social justice. It requires the lecturer to ensure that the curriculum facilitates learning and assessment that uses examples and activities recognising the cultural wealth of students from diverse backgrounds.

## 6.2.2 Diversity

The diverse nature of the South African population can make classrooms contested sites. Classes can be spaces that reproduce inequality and differentiated access to knowledge on the basis of gender, language,

schooling biographies etc. A lecturer who is conscious of these differences adopts pedagogic strategies that provide equal learning opportunities to all students. These involve:

- assisting with adjustment to university education through directing students to available support services
- adjusting the pace of content delivery at the beginning of the year to avoid demotivating and intimidating learners with information overload
- being sensitive to gender and racial difference
- being conscious of language barriers when assessing students' written work.

## 6.2.3 Large classes

Massification of higher education has led to large classes. In most cases, lecture facilities were not constructed with such large numbers in mind, making acoustics challenging in such venues. Students who sit far away from the lecturer may not always hear what is being taught, and because of the large student numbers, there is insufficient time to accommodate inclusive discussion in the lecture. Lecturers who appreciate the negative impact of large class sizes try to reduce the physical distance by making available dedicated consultation times. Furthermore, students should be able to access more focused instruction during small class tutorials that complement the large class contact.

Lecture facilities were not constructed with such large numbers in mind, making acoustics challenging in such venues.

As can be seen from the breadth of literature on students' access to higher education and their performance in university there is no absolute understanding of how to ensure student success. There are many inter-related factors at many levels (as Figure 1 on page 41 shows). Every student is an individual with multiple identities and different pathways to and through higher education. This poses numerous challenges for institutions and the system as a whole in improving access and success, and requires a range of interventions of different types and at multiple levels.

The CHE (2010:31) points out that all institutions are grappling with

> the inherent difficulty of some course content; increasing student numbers; resource constraints; too little support for students making the transition from school; a lack of coordination and systematic assessment of various "solutions" that have been attempted, and a lack of recognition for teaching and academic development work that discourages academic staff from putting energy into their teaching duties.

These challenges are not insurmountable. Despite resource constraints – particularly human resource constraints – institutions have implemented multiple interventions to improve learning outcomes, mostly through their AD units.

# 7 Interventions to improve success

## 7.1 Tracing the Academic Development field

Academic Development requires institutions to adapt their offerings to accommodate a greater diversity of educational preparedness.

The politics of disadvantage is a strong theme in the discourses and debates about student access and success, given the widely accepted understanding that inequalities within the schooling system affect the academic preparedness of students for higher education study. This has led to an "attribution of deficit", particularly to black students and students from poor socio-economic backgrounds. The concept of deficit also extends to the associated stigma of special educational interventions designed to bring poorly prepared students to a level at which they can participate effectively in academic programmes. Formally, at least, these debates were abandoned when the focus moved away from the "academic support" discourses, requiring students to bridge the academic gap between school and university. In its place has evolved the notion of Academic Development (AD), which requires institutions to adapt their offerings to accommodate a greater diversity of educational preparedness among students (Volbrecht and Boughey, 2004; Boughey, 2007; Scott, 2009).

Access and success programmes in South Africa cover a broad and complex range of areas. They centre around a core set of interventions to support AD and institutional development work. This work encompasses, but is not limited to, support for academic teaching and the professional development of academic teaching staff, as well as support to students. This is done through a focus on

- teaching and learning theory
- the coordination of extended and foundation academic programmes and various types of curriculum development programmes
- the development and use of educational technologies and writing centres, and other interventions.

Academic staff development and student support programmes have been in existence since the late 1980s. At that time, the student bodies of formerly white universities in particular began to change, as these universities admitted more black students and started accommodating students with a far wider range of school experiences and levels of preparedness for the degree courses on offer. While arguably marginal at first, these kinds of programmes have become more mainstream. The reasons for mainstreaming are increased numbers of students in

universities and the imperative of making university teaching more responsive to underprepared students. The challenge of underprepared students continues to have its roots in the relative lack of change in South Africa's notoriously unequal schooling system.

Access and success programmes are not limited to purely academic initiatives. They include a range of other forms of student support, such as mentoring, counselling and career development programmes, partnerships between universities and schools (partnerships between universities and colleges are also emerging), and student funding initiatives, in particular the NSFAS. Institutions are increasingly looking at student development in holistic and systemic ways. Understanding is improving of what it takes to provide meaningful access to university education for a diversity of students while responding to their multiple needs, in order for students and universities to jointly achieve "success".

The interventions in AD units to improve student success are characterised by both student support services and academic support. Most of the student support services are geared at addressing the articulation gap and psychosocial challenges that first generation students may experience, some of who stay far from home.

This field of work is, in itself, complex and contested, covering a broad range of activities (Scott, 2009; Boughey, 2007). The history of AD in South Africa includes two primary elements: equity and the formal educational process (Scott, 2009). AD is seen to be at the heart of issues relating to access and success in South Africa, given the importance of academic interventions in creating meaningful access and improving success rates. The term "Academic Development" is used differently in South Africa from other parts of the world, where it is widely referred to in relation to academic staff development (Scott, 2009).

As has been shown above, the growth in access to university education experienced in the 1990s created a more diverse student body, particularly in relation to the levels of preparedness among students for academic study (Boughey, 2007; Scott *et al*, 2007). It was at this stage that discussions then moved beyond formal access to university to explore broader definitions of access to university, such as the concept of "epistemological access". Epistemological access is not only about the individual agency of students, but is also recognised as an institutional responsibility to create the necessary conditions for students to gain admission to the tools for academic practice (Boughey and Niven, 2012; CHE, 2010).

Epistemological access is not only about the individual agency of students, but is also recognised as an institutional responsibility.

Yet AD has a range of meanings in the South African context, representative of different historical discourses in the South African higher education sector, as well as different institutional contexts (Boughey, 2007; Gosling, 2009; Scott, 2009). Boughey and Volbrecht (2004) and Boughey (2007)

trace the history of AD through three phases, broadly termed "academic support", "academic development" and "institutional development". These three phases broadly represent changes over time but in reality represent "discursive formulations" that have co-existed in different ways across institutions (Boughey, 2007).

There is great institutional variation in what AD/higher education development, or teaching and learning units, do.

According to Boughey (2007), these discourses have led to sets of practices. The move from academic support to AD, for instance, characterised not only a change from an emphasis on the individual student to the need for institutional shifts. It also characterised a shift from individual focused practices (such as additional tuition for small groups of students, as well as emotional and social support) to the location of academic programmes within faculties and the growth of a range of faculty-located curriculum initiatives.

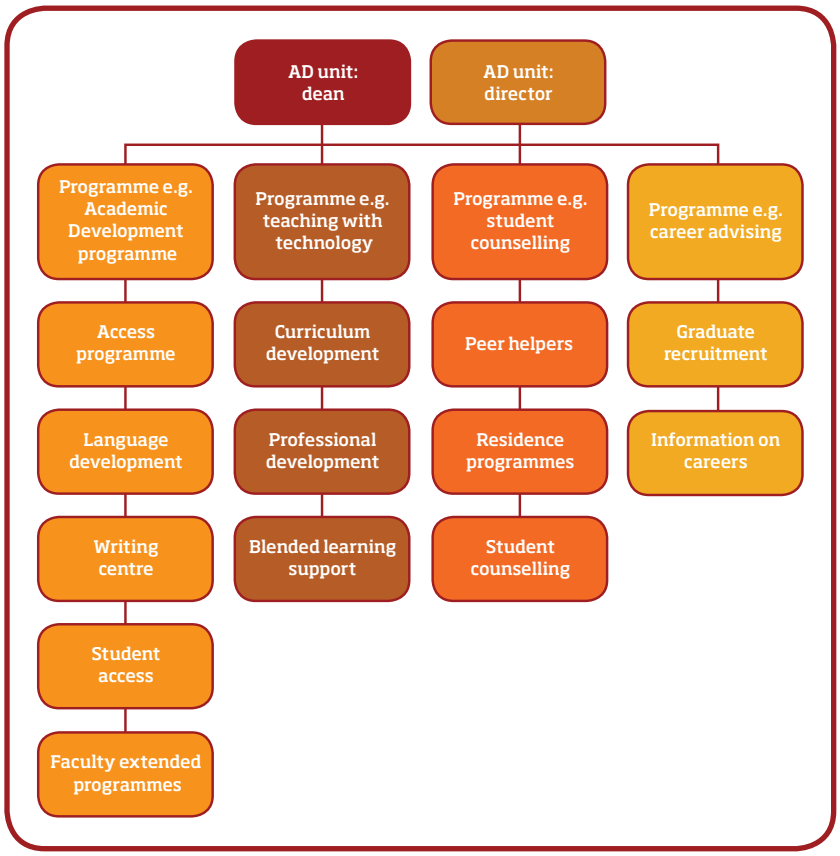
There is great institutional variation in what AD/higher education development, or teaching and learning units, do and are able to do in South African universities (Gosling, 2009). The core functions identified by most units in a study by Kilfoil include supporting academics through academic professional development, curriculum development, educational technology (particularly e-learning), and undertaking teaching activities. The units also support students through AD activities, counselling, and work-integrated learning (Kilfoil, 2012).

## 7.2 Academic Development departments

Analysis of interview data and the desktop review suggest that there are three broad models of organising AD work:

1. AD support work is coordinated centrally within AD units, where the heads provide strategic direction for multiple interventions on academic, psychosocial and career-oriented support. These initiatives are realised through extended curriculum programmes, tutoring, supplemental instruction, orientation, mentoring, student counselling, and career guidance. Each programme has a director who provides leadership to that programme and runs multiple sub-programmes to maintain the programme. Each sub-programme supports faculties implementing AD programmes (which will be discussed later under programmes), as well as the entire student body and staff in the institution who are in need of the services that are offered in the AD departments. An example of the structure of this AD support is portrayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Representation of centrally coordinated AD work [10]




2. Staff development and student support interventions are separately defined and work as independent strands of AD work. The AD initiatives focus exclusively on staff professional development. Student support services concentrate only on student development activities, including student counselling, AD support, sport, career development, student societies support, leadership development, disability support, etc.

3. The unit supporting teaching and learning has no responsibility for the operational aspects of either the academic- or student-focused interventions. The AD unit focuses mainly on monitoring and reporting of faculty-run programmes to ensure that disbursed funding is used properly, and that the relevant departments meet targets to ensure continued funding. The unit also supports programme start-up through provision of funding.

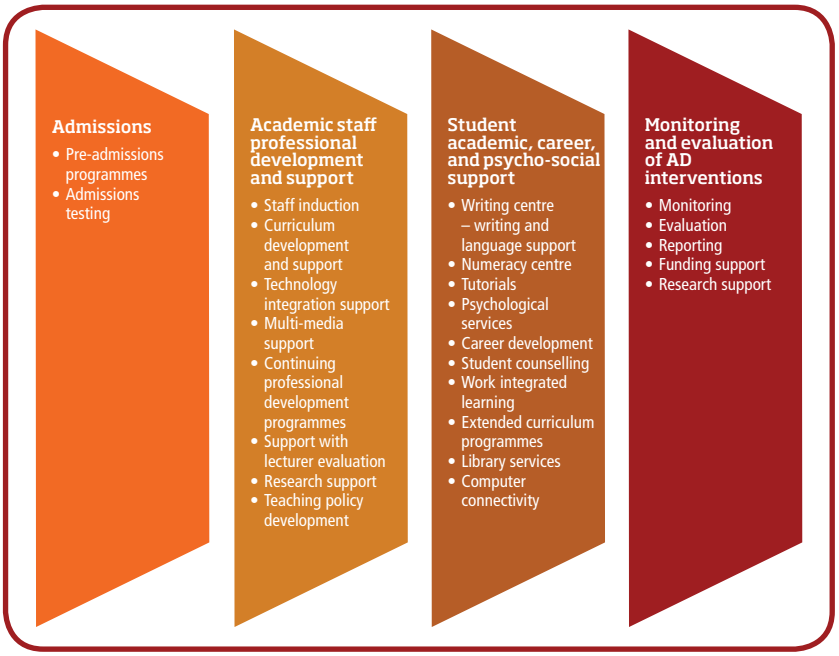
It is acknowledged that there may be some overlapping aspects of these primary models in some institutions. These overlaps can be established through further research, which targets not only AD professionals but also all units and faculties focusing on AD work. Staffing of AD units varies enormously from two to 125 staff, depending on the range of work in the unit.

Staffing of AD units varies enormously from two to 125 staff, depending on the range of work in the unit.

10 This model comes in many variations, so Figure 2 does not depict an ideal type. It is a representation aimed at capturing the differences in the broad organisation of AD work at institutions and not the nuances and particularities of specific programmes.

The research questions for this study did not specifically set out to define and categorise the work of AD units themselves, although some understanding of their range of operations has been useful for this project. The more specific focus has been on identifying the full spectrum of initiatives taking place within institutions to support student success. Figure 3 below provides an overview of activities and services currently offered across AD units.

Figure 3: Overview of activities and services offered in AD units




Campuses located in rural and semi-rural small towns experience difficulties with staffing as people are disinterested in positions in these towns.

In institutions that have undergone transformation through mergers, the functions taken up in the AD departments are mainly informed by the rationale to integrate what the various merged institutions offered. In most of these institutions, services offered are spread across different campuses, with the core AD department at one main campus. Campuses located in rural and semi-rural small towns experience difficulties with staffing as people are disinterested in positions in towns with "no quality of life" and limited potential for professional growth.

## 7.3 Academic Development interventions to enhance teaching and learning

Broadly, there are multiple interventions highlighted in interviews and gleaned from desktop research. These interventions are implemented through a range of activities and services aimed at addressing access and success.

These are presented as a set of themes below as follows:

1. **Transition and entry:** centred on transition, admission and first-year experience.
2. **Social support:** clustered in programmes under the banners of psychosocial support and mentoring.
3. **Teaching and learning:** comprised of programmes that provide better learning opportunities. These include infrastructure improvement, extended curriculum programmes, Supplemental Instruction, tutoring, support for writing, literacy, and numeracy, and systems for early detection of students who are struggling academically.
4. **Research:** aimed at influencing evidence-based decision-making for improvement.
5. **Professional development:** centred on professional development including induction programmes, courses and workshops, and research support.

## 7.3.1 Supporting transition and entry

There is considerable evidence that making the transition from school to university is a challenging one for many students – not only for those whose socio-economic class and schooling background poorly equips them for university study. Statistics show that large numbers of students drop out of university during or after the first year (Scott *et al*, 2007). This has led to a focus on the transition between school and university through school outreach programmes in many universities, an example being the Targeting Talent Programme at Wits, and a focus on the first-year experience, with many formal interventions such as the Stellenbosch First-Year Academy (Leibowitz *et al*, 2012).

What happens in the first year has a significant effect on overall success, as it is a foundation for the rest of the study experience.

As Scott points out, the first year of university is traditionally "one of exciting intellectual and personal discoveries, independence in thought and behaviour, widening horizons, and growth in confidence" (Scott, 2012b:17). However, in the South African context for perhaps a majority of students "the experience is marred by failure, loss of confidence, and perhaps disillusionment" (Scott, 2012b:17). It has been noted that what happens in the first year has a significant effect on overall success, as it is a foundation for the rest of the study experience.

Universities have an orientation period for first-year students, usually concentrated in one or two week periods before the start of the academic year. Some research has shown that orientation programmes are not always useful for poorer students, who are often busy sorting out administrative details of registration, financial aid and housing during the first few weeks. This means that they often miss out on crucial information about academic matters and about support services available to students (Jones *et al*, 2008). The REAP study proposed that orientation be reconsidered as something that takes place over a longer period of time (Jones *et al*, 2008). First-Year Experience programmes, operating at some universities, are an attempt to do this (Wilson-Strydom, 2012; Zulu, 2008).

The CHE's *Proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa* (2013a) emphasises that the higher education sector cannot rely solely on the schooling system to address the articulation gap. Rather, the higher education sector needs to directly intervene to address such transition issues.

Respondents from three institutions underscore that they have embarked on preadmission programmes to prepare students for university study. Many of the other institutions also run similar programmes. The three key programmes mentioned are highlighted in Table 5.

Table 5: Examples of transition interventions

| Intervention | Characteristics and motivations of intervention |
|---|---|
| Fostering familiarity with university | • Grade 10 - 12 learners from rural schools studying science, English and computer-related subjects were identified.<br>• Students were brought to the university on Saturdays and during winter schools or autumn schools to experience what it is like to be in a university.<br>• Being at a university helped to demystify the concept of the university and eliminate fear. |
| Preparing 100 matriculants for university | • Programme started in 2012.<br>• Five schools in the townships in the city where the university is based were selected for identification of students to be prepared for university.<br>• In these schools, 100 matric students were identified. Over the course of the year they went to campus and received curriculum and career advice to open their horizons and direct their course towards university.<br>• The intention was to support these students to access higher education even if they did not end up choosing the supporting university for their studies.<br>• In 2013, 55 of the students were admitted to the supporting university. |
| School outreach | • The marketing division and senior academics visited schools to provide career guidance, and to foster a greater understanding of what specific programmes are and what is required to study these.<br>• Learners in high school were exposed to the range of choices for university study. |

| Intervention | Characteristics and motivations of intervention |
|---|---|
| | • The institution has a science centre open to high schools. Schools brought learners to learn the basics of physics and maths in a fun environment.<br>• The significance of this initiative was that the institution exposed itself to schools and knows what was happening in schools while allowing learners to get a sense of maths and physics at university. |

Some participants indicated that the sustainability of these interventions is not guaranteed because of lack of funding.

## 7.3.2 Admissions

Although not all institutions include admission as an integral aspect of their AD function, most interviewees talked about admission, explaining how such processes work in their institutions. A clear distinction was made between testing for access and testing for placement. In all institutions, enrolment planning data guide them on the number of students that need to be enrolled to meet the DHET targets for the institution. Admission issues are handled through dedicated admission units and the work of the AD units to support student success starts once they have been admitted.

A clear distinction was made between testing for access and testing for placement.

In most institutions where testing is used for placement, faculties have their own admission criteria based on a points system. In some faculties, students who meet these criteria are then tested for placement to determine whether they should go into mainstream or extended curriculum programmes (ECPs). It appears that most institutions have their own placement tests. They use the NBTs in addition to these tests to aid decision-making.

In the two institutions that have dedicated access centres as part of their AD units, access testing is aimed at assessing the potential of students whose matric results do not qualify them for access. At the institution where more detail on this testing was provided, the respondent highlighted that access assessment is administered to more than half of the first-year students who get enrolled. The assessment is similar to the NBTs and covers maths and reading comprehension, modelled on problem solving and language proficiency. The assessment does more than just provide an access function:

> *We have a developmental focus and not just an admissions function, so we make developmental recommendations for*

*each student that we assess and they get a little printout with what those recommendations are. They can be simple things like: you must connect with tutorial groups, SI [Supplemental Instruction] groups, etc. [The report] goes to the student plus we capture it on our IT [Information Technology] system that we use and then it actually gets printed out on the registration form so when they are registering the student they can actually see what those recommendations were and if they need to do something as a faculty. So sometimes we will say you need to monitor the student's progress closely. We are not sure what way things will go so monitor them closely. Or we might say they are going to need language development or support, or whatever* (AD professional).

"Buddies" are assigned to assist students in getting the necessary interventions.

In some institutions, the AD units monitor whether students are receiving the recommended support. This can be done through "buddies" assigned to support first-year students. It would be the buddy's responsibility to assist students in getting the necessary interventions.

### 7.3.3 First-Year Experience

When students have been admitted to university, they require guidance on where to find help for specific problems and how to adjust, manage independent learning and find their way around campus. All universities provide orientation programmes for first-time undergraduate students. These vary in their content and approach but mostly take place at the start of the academic year. Many respondents acknowledged that orientation programmes tend to be overloaded. Information provided at orientation is often de-contextualised and therefore not absorbed effectively. For example, an orientation programme focusing on how to access and use the library might be difficult for students who do not yet have an idea of what they might be using the library for and how library use may be important to their particular course.

As a result of the decontextualised nature of orientation and the information overload, some institutions have instituted what they call the First-Year Experience (FYE) so as to spread the various activities that have traditionally been provided during orientation across the first year. The FYE is also useful for students who may have missed the first two weeks of university due to late registration. The various FYE programmes include compulsory faculty-based first-year seminars that are credit bearing; skills programmes with a focus on academic and personal skills; online skills programmes that are available throughout the year which students can refer to as they need them; and student experience surveys.

# 7.4 Social support

## 7.4.1 Psychosocial support

Psychosocial support is a key service to support students' wellbeing, especially in first year where many students battle to adjust to being away from home and to the demands of a university and its workload. A consistent theme in the interviews is the importance of understanding the link between students' psychosocial and academic needs. In particular, it should be recognised that every student may be impacted upon by non-academic factors that have a deep effect on their ability to engage academically.

> *So you want to treat [poor students] the same as everyone else because you want the same outcomes. But they are not the same. This one, the parent is a vendor who sits on the street somewhere* (AD professional).

At one institution, the link between psychosocial support and academic success is so strong that counsellors in residences can access the management information system to check student performance if students are experiencing psychosocial difficulties and seeking help for them.

There is a move towards integrating psychosocial and academic advisory services in some institutions, so that the work is complementary. However, this is not yet the norm.

There is a move towards integrating psychosocial and academic advisory services in some institutions.

## 7.4.2 Mentoring

Mentoring aimed at providing first-year students with a "buddy" to look up to and help show them the ropes during their first year at university has become a common feature within universities. Interviewees highlighted that several approaches to mentoring are being implemented, most of them focusing on the wellbeing of the student in social aspects. These approaches include:

- Residence-based, year-long mentoring run by facilitators employed by the university. This provides small group sessions on life skills, such as time management and coping with institutional requirements.
- Faculty-based peer mentoring where senior students are assigned as "buddies" to first-year students, accompany them to orientation activities, and inform them of new events on campus.
- Professional mentors consisting of retired professors who run sessions on work-based issues, such as engineering, for example.

Mentoring is a huge responsibility. For it to work, universities offer mentor training before the mentors take on this role. It is also important that the mentors are not detrimentally affected in relation to their own academic progress. Academically strong students who also have good leadership skills are selected to be mentors for peer-based mentoring. Institutions that have the funding pay mentors, but in some institutions mentoring is based on a volunteer system. An interesting phenomenon is that mentors are exploiting social networking platforms that are popular with students, like Facebook, Mxit and Twitter, to keep in touch with and support students.

## 7.5 Teaching and learning

All institutions have several academic interventions to enhance teaching and learning. Some interventions, like extended curriculum programmes (ECPs), tutorials, early warning systems, and writing, language and literacy programmes are more widely adopted, while a few institutions have other offerings.

### 7.5.1 Extended curriculum programmes

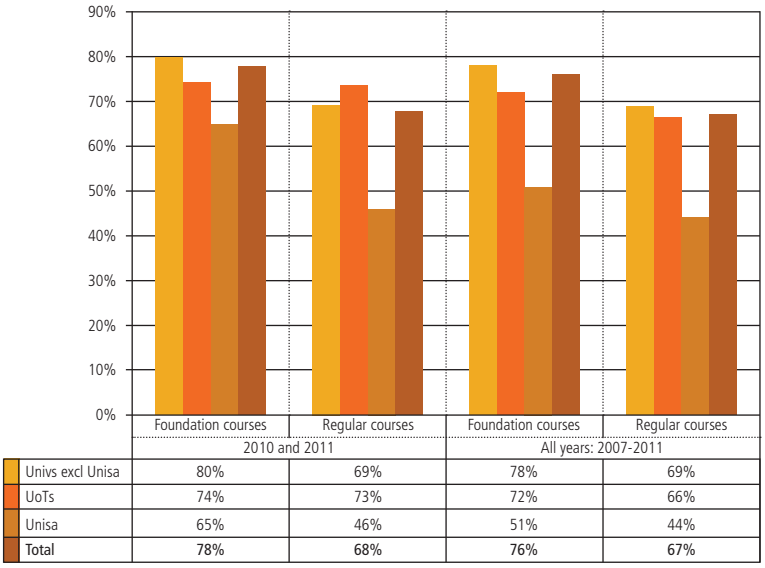
The most notable systemic solution to the articulation gap has been through extended curriculum programmes.

The most notable systemic solution to the articulation gap has been through extended curriculum programmes (ECPs), which provide a curriculum response to improve student access and success. These programmes have become a key feature of AD. ECPs have existed in various forms for three decades, and their significance is that they have "created the curriculum space needed to enable talented but underprepared students to achieve sound foundations for success in higher education" (CHE, 2013a). The 1997 white paper gave policy recognition to the need for ECPs, reaffirmed in the NPHE in 2001. The new funding framework of 2004 makes provision for funding of ECPs, enabling

> up to 15 percent of the first-time entering intake to be admitted to extended programmes. As institutions have used the intervention primarily to provide access for students who have not met regular institutional admission criteria, some 80 - 90 percent of foundation students would not have had an opportunity in higher education without the entry route provided by extended programmes (CHE, 2013a:73).

Although there are not yet any full cohort studies of ECPs, data collected by DHET provide an assessment of the success rates in these programmes. Figure 4 below shows the success rates of first-time entering foundation students.

Figure 4: Success rates of first-time entering foundation students by institution type




| | Foundation courses 2010 and 2011 | Regular courses 2010 and 2011 | Foundation courses All years: 2007-2011 | Regular courses All years: 2007-2011 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Univs excl Unisa | 80% | 69% | 78% | 69% |
| UoTs | 74% | 73% | 72% | 66% |
| Unisa | 65% | 46% | 51% | 44% |
| Total | 78% | 68% | 76% | 67% |

Source: CHE, 2013a:76

The data suggest that the growth in experience in ECP provision seems to have resulted in positive gain for students, as the success rate goes up slightly between 2010 and 2011. The data also emphasise that ECPs enable students to be successful in their first year at university. Further data in the CHE report (2013a) show that the success rate of ECP students who persist is comparable with those of mainstream students. Thousands of students who have entered university through ECPs have proceeded to graduate. The success rate of students in ECPs is being used to motivate structural reform of the undergraduate curriculum in South Africa. The argument is that

> providing additional curriculum space, by means of extending the standard duration of programmes, is an essential condition for enabling the majority of students to bridge the articulation gap (CHE, 2013:94).

Quantitative data on the success rate of students on ECPs are corroborated through case studies conducted at institutional level. These provide useful data on the efficacy of ECPs, offering snapshots of programmes as they were being conceptualised and implemented. What has emerged is a strong action research orientation among practitioners in the AD field, where practice is being constantly improved through reflective assessment of the interventions that are designed and implemented. These case studies mostly portray a picture of positive outcomes from interventions that have been conducted in action-type research methodology (see for example the case studies in Bozalek *et al*, 2011; Dhunpath and Vithal, 2012). The provision of extended programmes has resulted in the development of communities of practice in foundation programmes. It has culminated in publications and in conferences, organised by the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA). While the HELTASA platform encourages inter-institutional engagement, some

Thousands of students who have entered university through ECPs have proceeded to graduate.

institutions have introduced institutionally dedicated platforms to share practice. For example, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) co-ordinates the publication Paradigms, which is an intra-institutional effort at promoting the dissemination of innovative teaching and learning at CPUT, aimed at improving throughput.

Most of the current ECPs have evolved from bridging and foundation courses and are generally located in the science, engineering and commerce faculties. A few universities have extended programmes in education and the humanities. In some universities, faculties opted not to take the extended curriculum route. The faculties generally run ECPs, with AD units providing pedagogic, curricular and assessment support to faculties.

ECPs are, in the main, additional year undergraduate degree programmes that embed specific developmental skills like writing, language and numeracy skills, and also offer year-long as opposed to semester courses to increase time on task. ECPs also have small classes. Their pedagogy is characterised by small group interaction and constructivist learning principles. Students get expositions from lecturers and are encouraged to critically engage with these expositions and participate actively in their learning through group activity and problem-solving endeavours. The first year of the extended programmes is the one where these constructivist characteristics apply. In the second year of study, students largely integrate into mainstream curricula.

In ECPs, students get expositions from lecturers and are encouraged to critically engage.

All respondents are unequivocal in proclaiming the success of the ECPs in their institutions. They highlight the good foundation that ECPs provided to students who had the potential to access university education but would not have been accepted into mainstream programmes because of their low school-leaving points. Students admitted into ECPs would have found it challenging to enter university through the mainstream, or would not have been admitted to university in the first place.

### 7.5.2 Bridging programmes

Although no longer a significant feature of first-year programmes, it is worth mentioning the bridging programme at one university, which articulates with the FET sector because of its fit with current higher education priorities. In this programme, students take on courses for which they can get university credits, as well as access to FET programmes. Recognising the articulation gap and the potential of university-FET collaboration, another institution is exploring possibilities of developing, in collaboration with an FET college, courses that are offered at the university that can be taught at the FET college. Students can receive full credits for these courses if they progress to university.

### 7.5.3 Early warning systems

All universities realise that to support student success, students who are at risk need to be identified early and supported adequately so that

the system does not lose them. There are various ways in which early identification of "at risk" students is being managed. Most institutions operate on the belief that the first semester exams are too late to assist students at risk. Testing as early as five weeks into the first semester is used to flag students who would potentially struggle and to direct them to the necessary support systems.

Testing as early as five weeks into the first semester is used to flag students who would potentially struggle.

In some institutions, a student profile questionnaire is the first stage of assessment. Criteria in the questionnaire can be used as predictors of risk, in conjunction with other forms of assessment. Examples are the NBT and first tests administered in faculties. Students at risk are identified and asked about specific challenges.

Another approach involves issuing of letters of warning to students, using lecturers' assessment to determine the needed assistance. Students are directed to workshops, based on their needs. Importantly, the referred students are monitored. Close contact is maintained with the lecturer to track the student's progress and adapt methodologies for support, if improvement is not realised through the initially recommended interventions.

The challenge with most early warning systems is that institutions are still developing integrated management information systems to capture test data for decisions on student progress. The system has to be reliable and streamlined to not become an administrative burden for lecturers. This is important because, for such systems to work, lecturers have to input data on test results. Some institutions that have systems to capture student test marks struggle to ensure that lecturers input marks, rendering the systems ineffective. Another obstacle is that, when it is detected that students are struggling and need help, there is no capacity to follow up and ensure assistance. It is up to the students to seek help.

### 7.5.4 Tutorials

Substantial investment goes into tutoring, with levels varying across institutions. Some institutions have as many as 1 000 tutors supporting different faculty programmes. In all institutions, tutors are appointed at faculty level and the AD department trains them on effective tutor pedagogy. Most institutions select postgraduate students to be tutors, although this is not always possible at those with small numbers of postgraduates. At one site, it is recognised that lecturers who have tutorials are an integral part of the training of tutors, so the AD unit involves academics in the training. This is appropriate as the lecturers and not the AD department have the content knowledge to support the pedagogic skill training offered by AD units. Respondents observe a shortage of space for tutorials. With as many as 1 000 tutors in certain institutions, some are considering the option of online tutorials. One respondent specifies that the advantage of online tutorials is that they are accessible at times when students are most active and studying, usually the early hours of the morning.

### 7.5.5 Supplemental Instruction

A few institutions are making use of Supplemental Instruction (SI), which is based on small group collaborative learning by students, with the guidance and facilitation of an appointed SI leader. At one of the institutions, SI leaders are selected for courses with a historically high failure rate, if lecturers feel that students need the extra support. SI is a voluntary service and students access it if they want the extra tuition and engagement with peers who may be struggling with the same issues. The University of Missouri, which developed the programme and accredits SI coordinators in South Africa, regulates the process and training. Institutions also make sure that SI leaders receive the necessary training and support.

### 7.5.6 Writing, literacy and numeracy support

Only a few institutions have started or are in the process of starting a numeracy centre.

Acknowledging that language is a barrier to learning at university, most AD units have writing centres, which support student writing and literacy. Two models of providing assistance are followed: student- and lecturer-focused. Most institutions guide students with their writing process and have a considerable number of writing consultants. Others have capacity constraints and have had to devise more sustainable approaches to assisting with writing and language issues by working with lecturers.

In most institutions, language, literacy, and writing classes are embedded in extended curricula programmes. Lecturers can request writing support for specific assignments for students. In this way, writing and language instruction becomes contextualised within the discipline, and this is where lecturer's input is important.

In addition to writing centres, some institutions have language labs with programmes that support vocabulary-building. Students work on their own in a non-threatening environment.

Only a few institutions have started or are in the process of starting a numeracy centre. These centres assist students who do technical courses with numeracy skills. At one institution, the programmes are credit bearing and are offered as a module on extended curriculum programmes.

### 7.5.7 Infrastructure interventions

A growing area of intervention mentioned by a few interviewees is spatial configuration to enhance teaching and learning. A few AD leaders are providing input where new buildings are being constructed on how to create more flexible learning spaces, including using open areas to create informal learning environments. This includes, for example, putting tables in passageways to encourage small group learning, and including coffee nooks in central spaces where there are four to five lecture halls in the same venue. At one institution, space issues have been addressed during the revamp

and expansion of residence halls to promote learning. This includes installing Wi-Fi for students with laptops to access the internet while in residences, and setting up writing mini-labs for students without laptops. At one of the universities, space has been made within the AD unit for group discussions on academic work. This is in response to the realisation that, as the library requires silence, students are without comfortable spaces where they can quietly discuss academic work. There is always an AD consultant in this group discussion space and students can ask for help on aspects of their learning. If the consultant on duty cannot assist, s/he refers students to a relevant person.

## 7.5.8 Innovative teaching and learning

The literature shows that teaching and learning approaches aimed at enhancing learning for underprepared students have been developed across a range of disciplines and courses, with most of the programmes located in ECPs. Lecturers working in AD have developed programmes deploying various strategies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment to improve learning outcomes. Most of these interventions are designed to improve concept formation.

Furthermore, lecturers try to reconfigure teaching and learning spaces to address the disconnection between lecturer and student detrimental to learning. Some of these interventions include modifying "traditional" classroom practice, making it amenable to engagement between the lecturer and students. In such settings, the role of the lecturer is transformed from that of a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator who mediates and directs student contributions, using student contributions to diagnose remediation areas. Other interventions make use of technology to aid teaching, learning and assessment.

Two types of interventions are apparent: those that rely on basic props and mostly require change of lecturer/student roles in traditional classrooms, and those that have made use of technology. The focus of some interventions includes:

- reducing resistance to mathematics, which hinders learning of subject matter content, particularly in technical courses
- developing students' concept-mapping skills to enable them to capture and process information better
- using multiple modalities of practice including popular culture to encourage student engagement with subject content.

These interventions respond to the teaching and learning challenges highlighted above. Other examples from the literature review are presented below in relation to how they address issues of pedagogy, language, large classes, knowledge and diversity in specific learning areas. The strategies in these case studies demonstrate the aspects that make ECPs effective. They show that student-centred pedagogy encourages active participation in learning and reduces the articulation gap.

The role of the lecturer is transformed from that of a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator who mediates and directs student contributions.

Table 6: Some case studies on teaching and learning interventions in Academic Development

| Intervention | Context | Strategies to enhance learning |
|---|---|---|
| Breaking down the numeracy barrier in a design course at a university of technology (Rohlwink, 2011) | Maths development is a focus of foundation programmes and maths is essential for a design course. Students on design courses were shocked to discover they had to do maths again, as most had developed resistance to it and thought they had finished with maths at school level. | • A diagnostic maths test showed students had difficulty in calculating the area and circumference of a circle, volume of regular prisms, and area of a rectangle.<br>• Students could not differentiate square and cubic metres, did not know when to multiply and when to divide, and were unable to apply metric division and multiplication or basic mathematical knowledge to a practical design problem.<br>• The lecturer showed sensitivity to students' articulation challenges when she asked them to do free writing to express their attitudes and emotions towards and past experiences of maths.<br>• The lecturer gave three lessons on the brain and memory to motivate students that they could break down past barriers and create a new relationship with maths.<br>• The lecturer used visual language to explain the concept of $mm^2$ and $cm^2$, for example, "'gather up' $mm^2$ into a $cm^2$ to create the impression of arranging a number of smaller units into one larger unit (divide)".<br>• The class was divided into small groups based on diagnostic test results.<br>• Learning was authentic as students had to work with worksheets to solve problems on their own.<br>• Students were tested after the learning and the results showed that the pass rate had doubled compared to the diagnostic, and the class average had improved by 10 percent. |
| Multiple modes of epistemological access in Physics at UWC (Herbert, Conana, Volkwyn and Marshall, 2011) | Students' resistance to maths affected their ability to perform well and enjoy physics. Traditionally, maths was introduced very early on in the course, and the reaction to maths through this early introduction would affect student engagement with the course. | • The instructors deferred the introduction of maths to a later stage to allow students to acquire discursive fluency in the subject before resistance to it created a barrier.<br>• Students were given a chance to develop their conceptual understanding through communicating concepts using words, diagrams, graphs, and mathematics.<br>• Class activities were structured around investigation and problem solving. |

| Intervention | Context | Strategies to enhance learning |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Practical laboratory sessions encouraged scientific investigation that employed some aspects of the scientific method.<br>• A large room was used for lectures and laboratory experiments. The space allowed students to work in groups of three.<br>• Lectures privileged discussion over lecturer exposition.<br>• Formative feedback was given on student productions.<br>• Teams of lecturers taught the classes and moved around, discussing matters with students, sometimes stopping to make expositions to the whole class if necessary.<br>• The course embedded "reading, writing and computer literacy".<br>• The course had a resident academic literacy specialist who monitored students and lecturers during class and could actively engage in class by asking lecturers to clarify certain aspects. |
| "Effective numeracy" – using interactive spreadsheets in computer-based tutorials (Frith *et al*, 2004) | Achievement in maths allows students to gain access to certain programmes in a university. However, a significant number of South African students enter university without the requisite maths to qualify for enrolment in their preferred disciplines. Students therefore need mathematical skills to cope with the maths demand of their courses. | • Concept formation was promoted through interactive spreadsheets which were used to provide students with an understanding of the concepts and enable them to retain what they had learned. |

| Intervention | Context | Strategies to enhance learning |
|---|---|---|
| Assisting students with text comprehension in a Life Sciences programme at UWC (Short and Jurgen, 2011) | Students often find it difficult to read and make sense of multiple readings to construct an argument. As such, they need to be taught how to identify the key ideas in texts. | • Concept-mapping was used to improve student understanding of key terms and to extract key ideas from text-heavy books.<br>• Students were taught to engage with texts and construct their own knowledge. |
| Using multiple modalities of practice to gain epistemological access at UWC (Carelse, 2011) | The Social Work department at UWC has offered the ECP in the Bachelor of Social Work degree (BSW) since 2010. The ECP consists of four social work theory modules of which students take two per year during their first two years of study. These modules have been successful in yielding epistemological access to underprepared students. | • The BSW class was small, with 40 students from diverse backgrounds. Some gained entry through their matric results and others through recognition of prior learning without a matric qualification.<br>• Social constructivist theories informed the teaching in the BSW and included "class-room discussions and e-teaching discussion forums, group presentations, debates, case studies, essay writing and concept-mapping" – all meant to enable students to participate in the co-construction of knowledge.<br>• In the first term, students were assigned into groups of five that would serve as collaborative groups.<br>• Students were required to prepare for class using prescribed readings.<br>• Students were expected to present in class.<br>• Presentations took cognisance of students' strengths, for example, some presentations were based on a rap song of lecture content, and others on role-play, talk show simulation or PowerPoint presentation.<br>• Students made use of members of their group, the lecturer, or the tutor to explain concepts they did not fully grasp. |

11 The public service human resources system.

## 7.6 Research

Institutions' commitment to their AD work partly manifests in how data and research are used to inform planning and to make decisions about and improve programmes. This is evidenced by the extent of respondents' discussions of research in their institutions and the use of data for evidence-based decision-making.

### 7.6.1 Data

At most universities, data for AD planning and analysis are located in the offices of institutional planning. In one example, data analysis provided by the academic faculties is done at the Teaching and Learning (AD) office to fulfil its monitoring, evaluation, and reporting function. Generally, the primary data for planning are test and exam results, cohort data and lecturer evaluation.

Cohort data are useful for analysis of dropout, retention and throughput. The five institutional planners indicated in their interviews that this data were vital, as deans and departmental heads sometimes celebrate pass rates out of context. Pass rates only reflect the performance of persisting students, and do not account for those lost to the system, a critical dimension in the analysis of higher education statistics. Pass rates without the context of cohort data provide a partial picture of performance. This leads to misguided planning, as the emphasis in the classroom should be on improving teaching and learning to retain students and not merely on teaching for those who persist. Cohort analysis enables appropriate interventions based on where exactly the dropout point is – first, second, or third year. Courses that impede student progress and cause dropout can be identified through cohort analysis.

At a national level, it was reported that the DHET now has a specialised server to conduct regular cohort studies. Interest exists in using cohort data to conduct analysis of particularly critical qualifications. The aim is to inform skills development debates with accurate data on education, training and employment. Ideally the system should generate comparisons of DHET data and institutional data sets to enable the creation of standardised methodologies of data collection and analysis across institutions. The DHET is already tracking teacher education graduates through the PERSAL[11] system to evaluate where they end up being employed. This can only be done for teachers employed by government, as they cannot track people employed in governing body posts, at independent schools or in other sectors.

Tests and exam results are used for several purposes. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, test data in the first five to six weeks are used to identify students at risk for support. Exam data are also useful in identifying "killer" courses. Most institutions are interested in determining the courses with high failure rates, which impede graduation. At some institutions, management

Institutions are interested in determining the courses with high failure rates, which impede graduation.

information systems are used to generate lecturer evaluation data and their uptake of AD interventions to determine features associated with student failure. This analysis can be insightful:

*Most of the "at risk" subjects don't have tutors. The teachers who teach the "at risk" subjects are ultimately the people who don't go to courses.*

> *Most of the "at risk" subjects don't have tutors. The teachers who teach the "at risk" subjects are ultimately the people who don't go to courses, who don't come to our training, who don't do special training, etc. The pattern is there. Once they become better teachers, the students become better learners* (AD professional).

With such analysis at hand, AD units can make their case for interventions:

> *We have a very large fund allocated to paying the tutors and we've also noticed when we do our evaluations that those subjects that do have tutors, even if they are an "at risk" subject matter, tend to have a higher success rate than the subjects without tutors. We've tried to collect that kind of evidence to persuade the deans and the heads of departments why it's important for them to do things like make use of the tutors, send your students to the writing centre because those are all going to impact on the students' success* (AD professional).

Test and exam data are used to evaluate the success of interventions. For example, exam and test results of students on support programmes can be disaggregated. This data should be read critically, as an AD professional warns that impact analysis can be reductionist and should be treated with caution:

> *We just got involved in a conversation internally to see about an online package, an online measuring tool that when students join an intervention that then their academic results are the one indicator of whether this intervention was useful or not. And I resisted that, I said that it's really simplistic, I don't think we can for instance measure a career development workshop as to - you know, a student might well dropout after a career development workshop and say actually I don't want to do dentistry, I'm really not into dentistry - and they make it a year out, join another institution or come back to university and do something different a year later and be a really successful, do a law degree or whatever. That career development workshop may well have in four years been successful but to measure there and then in academic terms, I just think it's short sighted and simplistic* (AD professional).

Therefore conclusions made from data should be managed carefully. This is especially the case with lecturer evaluation data:

> *Often we take evaluations of teaching to be an evaluation of the teacher [but] there's not actually a direct correlation*

> *as the academics will tell you in any case. So I have been thinking that one through, and thinking that we must be careful about how we use these evaluations and we should rather use them to plan workshops for lecturers in general and say, it looks like all the students say this is a problem, so let's do a workshop around that. So you rather tackle it from a teaching development perspective than that the individual is a problem* (AD professional).

Exam data form part of the reporting to the DHET for the TDG, while exam results and institutional cohort data both feed into the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS). HEMIS shows the entire country's access, retention, persistence and throughput rates.

All institutions use management information systems for data capture and analysis. Some systems are interoperable with the HEMIS system, user-friendly and can be accessed by staff within institutions for planning purposes. A planning professional explained the power of their data management system as "it takes data from HEMIS and cuts it and dices and slices it however you want it".

## 7.6.2 Researching practice

Research output is limited because of capacity constraints.

AD professionals and institutional planners acknowledge research as an integral aspect of AD work. However, their research output is limited because of capacity constraints. Research has three main purposes: to inform institutional planning; to share and improve practice; and to advance professional development. These purposes are not mutually exclusive and can be linked with particular projects.

Institutional planning offices and faculties where ECPs are located conduct research for institutional planning. The research includes cohort studies and analysis of access data to inform enrolment planning. An example of current investigations is graduate destination research, which links with the DHET's interest in tracking graduate absorption. The aim is to better inform conversations about shortages of skills, work readiness, and career choice. Having a weak tracking system of graduate destinations is wasteful, as training continues in areas for which there is no industry demand, while those where demand exists are neglected:

> *It's huge wastage in the system and unless we can start tracking where they are going and understanding how we link between the higher education space and the workspace and that sort of movement between… That's also got a huge amount to do with success because its fine, you get graduates out, but if they can't find work…* (AD professional).

Based on the interviews and desktop review, research for the improvement of practice can be grouped in seven categories:

Table 7: Categories of research to share and improve practice

| Research category | Examples of research areas |
|---|---|
| Professional issues | • Social and cultural conditions conducive for uptake of professional development opportunities<br>• Staff workload<br>• Scholarship of teaching and learning<br>• Identity shifts of AD professionals involved in e-learning |
| Student experience | • Access in SA higher education<br>• First-year student retention and success<br>• First-Year Experience<br>• Factors affecting student learning<br>• Youth development<br>• Absenteeism<br>• Cohort studies<br>• Student satisfaction surveys<br>• Student engagement |
| Curriculum | • Integrating writing skills in specific disciplines to improve student performance<br>• Articulation of FET/university curricula<br>• Courses that impede graduation<br>• Programme evaluation<br>• Transliteracies – how to bring different literacies into the curriculum |
| Pedagogy | • Authentic learning<br>• Large classes<br>• E-learning |
| Assessment | • Linking NBT test results with first-year performance<br>• Evaluating how online assessment improves interaction between lecturer and students and impacts student performance<br>• Early assessment |
| Institutional issues | • Institutional culture |
| Labour market analysis | • Graduate employability surveys<br>• Graduate destination surveys |

While the sample of respondents interviewed here is not representative, research on professional issues, student experience, and curriculum appears to attract the most interest. Research is shared through conference presentations, journal publications and books. The research questions for this study did not probe the theories and approaches adopted in the research. However, it is worth mentioning one professional's criticism of the use of theory in AD research, based on her own experience:

> *Throughout the country we are actually using very few ideas to express our theory, very few ideas to explain what we are seeing in the student data... Universities [are] explaining [student failure by] using ideas which actually do not make sense, over and over again, often the ideas are faulty, the theories are misappropriated, wrongly as it were so the original theory has been lost. What you have got is a sort of a common sense mismatch of how the universities are explaining, teaching and learning... [We need to use] more robust theory to explain what we see in the data* (AD professional).

This critique calls for an evaluation of the theories used locally to frame student failure and success.

Strong communities have formed around research on access and success. Institutional planning research is presented at conferences like the Southern African Association for Institutional Research (SAAIR), while work on AD initiatives is presented at the annual HELTASA conferences. AD professionals can join various HELTASA special interest groups (SIGs) on areas such as technology and professional development. There is continued networking and sharing of practice beyond the conferences.

In addition to national conferences, annual colloquia give lecturers an opportunity to showcase their practice and engage with peers. The feedback is that these colloquia have become popular among academics and are well attended.

Respondents underline that, beyond the conferences, collaboration includes cross-institutional research on student engagement, social justice, emerging technologies, and professional identities, among others. Cooperation is usually enabled by a research grant with the intention to generate large data sets through multi-site data gathering and analysis. Such collaboration, for example in the HELTASA SIGs, provides opportunities for skills transfer between experienced and emerging AD researchers. Respondents referred to research in progress, to be published in due course.

AD professionals conduct research as part of their PhD studies to share practice and for professional advancement. AD units' projects or areas of work inform all the work. These projects enable AD professionals to critique their practice and enhance it during the course of their studies.

Research projects enable AD professionals to critique their practice and enhance it during the course of their studies.

## 7.7 Professional development

An intervention enabling student success is "the development and implementation of teaching approaches that will be effective in catering for student diversity" (Scott *et al*, 2007, cited in Quinn, 2012). It entails academic staff development, as most teachers taught as they were trained without considering challenges that students face. Quinn (2012) ascribes this to "student deficit, school deficit, intellectual elitist" discourses. Lecturers influenced by these discourses believe that changing their approaches to teaching from the traditional lecture exposition style would water down intellectual standards. They believe that underprepared students should not be allowed formal access to universities and that schools should prepare students better for university.

Other lecturers believe in critically examining and changing their practice to promote student success. They are open to transformation and willing to reconceptualise higher education in relation to

> providing formal and epistemological access not just for the elite, but also for students who were previously denied access to higher education. For these lecturers an appropriate response to the changing higher education context is to change their teaching methods, curricula and assessment methods to enable all students to gain epistemological access (Quinn, 2012:31).

One of the AD professionals interviewed sums up the significance of professional development as: "We don't only view student success as a student issue. It's also a staff issue." This sentiment manifests in AD units. Most emphasise both staff and student development. Staff development interventions are responsive to theories of how best students learn. AD units offer professional development interventions for lecturers, including, among others:[12]

- a formal qualification, the Higher Diploma in Higher Education and Training (HDHET)
- induction for new academic staff
- regular workshops and seminars on aspects of teaching and learning, such as assessment with web studies, outcomes for postgraduate programmes, portfolios, setting exam papers, marking exam papers, and compiling a professional portfolio
- encouraging lecturers to reflect on their practice through engagement in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL)[13], so that they improve student learning outcomes.

Some lecturers believe that changing their approaches to teaching from the traditional lecture exposition style would water down intellectual standards.

In addition to formal approaches to professional development, there are informal opportunities arising from collaboration within and across institutions.

12 Information on offerings obtained from institutional AD centre websites.
13 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) is a phrase used to describe the area of research that broadly covers issues of teaching and learning in higher education.

### 7.7.1 Induction

All institutions provide staff induction, including for those from a university teaching background. The approach and the content vary across institutions, as does the time span, which ranges from a couple of days to a week, followed by six months of development programmes in some institutions. The importance thereof also differs – in some institutions it is compulsory, and a portfolio of evidence is submitted after attending the sixth month programme, leading to the lifting of the probationary period. In other institutions, it was reported that some deans do not allow lecturers in their faculties to attend induction sessions, indicating that they cannot leave classes unattended. In this regard there is considerable variation across institutions.

It was reported that some deans do not allow lecturers in their faculties to attend induction sessions.

Most of the respondents report that induction is run twice a year, with a few universities running induction on an ongoing basis when new staff are appointed. A unique approach at one of the institutions is that the assessment for induction is the first module of a SOTL certificate which covers 11 topics. The course encourages lecturers to take on additional modules.

Induction training is based on limited exposure to all the courses that are presented throughout the year as development courses, including pedagogy, assessment, and curriculum.

### 7.7.2 Courses and workshops

All AD respondents talk about professional development courses and workshops that their units offer. These cover aspects of curriculum development, pedagogy and assessment, including training for markers, facilitation skills for large classes, assessment, and integrating technology for teaching and learning.

The most popular workshop is on assessment. At several institutions, this module is compulsory and essential for consideration for promotion. As a determinant of student success, it is crucial that assessment be done well. A respondent elaborates on this issue in the context of diversity:

> *The assessment of students' learning is really key because you can use assessment either to maintain or challenge existing social structures. If you penalise students very heavily for simple grammatical and language errors and you can actually make them fail even although the thought in what they're giving you to read is actually of a very high order... So you need to make sure that the way you assess students' language takes into account diversity and that you assess validly, reliably and fairly* (AD professional).

In the Western Cape, a regional postgraduate diploma in Higher Education Teaching and Learning will be on offer from 2014. Other regions plan to offer a similar qualification. While it is available at all the Eastern Cape

universities, one of the institutions found that it was not working well. Uptake was poor so they replaced it with an unaccredited certificate course on SOTL.

As more students access social networking platforms and technologies, particularly mobile devices, some lecturers are taking up technology use for teaching and learning.

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Courses and workshops are scheduled throughout the year, with the expectation that lecturers attend voluntarily. In some cases AD staff provide faculty-wide support, or work with specific lecturers in course delivery to support them with writing skills or language-related matters.

Pedagogical, curriculum and assessment-related issues are explored at lunchtime seminars. Lecturers engaging in good practice are provided with a platform to encourage a culture of sharing and motivate others to improve their practice for enhanced student outcomes. Respondents report that it could become an effective methodology if senior professors took up AD courses that influence a change in their practice. It would also encourage other staff members to attend training.

Useful collaboration is taking place in research and training, but sharing resources and information is a relatively underexplored area. Only two interviewees indicate that they were using assessment tests and a student guide developed at another institution. Good resources for AD, for example guides on writing and language, could be shared through a central repository. Permission could be granted to adapt and re-use content to avoid the creation of different versions of the same product. The potential for sharing resources exists, especially in an area of practice which battles with capacity and other constraints.

# Constraints on Academic Development work

# 8

Notwithstanding the various interventions that institutions are implementing to improve student success, AD work is still beset with a multitude of constraints, including those to do with staffing, infrastructure, curriculum, data and research, and institutional and structural matters.

## 8.1 Staffing

Boughey (2007), Scott (2009) and others show how the history of AD work within institutions and the lack of sustained resourcing for this work have affected the growth of a cohort of AD practitioners within and across institutions. These particular structural constraints (among them, lack of funding for permanent positions) means a limited focus on the scholarship of teaching and learning, with many practitioners in the field unable to manage both teaching and producing research in their field.

The lack of sustained resourcing for AD work has affected the growth of a cohort of AD practitioners within and across institutions.

In all universities, large numbers of temporary or contract employees tend to staff AD units. While some institutions have attempted to change this trend in recent years, it still featured in the majority of interviews. The new draft policy on the TDG attempts to address this problem by disbursing funds for three years to reduce instability. Three-year funding cycles provide better scope for planning, particularly in providing longer-term contracts for staff.

Instability in employment in these units arises from the way in which AD work is funded within institutions, with a high reliance on external funding. In the past, as the literature shows, this was primarily donor funding but in recent years earmarked grants were received from government. In many institutions, AD units are heavily reliant on these funds. Short-term funding makes it difficult to appoint people on longer-term contracts, creating insecurity for the units and staff. One person indicates that she constantly seems to be advertising positions.

Contractual and employment conditions of teaching and learning staff were consistently raised in interviews. In a few institutions, AD staff are appointed on academic conditions of service, which allows them access to certain benefits and academic career paths. However, in the vast majority of institutions, teaching and learning support staff are seen as just that: either strictly as support staff or alternatively as professional staff, but with no academic conditions of service. This complex issue relates to

Most institutions tend to view AD and its focus on support for success as administrative work.

how institutions define different categories of staff, including academics. Most institutions tend to view AD and its focus on support for success as administrative work. The contractual status of teaching and learning staff appears to be a major concern.

Academic conditions of service require some emphasis on research production. The dominant view of teaching and learning professionals is that they must improve their academic qualifications to PhD level, conduct research and publish to be taken seriously by academics and strengthen the scholarship of teaching and learning. They find themselves on the cusp of the dichotomy between research and teaching, involved primarily in teaching work but not recognised as academics.

> *If you're going to work with an academic, if you're going to argue with an academic about their teaching, you probably need to be at least Dr. Somebody: you can't just go in with an honours degree... you need to have some stature, you need to have some academic reputation to be able to do that* (AD professional).

Another respondent emphasises that:

> *If you want to be taken seriously by academics you need to carry yourself as an academic, speak like one, write like one, engage, argue like one, but we are at a stage where we are a service centre - we provide services. But I am not happy with that. I want us to do more. I want strong people so that when we argue, we can do that as strong intellectuals and researchers* (AD professional).

However, the relative instability of the sector mitigates against improving academic qualifications because workloads are high. Only a handful of teaching and learning professionals indicate that they have the space and time to research and publish. A few individuals report that, despite being appointed as professors, their roles are not widely accepted by academic staff as important to institutional development.

Ideas about resolving this dilemma vary and are linked not just to changing contractual status but also to the general need to grow institutional support and respect for teaching and learning initiatives. One suggestion was that academic conditions of service might not be the answer because of the difficulty in finding time to conduct research. In courses and departments where teaching loads are high, increasing research output is difficult and pressure to publish can take staff away from crucial teaching responsibilities. It was also mentioned as a concern by one respondent that AD staff are so busy with their practice that they rarely find the time to debate and engage at a scholarly level, which is crucial for examining practice and developing themselves and the field:

> *They are just so overworked that I'm surprised that we have any research outputs at all. It's very low, and I can fully understand why* (AD professional).

Teaching being underrecognised is compounded by AD staff generally being on the periphery or seen as "outsiders" to academe:

> *It is true that AD work is seen to be on the periphery. So how do you influence and help bring the kind of results and outcomes that you're looking for if you work from the periphery? (*AD professional).

A respondent expresses a more positive view:

> *I think the greater innovation happens at the periphery of any system, so I don't think it's necessarily a bad place to be... one of the deans said he didn't want anyone coming from the side to tell him what to do, but I think being at somebody's side is the right place for an academic developer... you're sitting beside them working with them (*AD professional)

It is clear from the views expressed, however, that a lack of professional status means the absence of clear career pathways for teaching and learning professionals. This includes a dearth of promotion possibilities because of limited senior permanent posts and the lack of a promotion system similar to that available to academic staff. Thus AD staff often change jobs or look to academic positions within faculties, which may offer greater career growth possibilities. In one institution, subject to a merger, no academic promotions have taken place at all since the merger, severely restricting the institution's capacity for attracting and retaining academic staff at all levels. Indeed, where there is little recognition for work done, few incentives exist for staff to improve their practice:

A lack of professional status means the absence of clear career pathways for teaching and learning professionals.

> *This in my opinion [is] one of the biggest things... constraining Academic Development: that you get really concerned, good, innovative, intelligent, committed people doing work that they love, that they believe is important, and they reach career dead-ends... so if we can sort that one out, the conditions of service for Academic Development professionals... because it's not just about money, it's primarily about self-fulfilment* (Policy professional).

Funding and status constraints make it generally difficult for institutions to attract new and qualified staff to AD positions. Staff turnover is high. Experienced staff move between institutions regularly. This is particularly an issue in rural universities and smaller centres, which may find it more difficult than urban universities to attract staff.

Many heads of AD units are close to retirement, compounding these problems. Succession planning is necessary but difficult due to the instability in the units. A number of respondents raised a concern about where the next generation of teaching and learning experts will come from.

There was some reference in the interviews to the role of HELTASA in supporting the growth of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The SIGs of HELTASA are important in building communities of practice among teaching and learning professionals across institutions. However, despite the annual conference, the proportion of academic staff overall who participate in HELTASA events and conduct teaching and learning-related research remains small. There is a need for more time and space for reflection and engagement, both within institutions and across them.

> *Whoever is in Academic Development is so busy with development work, we have very little time for robust debate... and HELTASA is once a year, and then you have the SIGs, but there isn't time for scholarly engagement around Academic Development (*AD professional).

Greater engagement should happen between HELTASA and other professional associations such as the SAAIR. However, as some of the initiatives mentioned in this report do show, there is growing interest in collaboration and building research and intellectual capacity in the AD field. One respondent suggests that HELTASA should engage more directly with institutional leaders, in particular the deputy vice-chancellors responsible for teaching and learning, whether through HESA or another mechanism, to raise some of the constraints.

Respondents broadly supported the focus of the CHE on teaching and learning in its current quality assurance cycle. There could be many benefits of this focus, including clear ways of defining quality criteria for teaching and learning.

> *Because teaching and learning as an area has never received proper attention, part of the challenge is, which criteria are you going to use, because how do you define good teaching? We have not done enough to be able to talk about teaching at the same level as we do research (*AD professional).

There is inadequate reward and recognition for teaching and "mixed messaging" about the importance of research versus teaching.

This issue relates to the status of teaching and learning development work and the need for greater recognition and support for the scholarship of teaching and learning. Research is not only more greatly rewarded but a crucial aspect of academic identities. Even in predominantly teaching institutions, where research output is generally low, there is inadequate reward and recognition for teaching and "mixed messaging" about the importance of research versus teaching. A stronger reward and recognition system for teaching would be one contributing factor to improving the status of teaching and learning/AD professionals.

Boughey argues for a third generation of AD, which requires a discursive shift: merging AD work within quality discourses, embracing the efficiency debates, but equally developing academic programmes properly as "fit for purpose", and allowing more nuance and context to be explored in relation to curriculum and teaching practices (Boughey, 2007).

## 8.2 Infrastructure

The considerable expansion of student numbers has brought infrastructural needs into sharper focus. Several respondents mentioned infrastructure constraints. Not only may there not be enough facilities for teaching, but the teaching spaces are inappropriate for different modes of teaching. Space constraints have a significant effect on timetabling. Managing the use of space requires high levels of logistical coordination.

Teaching and learning spaces should be designed to match need – whether for large classes, tutorial support or laboratory work. Infrastructure development should be linked to appropriate technical resources to support teaching.

Teaching and learning spaces should be designed to match need - whether for large classes, tutorial support or laboratory work.

A shortage of residence space is an issue for most institutions, although only a few respondents mention this. Living conditions are important for student success. In many universities, residences are a key part of the strategy for improving student success.

## 8.3 Curriculum

According to the respondents, curriculum structure is important as students "don't do optional", that is, they do not register for additional courses. Where supplementary support courses for academic literacy, for example, are not structured within the curriculum, students are unlikely to take them up, creating "white elephant" courses. Evidence shows support is best structured as a formal credit-bearing part of the curriculum.

> *The work we do would be seen as support work, and it would be seen as external to the main teaching and learning that happens in the departments. So you could not be part of the timetable, and perhaps it would not be taken seriously for that reason* (AD professional).

The discussion on extended programmes demonstrates that they can be effective in improving student success rates. The growth in first-year support programmes is a sign that many institutions pay attention to students in their first year. However, respondents suggest that support should continue throughout the undergraduate years as many students also struggle after their first year of study. In semesterised courses, there is little time for support because of time constraints. In many cases, student development work is limited in the formal curriculum.

> *So they would have been in the system for two years of this very carefully constructed superb team of people that are supporting them and they hit second year maths in their third year and it's like everything has been pulled out from under them... and so then it's not surprising either in their second academic year or third year at university they just disappear*

> *altogether and they fall out, or they take the second year and they fail it and then they repeat the second year and so... what was a four-year degree now becomes a five-year, then a six-year and then financial problems hit (*AD professional).

Several respondents mentioned difficulties in attracting students into extended programmes. Students may not opt for these opportunities because they find a place at a less selective university in the mainstream, and because they do not see the value of additional support at the beginning. That they are likely to end up taking the same length of time to complete their degree as they would in an extended programme is not something they will consider when they start out.

At some universities the wide range of courses means too much choice, which can make it impossible to keep venue allocation and exam timetabling clash-free. Overloaded curricula also significantly affect student decision-making. Students who overload their course time can set themselves up for failure. In one institution this is a significant problem, which is being addressed centrally by the university as part of an initiative to improve student success rates and the quality of academic provision.

Respondents mention the expansion of tutorial support to improve student-staff contact time and student success. While it may be possible to provide targeted courses for small proportions of students, tutorial support across programmes hold implications for costs, staffing and infrastructure. However, there is interest in exploring ways of optimising academic-student contact time.

> *Well, you extend the degree time but then you are not going to be able to teach them in small groups. So it's a partial solution, but that much smaller staff/student ratio that works really well for the extended programmes... cannot be maintained if you take it to the entire student body* (Planning professional).

A paucity of curriculum development skills among academic staff is a significant hindrance.

A paucity of curriculum development skills among academic staff is a significant hindrance. A number of respondents describe a low level of understanding about the kind of work that curricula require. It is a process that demands time, space for reflection and collaboration, and pedagogical and disciplinary expertise. The lack of this skill creates a serious hurdle to improving curriculum structures. Curriculum development could become a national imperative if the recommendations of the CHE task team for a four-year undergraduate degree programme are accepted, and capacity constraints will have to be urgently addressed.

Funding is also an issue. According to Ahmed Essop, the CEO of the CHE, although all universities have support programmes in place for inadequately prepared students,

> the full impact of these programmes is limited because [state] funding is provided for a maximum of 15 percent of an entering

> cohort and because the programmes are an add-on. [They] have not resulted in a fundamental reform of the curriculum structure, which may be necessary given the extent of the problem (quoted in John, 2013:18).

## 8.4 Data and research

Respondents identify problems related to availability of data, IT infrastructure and software, and the harmonisation of different data systems, both at national and institutional level. However, even where data systems receive adequate attention, the majority of respondents report a need for greater capacity to conduct data analysis and institutional research. Capability is required to analyse large data sets, monitor data collection and build institutional "business intelligence" for evidence-based decision-making. These challenges are systemic:

> *Very often if you give raw data to people they actually don't know how to make sense of it. So having the means to explain and to make the connections and see the patterns is critically important* (Planning professional).

There is a dearth of data analysts and institutional researchers who understand planning and have the necessary institutional knowledge to improve systems:

> *Do they [universities] have the servers and the technical people that can run data systems properly? ... You are having an evidence-based conversation without evidence, or with poor quality evidence or poor quality data... and the last bit is somebody who is so well-versed with the culture of the institution that they are able to systemically ask the questions and provide the data that will be able to answer those questions. Now that only comes with time and that's a long-term investment in capacity (*AD professional).

Human resources (HR) management demands improved data, institutionally and nationally. Problems relate to definitions of staff categories, such as how academics are defined within HEMIS and within institutional HR systems, whether or not these are harmonised, and how temporary staff are captured on HR systems. The variation in the description and use of data restricts the building of proper national data sets. It is still difficult to track staff across the system, as ID numbers are not yet used in HEMIS data. Understanding staff-student ratios is crucial for academic planning work.

Human resources management demands improved data, institutionally and nationally.

Several respondents mentioned the need for institutional staff to develop specific capacity in the area of "learning analytics". These are a set of specific approaches and models for collecting and analysing student data and contextual information.

## 8.5 Institutional and structural

Structural problems act as barriers to the work of teaching and learning specialists. Building systems for student success is slow and complex, with many different angles.

Academic staff have to support effective tracking systems, both by building early assessment practices into their teaching and by using IT systems effectively.

Student success is strongly linked to both direct academic assistance for students, as well as other forms, such as psychosocial support. In the majority of institutions, psychosocial support services are managed under student affairs departments, while academic support services are combined in teaching and learning units and faculties. In a small number of institutions, student support in all its forms is combined under the auspices of teaching and learning units. The standard model is to separate the academic and non-academic support structures. A number of respondents find this worrying, as the structural division results in little collaboration. Some teaching and learning and student affairs professionals believe that greater links between these different support programmes, whether driven by structure or policy, would have a positive effect on student success.

> *We had an exam timetable where people wrote three of their majors in one day, all the way to the evening at 9 o'clock. It's impossible of course, and these kids are failing – it's a ridiculous design. But of course nobody thought that our kids need to go home... they need to get a taxi... this is an impossible timetable... we set students up for failure – but nobody had thought of that because of course it's not their job to think about that – it's my job* (AD professional).

A number of respondents point out that enrolment planning is a centralised process in most institutions, with little interest in or participation from faculties. Sometimes it is de-linked from broader academic planning processes. The ways in which institutions work to improve student success need strong buy-in from academic faculties, and not all academics support the involvement of centralised planners and developers in this work. How universities are structured to respond to challenges of student success is crucial for change to take place.

Academic staff have to support effective tracking systems, both by building early assessment practices into their teaching and by using IT systems effectively. Without early evaluation and uploading of marks, institutions cannot operate centralised early warning systems. In one institution resistance exists because it would put departmental and individual assessment practices under closer scrutiny. Sometimes opposition exists to using new technologies. Given the fast-changing higher education workplace, an acceptance of new technology to support better teaching and student success rates is crucial to changing teaching and learning practice. Resistance to technology sometimes goes with resistance to changing pedagogical practice. As mentioned, the attitudes of lecturers are significant for student success and therefore recognised as a constraint to improving student performance. In talking about support to students one respondent says:

> *It is not rocket science but it has to be intentional and it has to be consistent and continuous* (AD professional).

A few examples were provided of situations where the "mindsets" of lecturers were to write off weaker students. One respondent indicates that attitudinal change was a more significant limitation to address than any resource problems.

A few examples were provided of situations where the "mindsets" of lecturers were to write off weaker students.

> *You're coming to tell us about this, but it's not up to us as lecturers to deal with all these issues that students are bringing in... so they feel very resentful* (AD professional).

In one institution this problem is described as conservative attitudes among white staff towards black students, with academics resisting working on academic literacy because they believe students should take responsibility for learning "deficits". Race may well be a factor in student-staff relations, but the majority of respondents did not overtly reference it.

> *If we don't get the mindset right we'll never ever, no matter what resources we have, get it right... we must make sure that you understand that if I'm appointed as a lecturer, I'm here to assist these learners* (AD professional).

According to several respondents, significant numbers of lecturers refuse to examine and develop their teaching practice.

> *It's absurd that we have university lecturers who are employed to teach who know nothing whatsoever about it. How could you do that in any other field?* (Policy professional).

Workloads of academic staff arose frequently in the discussions about constraints to improving student success. In the context of universities of technology in particular, academic staff have been extensively involved in curriculum development work to make qualifications comply with the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). Curriculum development work is complex and time-consuming and requires extensive support. Several respondents cite it as an area requiring significant capacity growth, as mentioned above. Putting aside the specific challenges of HEQSF work, workloads were frequently mentioned as heavy, leading to inadequate contact time with students, little reflection on teaching practice, and a growth in large classes, as well as little time and space for developing successful interventions.

But, in other cases, as one respondent says, the problem is academic staff being "very jealous of their own domains". For them, disciplinary knowledge and subject expertise define their identities, not the ability to teach well. Academic identities are more strongly grounded in the disciplines and a teaching identity is not rewarded, cultivated or compelled through policy. Such attitudes extend to a view that professional AD staff are not important to the work of the institution. Many respondents state that AD work is still considered to be low status and is not often recognised

by faculty-based staff, something that has changed little over the years. There are, however, examples, of institutions where the recognition of AD has improved, as the status of teaching development and the scholarship of teaching and learning grows.

The data show that staff professional development offerings are expanding and that, certainly for new academic staff, these courses are predominantly compulsory. However, it is difficult to attract more established lecturers to courses. Staff need to be convinced to examine their pedagogical and assessment practices, but are unlikely to do so unless compelled by institutional policy.

The literature shows that professional development is most effective when lecturers are given the space to explore and examine their own teaching practice. Data should be used meaningfully to frame teaching and learning interventions.

> *So you see what we need to do is to use the data for us to unpack what are the conceptions or conceptualisation of teaching and learning that are underpinning what the data is telling us. But in order to do that you need to be open for yourself to be taken out of your comfort zones, both in terms of epistemologies of your own discipline but also in terms of your common sense ideas about teaching. And that takes time and in a sense, it is painful* (Planning professional).

A lack of institutional policy on teaching undermines student success.

Addressing teaching practice means building accountability so that lecturers become responsible for improving their teaching. One respondent described the Cuban higher education model which requires a specific two-year qualification for teaching, in addition to the necessary disciplinary qualifications. According to the respondent, the issue of whether or not teaching qualifications should be made compulsory for higher education lecturers may soon be under policy discussion in South Africa. A lack of institutional policy on teaching, in particular compelling professional teaching development, undermines student success, as mentioned by a number of participants:

> *It would be nicer if there were more systemic frameworks in which people worked at a university... so you know you have to go there if you're going to start working with curriculum... if you are going to start with a new programme you have to go there... I don't know how many universities have it* (AD professional).

Most institutions have a range of teaching and learning programmes, and some improvements have been noted in teaching practices and throughput rates. AD professionals are driven by an interest in students, shifting inequities and supporting good teaching:

> *Passion for education is a key, I think for all of us, because we identify the students' needs and if we are all honest without*

> *them we wouldn't be here. So it is the students' needs that give us a job and a reason to come to work every morning...* (AD professional).

Money is not necessarily useful unless supported by proper planning.

However, a general view is that not enough is done to advance the recognition of teaching, even in universities with relatively high success rates. All respondents regard this as requiring consistent improvement. Most noteworthy is that several AD units have been unable to appoint all the staff provisioned for in their organograms, both because of funding and capacity constraints. One respondent cautions that money is not necessarily useful unless supported by proper planning. It is not merely about programmes but relates to leadership intent, institutional policy and structures, and significantly, changing attitudes. Centralised teaching development units need to have strong, mutually respectful relationships with faculties for AD work to succeed.

Several universities have strategies for teaching and learning and senate-driven committees that work to improve teaching and learning and student success. The importance of high-level institutional leadership for teaching and learning is regularly mentioned as a key driver of strong teaching policies. Leadership is a key factor in improving student success, curriculum structures and teaching practice. Committed senior managers, particularly deans, are essential.

If senates are engaged with the necessary policy to support teaching and learning decision-making, institutions can develop this area substantially. Leadership from senates and deans and clear institutional policy is key to making teaching and learning more visible:

> *Yesterday I had a chat with three members of staff from one of our departments... and I picked up that this department was really worried about the stress on throughput rates and student performance... "you're pushing throughput rates, so we're just putting students through"... but they were worried about it... great!* (AD professional).

Indeed, as one participant described it, universities have an ethical responsibility towards their students to ensure that the university is not a revolving door. The social mandate of institutions of improving equity, providing high quality teaching to students and creating meaningful access for all was a recognised theme raised by the participants:

> *[The drivers] come from all corners... there is pressure from government, there is pressure from the institution, and there is also pressure from the students themselves...* (AD professional).

# 9 Priority areas for future action

This section draws on a synthesis of the findings from the research interviews. The ideas are grouped into nine overarching themes.

## 9.1 Enhancing the status and practice of teaching

There is a need for more reward for paying attention to one's pedagogical practice.

Improving the status of teaching is considered an essential strategy for student success, which must become a priority at all institutions. There is a need for greater attention to and support for all lecturers to examine and develop their pedagogical practices, supported by institutional policy and resources. There are several suggestions about how this could be done.

> *If we can also get the rewards and recognition system changed so that scholarship of teaching and learning is viewed as seriously as discipline-based research, that will encourage people that are really more interested in the learning and teaching of their discipline than in increasing the discipline knowledge* (Policy professional).

> *Academic Development departments like ours for example might run teaching awards but we don't get the teaching awards. And so we're not really acknowledged and even the teachers where there are teaching awards, too few of them get acknowledged* (AD professional).

> *There [is a need] for more reward for paying attention to one's pedagogical practice* (AD professional).

The CHE/HELTASA teaching awards were acknowledged as raising awareness about and rewarding good teaching practices. Respondents appreciate the fact that this support emanates from a national statutory body.

> *The CHE/HELTASA awards are contributing in the sense that through the awards we are creating awareness in terms of what we mean by good teaching. What is good teaching? How do we know, how do we support it, and how do we nurture it?* (Policy professional).

Respondents note that AD work could be rewarded with a fellowship system, similar to one that exists in Britain. It could work like the National Research Foundation (NRF) system for research, where fellowship status is achieved by meeting criteria and going through a formal evaluation process. Teaching fellowships would allow lecturers the time and space to expand their practice of instruction and conduct related research.

Links are needed between improvement initiatives aimed at teaching and related scholarship:

> *South African teaching and learning practitioners, including those in the classroom, are not going to be listened to if they do not go about it in a research-disciplined manner because just talking about interventions and throwing in numbers here and there... you cannot implement those interventions if you don't have the support of the deans...*(AD professional).

Another suggestion was personal portfolios for academic staff to reflect and change their teaching for the better. Peer-enhanced instruction, where lecturers support one another more formally through observation, could be another option.

Peer-enhanced instruction, where lecturers support one another more formally through observation, could be another option.

Respondents also recommend building staff capacity in assessment and other activities. At one institution, the enhancement of practices of student appraisal was an ongoing part of the work of the teaching and learning unit:

> *Because even when I have workshops on assessment I tell them assessment is not guerrilla warfare where you have to hide... they (students) should know how you assess it – the expectations – you should be in a position to tell them that even in the exam if you want to pass you should be able to do one, two...* (AD professional).

At one institution, promotion is dependent on the completion of at least a module from the postgraduate diploma course in higher education on assessment and evaluation:

> *Some people do it because they want to apply for promotion and when they attend... they gain more interest and want to do other courses and they end up finishing the qualification* (AD professional).

Commenting on what makes a good teacher, one respondent indicates that it is the desire to constantly improve practice and learn new methods:

> *And some of them are so idiosyncratic but their high, high expectations of their students, their passion for what they do, the amount of time they're prepared to spend with their students, the amount of change they're prepared to do on a*

*regular basis to reflect on their own teaching approaches, to change in relation to things that they read... you know, this constant improvement is actually what is the marker of the excellent teacher* (AD professional).

It is suggested that some form of minimum teacher training for lecturers might be a useful policy intervention:

*Do we need something that says that every person who teaches, lectures, whatever has to have at least a minimum training period, whether it's a full qualification or not?* (Policy professional).

It is apparent that many universities train teachers and have policies in place to compel new lecturers to undertake particular forms of training, although this is not consistent across institutions. An option is to develop stronger national guidelines for university lecturing, similar to the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications. The new TDG policy will compel institutions to put in place teaching development plans.

## 9.2 Supporting scholarship of teaching and learning

Innovation funding could help in exploring new initiatives and methods of teaching.

Greater support for the scholarship of teaching and learning is key. In some countries prestigious teaching and learning research awards are linked to ratings. Such research differs from other forms of research because it homes in on practice and how approaches can benefit students. It could make an impact on a national level. One university has just created a research chair for higher education teaching and learning.

Many participants express the need for spaces to talk about changing practices and explore effective ways of working.

*If one can create a space where you can get a team of people to focus, to buy out their time, to conceptualise what this would mean - because I think we don't get time to sharpen the arrows... if everybody is busy with implementation, nobody can sit back and reflect on what's the direction and where are we going.* (AD professional).

Innovation funding could help in exploring new initiatives and methods of teaching. AD professionals interviewed for this study would like to spend more time engaging with pedagogical practices in classrooms:

*I would like to leave this office every now and then and go sit in classrooms to see what is going on in terms of pedagogy...* (AD professional).

Research participants acknowledge HELTASA's essential role in stimulating focus on teaching and learning, primarily through collaboration and joint research in HELTASA SIGs but also through its annual conference. There is also considerable criticism of HELTASA, including that the conference is more about "talking practice" than theorising.

> *But it is the contradiction that we find in our universities where teaching and learning is not seen as a research... area. So the approaches and methodologies that should be established, nurtured, grown, are not supported within universities. And that shows, or the impact is seen in HELTASA* (Policy professional).

Nevertheless, it remains a significant forum for the many people working in AD and for lecturers interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning. HELTASA conferences provide a platform for individual academics to explore their own teaching practices and gain ideas from others in the field. As the interventions data also show, a number of institutions have set up their own institutional conferences on teaching and learning to provide similar platforms.

One person would like to spend more time studying what makes students persist. A great deal of AD work is about "at risk" or weaker students but little is done for high performing students, who are largely left to their own devices.

Little is done for high performing students, who are largely left to their own devices.

Respondents underscore two points related to developing scholarship into teaching and learning. First, greater emphasis should be placed on monitoring the different projects and interventions and understanding what is working to improve success rates, and why. This is not just about growing the field of research on teaching and learning, but also relates to institutional planning and utilising data for planning purposes. Second, the scholarship of teaching and learning in South Africa is theoretically weak and requires development to become rigorous if the field is to gain status within scholarly communities.

## 9.3 Improving curriculum development and teaching practice

The possibility of a four-year undergraduate degree has been mooted. Several respondents express apprehension about how the intensive nature of extended degree programmes can be replicated, should there be a move to a four-year degree.

> *We would like to make the university acknowledge its centrality not as an intervention but as a provision. In other words the ingredients of an access programme (such as*

> *extended curriculum programmes) must not be concentrated to 10 percent but distributed across the whole student body and especially those elements that work in access must become mandatory for all students* (AD professional).

A few respondents identify the need for more in-depth curriculum review and development work to ensure optimal response to student learning needs and quality programme development. A multi-stakeholder approach may be needed to investigate courses that have high failure rates, particularly those that are not first-year courses, which is where the emphasis has been.

There is evidence in the interviews of a need for more curriculum development work. At least one institution is engaged in a major curriculum review while others are working on curriculum re-alignment related to the HEQSF. Curriculum development and renewal is time-consuming and specialised. Approached from different angles (structural problems, clearer expression of outcomes, relevance, and so forth), a number of AD professionals propose that it is an area requiring significant improvement. The issues of capacity for curriculum development are discussed elsewhere in this report.

Several participants referred to the need for proper tutorial systems. Tutorials are understood differently across institutions. In one instance tutors are described as senior students who can be mentors and advisors to junior students and who are able to refer peers to the relevant support services. Interest was expressed in SI, even at the institutions where it is not currently in operation. This is relevant to the ways in which institutions structure their teaching provision within particular curricula.

## 9.4 Using technology to support teaching

Respondents detailed many ways in which novel technologies can enhance teaching practice.

Respondents detailed many ways in which novel technologies can enhance teaching practice. Well-designed, quality learning materials can be made available as open educational resources to increase distance education success rates, which are extremely low. Resources can be shared, making this a prime area for effective partnerships between and across institutions. In particular, learning materials can be made more interactive. Institutional collaboration on developing open educational resources (OERs), where disciplinary experts cooperate to generate materials, has achieved some success. Given the potential strength of OERs, one participant suggests that policy could guide this process, requiring publicly funded educational resources to be made available as OERs.

Suggestions were also made about the kinds of technological improvements that can facilitate stronger teaching and learning at higher education level.

An example is online marking to facilitate more regular contact between students and lecturers, while building the ability of institutions to more effectively track students' progress.

An approach to helping students understand what is required is to provide them with the criteria for evaluating their work and give them the opportunity to assess each other's work. Online tools can be used for this.

> *Because if you understand what the criteria are then you understand what's involved in the learning. So to see teaching in a different sort of way...* (AD professional).

Lecturers should be increasingly exploring new technologies, especially the use of social media for communicating with students. Another option is "flipped classrooms". A participant describes these as using class time not to present but to discuss information that students prepared and absorbed beforehand. This opens up class time for more interactive work. Technology can also be used to regularly engage with students, for example, through weekly, short online tests.

Lecturers should be increasingly exploring new technologies, especially the use of social media for communicating with students.

One example is of a large university that maintains constant communication with students via SMS, attempting a personalised interface with students to help reduce feelings of isolation that they may experience at a big institution:

> *They get SMSs saying, just a reminder that tomorrow there is a... workshop and please come, we'd love to see you. So it's very personalised... it all happens electronically but people have to actually organise the whole system. I would really like to have that kind of system because I think a lot of the students feel quite isolated and that would pick up the students that are falling through the cracks* (AD professional).

Many institutions have programmes within the residence systems to support learning, as can be seen from the initiatives section. Those that don't, are planning to improve these by offering mentorship and tutorial programmes and expanding study spaces and access to ICTs in residence. This section provides only a snapshot of the possible technology-related teaching tools available to institutions. While there is a lot of innovation in some parts of the system, many respondents underline this area for future growth.

## 9.5 Building data and research capacity

Participants regard expanding capacity for data collection and analysis at both national and institutional levels as a key area for intervention. There is considerable variation in this regard across institutions but all have room for growth.

There are many ways in which data can be used to enhance understanding of student success and institutional practice. These include early warning systems to identify students who are struggling academically; graduate tracking systems; and evaluative research capacity to monitor the range of projects and interventions in place.

The DHET now has the capability to regularly produce cohort studies after acquiring a new specialised server for its HEMIS data. The department aims to conduct regular detailed cohort studies, an area for which huge scope for growth exists. The data exist in the system, but capability is needed for effective analysis. It will also be possible to conduct cohort studies for particular fields of study.

There is a need for evidence-based policy-making with a mix of both qualitative and quantitative research work:

> *Because what you will see in that document on the Teaching Development Grant is evidence-based change is coming into the discourse... and for me it's evidence, both qualitative and quantitative* (AD professional).

> *But we are not going to shift AD or teaching and learning if we don't have very strong research and qualitative analysis* (AD professional).

There is a need for evidence-based policy-making with a mix of both qualitative and quantitative research work.

Staff training and development needs attention in some institutions, with a focus on growing academics' understanding of academic literacy and epistemological access. Staff qualifications must also be improved, preferably at alternative institutions to those where they work. As the initiatives section shows, there are a few postgraduate diplomas in teaching and at least one more in development.

Respondents express an interest in doing more breakdown of data per faculty and more research on graduates and employability. Questions to be answered, include: What has been the impact of what students learn in their degree programmes? This links to a desire for far greater data management and research capacity.

> *The whole issue of student enrolment and monitoring... who's in the system, how are they doing? If they're not doing well how are you picking it up, at what point in their studies? And are you referring them for some kind of support? So if you don't have the management systems to do that then you just will continue to bleed students out of the system* (Policy professional).

Early warning systems appear to vary significantly in their sophistication and efficacy but are a crucial pillar in identifying struggling students and preventing attrition. Timely identification of such students is still a problem at some institutions. It is noted that institutional policy must compel staff to capture marks consistently and timeously on tracking systems to make early warning systems more effective.

On the research side, an interest exists in growing the ability to conduct survey research, e.g. on graduate tracking, conducting focus groups with students, etc. Tracking of graduates is inadequate, although alumni offices are improving systems for keeping in contact with graduates. It is suggested that social media be used, given the prevalent use of mobile phones and increasingly smart phones.

There is concern about the extent to which universities are building the linkages between undergraduate education and the requirements of the employment sector. Many institutions have an interest in thinking about graduate attributes more intensively, with some conducting relevant research, as the data show. It touches on comprehending student success as more than merely throughput. One institution is exploring the possibility of e-portfolios, with students tracking their own progress. The portfolio would show graduate attributes and competencies that they have gained – not just through academic programmes, but also extra-curricula activities. As part of this process, faculties are examining graduate attributes in relation to their courses. The low self-esteem of students and their perceptions that it may be difficult to find jobs after graduation need intervention, and the institution is looking to prepare students better for the workplace.

The low self-esteem of students and their perceptions that it may be difficult to find jobs after graduation need intervention.

## 9.6 Improving infrastructure for teaching and learning

Infrastructure improvements are essential for better teaching. In particular, there are attempts to make teaching spaces more conducive to mutual engagement by using new technologies such as interactive blackboards (smart boards) and spaces where students can study (overnight, if necessary), including libraries. At one campus, however, regular theft of new technology was a huge problem.

Thinking more creatively about designing learning spaces was a key theme of improvement discussions:

> *We have to be able to get learning environments that speak to both the strategy development but also the current students and where they are at* (AD professional).

## 9.7 Growing a new generation of Academic Development professionals

Previous sections, including both the literature review and the sections outlining the constraints that respondents raise, discuss the concerns of

many that a new generation of AD professionals is not being adequately developed, and that the older generation is close to retirement. This is a key priority for the sector, as many emphasise.

> *I would say that one of our major problems in South Africa is developing a cadre of informed qualified people who can use the theory critically and not track out the same old excuses about teaching and learning, the same old theories. We need to develop those people to bring about change* (AD professional).

A similar anxiety pertains to the building of a cadre of institutional researchers and related attractive career paths, so that it can be a conscious choice of occupation, rather than something that people stumble into. All the areas requiring capacity building could be explored as part of broader approaches for producing professional academic and support staff, as needed in the current university environment. In this regard, national and institutional strategies will be necessary.

## 9.8 Addressing institutional structures and integration

This section discusses a range of institutional issues significant for future support for student success. They are broadly linked to institutional processes, structures and leadership.

Overall, there is a need for more experienced and vaster numbers of staff to cover the range of activities required in the AD arena.

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The implementation of linked interventions demonstrates the importance of strong leadership for teaching and learning activities. Here it is crucial that both the linked initiatives and adequate structures and resources to support teaching and learning improvement and collaboration are in place.

There is some evidence that working with student pre-admission can minimise problems that affect student success, e.g. helping students make course decisions and giving schools better information for students. One institution without strong relationships with schools and FET colleges is interested in building support for pre-admission programmes.

The message is that greater collaboration is needed between departments providing student support:

> *I want to work with other directors in other student support units. I'm already working with the director of housing. I*

*want to work with the director of the library, of student guidance, the finance guy who handles NSFAS funding. All these are non-academic issues which have a direct impact on academic performance* (AD professional).

*What we need at (name of university) is an integrated approach to student development* (AD professional).

This complex issue requires a high level of institutional integration and understanding of the variable influences on student success or attrition. Student needs have to be addressed at many different levels.

*Unless you get the whole package in order, you can work with teaching and learning but if students are hungry, the places they're sleeping in are dangerous and they can't study at night – how can you address such a problem? So it's how you get the whole lot of an institution, the registrar's division, the NSFAS, the people giving financial aid and the people in the residences – how do you get all of that to talk to each other to support the teaching and learning enterprise?* (AD professional).

Another respondent describes it as:

*"How do we create parity between intellectual cognitive development and personal social development?"*

This is not simple as it involves active planning to formally avail forms of student support other than the purely academic:

*It has to do with how they [students] engage, how they attach, how they are incorporated into and feel part of an institution. And to change that one needs to have access to them; if I haven't got access to them because their timetable is jammed and they've only got 12 weeks on campus, then I can't do that kind of work* (AD professional).

This links to a similar concern of another interview participant: student affairs projects, while well-intended, can end up working against the teaching and learning project. The point is also made that a relative lack of involvement of student leadership in decisions about teaching and learning is counterproductive because students are not invested in improvements.

*I would say we are not challenging them enough because students, like everybody else... you work with the noises around you, what is in the air... what are the issues of the day... So if they do not find strong arguments and headlines that raise questions about student success, they will never think that it is their role* (Policy professional).

So if [student leaders] do not find strong arguments and headlines that raise questions about student success, they will never think that it is their role.

At one institution, the heads of AD and student affairs reported to one deputy vice-chancellor, who facilitated close collaboration between the two

departments. This situation ended, however, with a change of leadership. The relationship between student affairs and AD has also been discussed at a national level, concluding a need for cooperation between HELTASA and other national associations, such as the student affairs associations and SAAIR.

What came through from these discussions is that, because of the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the factors that contribute to student success, multi-pronged strategies are needed at institutional levels to support students. The extent to which institutions are able to harmonise and link wide-ranging and bureaucratically separate initiatives may be the key to truly shifting poor student success rates.

## 9.9 Ensuring enabling policy frameworks

Institutions are "guarded" about their good practices as that which give them the "competitive edge". This attitude would have to change substantially.

A suggestion from the interviews is that policy makers may need to place greater emphasis on historically disadvantaged institutions, including with regard to distribution of funding. The possibility was proffered of issue-based collaborations between historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions. Institutions with a majority of students from weak schooling backgrounds face a greater challenge with regard to access and success. Policy needs to differentiate among institutions. An example given is that much of higher education policy is made on the assumption that the dominant mode of delivery is contact delivery, when over 40 percent of the students in the system are in distance education mode. This general point about recognising differences among institutions also emerges from the literature review on policy.

At a policy level, part of the thinking behind the policy changes to the TDG is that funds can be used to stimulate the growth of new generations of academic staff. It is envisaged that the grant could support tutorship programmes for postgraduate students or teaching development for recently graduated postgraduates.

Respondents also reflect on how policy-level discussion about institutional collaboration taking place might be advanced. One policy professional raises the point that institutions are "guarded" about their good practices as that which give them the "competitive edge". This attitude would have to change substantially, perhaps with the assistance of policy and funding incentives, for any significant shifts to take place. In relation to this issue, one participant opposes the setting up of parallel structures on student success and AD. New projects should rather find a way to work with existing structures, institutions and organisations and complement existing work being done, to ensure that efforts are not fragmented across the sector.

A respondent makes the important point that good policy on paper can mask what is really happening in the classroom. An example is that policy

dictates having adequate teaching resources available in all classrooms across the university. But this is not always the case, nor always possible, so the real situation often differs from policy intent.

> *We have masses of policies and most of the policies, if you looked at them, you would be very happy with them. They're very positive. The problem is the implementation of those policies. A lot of the policy studies people talk about institutional cultures and departmental cultures. There are policies that mean one thing to you, perhaps, as the policy writer, yet refracted through the culture of that particular department turn out to be something else in their understanding... So, we are not successful at implementing our policies* (AD professional).

Nationally, a number of changes are pending, including the new policy on the TDG, aimed at enhancing support from the DHET for teaching and learning. Another change is a new directorate with a specific focus on teaching and learning development. The department could then constantly monitor funding and policy in the teaching arena and make decisions about how money can best be used to support improvement in teaching and learning.

From one viewpoint, adequate policy frameworks are in place at national level and in some institutions to facilitate student success. However, these policies have not always translated into changes to institutional practice. Greater attention could be given to how policy can bolster practice in specific areas, and what can be done to facilitate priority areas of implementation.

Greater attention could be given to how policy can bolster practice in specific areas, and what can be done to facilitate priority areas of implementation.

# 10 Conclusion: improving access and success in South African universities

The South African higher education system faces daunting challenges in addressing student access and success. It is a relatively poor performing and highly unequal system, with low participation, high attrition and substantial class and racial inequity. The imperatives for change therefore encompass both greater social justice within higher education and more effective contribution by the higher education sector to the country's high-level developmental skills needs.

An articulation gap persists between the school and university sectors. It manifests in a mismatch between, on the one hand, the preparedness of the majority of students entering university and, on the other, the curriculum structures and forms of higher education on offer from South African universities (CHE, 2013a).

This research finds diverse and complex factors that impact on access to and success at university, ranging from the personal to the social to the institutional.

This research finds diverse and complex factors that impact on access to and success at university, ranging from the personal to the social to the institutional. The report broadly defines and explains these many complexities, all of which require addressing. No single intervention is by itself likely to shift student performance and success. In this sense, although universities are engaged in mitigating external factors, such as through working with schools, institutional systems are critical to improving undergraduate student success. Institutions must increasingly integrate their structures and initiatives towards this goal. This includes developing closer connections between psychosocial and academic student support initiatives. It also requires an understanding of the holistic needs of students – something already happening at a number of sites. Lastly, it means approaching student academic support as integrally linked to staff development.

The primary emphasis of the research was on the academic factors affecting student performance. It is widely acknowledged that addressing academic dynamics, predominantly those of teaching and learning, is a priority for change. This is the area in which those working within and across South African universities can realise considerable shifts towards equity and student success.

There is no doubt that significant work is being done in universities, through pre-admissions, admissions and placements; student academic, psychosocial and material support; professional development of academic staff; curriculum development; growth in information management and evidence-based planning and decision-making; and through growing support for the scholarship of teaching and learning. The numbers and

scope of initiatives are constantly increasing, as is evidence of greater systemic thinking and institutional leadership responding to the complex causes of poor student performance. Leadership here is understood to come from many different quarters. While centralised policy and drive is essential, leadership has to and does come from researchers, lecturers, professional support staff and students themselves.

The report also details serious, continuing constraints hindering teaching and learning. On the one end of the spectrum, demands relate to resources and infrastructure, curriculum, and staffing and skills. On the other end, universities face persistent resistance to change, in particular to examining and changing teaching practice and to improving the status of teaching and learning development work.

Funding limitations have affected the AD field detrimentally and this requires stabilisation with regards staffing and related issues. Career pathways for AD staff must be identified, while those working in this field should attend to their research skills and qualifications with a view to developing knowledge and practice in teaching and learning. Attention must be paid to growing a new generation of AD professionals.

Addressing teaching human resources requirements connects to the status of teaching and learning, which must be advanced. Options for enhancement are instituting reward and recognition systems for teaching work; tackling attitudes towards teaching; and improving teaching practice. Better policy and structure may be necessary, both nationally and institutionally, to intensify and compel the development of teaching over time, where necessary.

The question of the centrality or marginality of AD initiatives within institutions is multifaceted. A strong view within the AD community is that, despite the magnitude of student success challenges, initiatives to address these remain marginal and most certainly contested (Scott et al, 2007; Boughey, 2010; Dhunpath and Vithal, 2012). This study finds positive changes towards making teaching and learning, as well as AD work, more central to the strategies of universities. Nevertheless, significant shifts are necessary for teaching development work to occupy a position that would realise its potential contribution.

Significant shifts are necessary for teaching development to occupy a position that would realise its potential contribution.

The scholarship of teaching and learning and other research areas demands growth. Finding ways of supporting and encouraging the scholarship of teaching and learning among a broader group of people will help to increase its status. This will add to the knowledge about what kinds of teaching interventions work for student success.

Skills and capacity in a range of areas need strengthening. Respondents regard data gathering and analysis and institutional research and planning as national and institutional challenges. Upgrading teaching skills and technology use in teaching emerges as a necessity in the research that cannot be ignored. Curriculum development is another area requiring specific and targeted capacity development.

A number of issues identified in the literature support the above findings, and confirm that the desired initiative must be at both the level of national policy and of institutional strategy and practice. Consequently, there are multiple points of possible and necessary intervention. Among these are substantial systemic issues, such as the needs for effective pathways from school into post-school educational opportunities and for addressing the weaknesses of the FET sector. These include institutional goals such as:

- mainstreaming student success through leadership, focused effort and dedicated funding
- addressing the underpreparedness of institutions for the diversity of students (Jones et al, 2008; Dhunpath *et al*, 2012)
- addressing curriculum design and teaching approaches (Scott, 2012a and b)
- building teaching capacity and reward systems to support teaching development (Scott, 2012a and b; Boughey, 2010)
- growing collaborative work in the system to pool the available expertise and professionalise the AD field (Boughey, 2010).

Valorising research over teaching has become embedded in academic culture and identity.

The focus in this concluding section has so far been on practical steps for improving teaching and learning. It is evident from the literature and the interviews that discursive shifts are necessary to bring about actual change in teaching and learning. Many academics experience a direct tension between teaching and research in their daily working lives, as "valorising research over teaching has become embedded in academic culture and identity" (Scott, 2012b: 18). In lieu of change in the broader academic culture, this "regrettable dichotomising of teaching and research" (p.18) will continue to deter academics from concentrating on teaching. Scott argues that the sector should confront the choice (p.24) of whether to pay attention to undergraduate education by focusing on the scholarship of teaching and learning:

> In the South African higher education context, a major focus of attention needs to be on developing and implementing mainstream course design and teaching approaches that cater effectively for the realities and diversity of the student body (Scott, 2012b: 31).

The crucial question here is whether the will exists to recognise the importance of teaching. The dichotomy between teaching and research should be addressed in a way that universities take responsibility for developing teaching practices appropriate for the South African context (Scott, 2012b). This returns then to the many suggestions made in the interviews about increasing the status of teaching and learning. As one respondent in this study notes, there is a need for greater "intentionality" in how institutions approach interventions to enhance student success.

Another of the choices that Scott (p.24) identifies for universities is to take "psychological ownership of the student intake", rather than continuing to view groups of students who may be underprepared as unsuitable for university. Different views pertain. Some accept, with a hint of reluctance, that there is "no choice":

> Managing underpreparedness takes time and resources. Some would argue that this is the function of the schooling system... but... the tertiary sector simply has no other immediate choice than to take on the work with enthusiasm and commitment if equity and redress are priorities. Universities can and should assist underprepared students but cannot be expected to independently redress many years of inadequate education at school (Wits 2003,42: quoted in CHE, 2010: 31).

Others are clear that the underpreparedness paradigm still paints disadvantaged students as in deficit in some way.

Others are clear that this paradigm still paints disadvantaged students as in deficit in some way, by advocating for more fundamental institutional change:

> I am actually advocating the move from "underprepared students" to "underprepared institutions"... The institution needs to transform... we fully focused on the student initially... we're developing the student up to a point... [to] cope with the demands of what we want at university: to now say well, it's not just the student but we also somehow have to transform what we do" (academic staff member interviewed in Jones et al, 2008: 47).

Wilson-Strydom (2011) proposes the capabilities approach to enhance understanding of the transition from school to university. The capabilities approach posits that individual agency can be constrained or enhanced by the freedoms people enjoy and which allow for choice and achievement. It is a framework to understand the ways in which both social background and institutional environments impact on students' meaningful access to and ability to succeed at university, as well as the meaning of success. The capability approach argues that "in a just world social structures or social organisations should expand people's capabilities" (Wilson-Strydom, 2011:411).

There is strong evidence from the interviews that resistance continues within South African academia against truly shedding the "deficit" perspective on students. Debates about where the responsibility lies for addressing the inequities of the past will be ongoing until there is a fundamental adjustment to the overall quality and equity of the schooling system. The CHE report (2013a) argues that the potential for immediate change to address the articulation gap is unlikely to come from the schooling sector. It is therefore generally accepted that universities must adapt to ensure success for a diversity of students, and many have been doing so for some time, through academic and other programmes.

However, the political discourse about who gains access to university continues to be controversial, given the persistence of the idea of the "deficit" student. Debates about the extent to which the structures and cultures of institutions need to transform will continue in the policy environment and within institutions themselves. If so many students are not succeeding – which makes student attrition a mainstream issue – the real question is: what will it take to make curriculum change and the improvement of teaching and learning mainstream issues?

There is some evidence of movement. During the brief period in which this report was put together, three major "events" took place that showed evidence that there is finally a national conversation about the centrality of teaching and learning in overturning the inequities and inefficiencies in the higher education system.

The first is the initial articulation of the new QEP of the CHE, commencing in 2014, and recently discussed with universities, which is discussed earlier in this report. The primary focus of the next phase of quality assurance and enhancement is directly on teaching and learning.

The second is DHET's new draft policy on the TDG, recently presented to universities, which will be in place from the 2014 funding cycle. The policy intends to direct TDG funds towards supporting improvements in teaching and learning and addresses the ways in which the TDG inadvertently worked against this goal in the past.

If so many students are not succeeding – which makes student attrition a mainstream issue – the real question is: what will it take to make curriculum change and the improvement of teaching and learning mainstream issues?

The convergence between these two new developments is noteworthy. With the kind of national attention that these two policy drivers can generate, there is significant potential for change.

The third event is the release by the CHE of a proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform (2013a), which provides a set of well-researched suggestions that the higher education sector must now engage with. Whatever the responses will be to this report, there is no doubt that it has started a profound conversation about the possibility of curriculum reform contributing to enhanced student success.

Accepting the need for change in the structures and cultures of institutions is a precondition for actualising the advancement of student access and success in a context of diversity. It does appear that the moment has arrived for the system to confront the significant structural and discursive changes required to catalyse meaningful transformation.

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# Annexures

## Annexure 1: Names of interview respondents

| Name | Designation | Organisation |
|---|---|---|
| Prof Rod Bally | Director | Planning and Quality Assurance Unit, University of Fort Hare |
| Prof Chrissie Boughey | Dean: Teaching and Learning | Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning, Rhodes University |
| Prof Vivienne Bozalek | Director | Teaching and Learning Centre, University of the Western Cape |
| Prof Owence Chabaya | Director | Centre for Academic Excellence, University of Limpopo |
| Prof Elizabeth de Kadt | Executive Director | Academic Development and Support, University of Johannesburg |
| Dr Rubby Dhunpath | Director: | University Teaching and Learning Office, University of KwaZulu Natal |
| Valindawo Dwayi | Director | Centre for Learning and Teaching Development, Walter Sisulu University |
| Prof Ansu Erasmus | Senior Director | Higher Education Development and Support Unit, Tshwane University of Technology |
| Prof Cheryl Foxcroft | Dean | Teaching and Learning, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University |
| Patricia Gibbon | Senior Director | Division of Institutional Planning, Evaluation and Monitoring, University of Johannesburg |
| Jennifer Glennie | Director | South African Institute for Distance Education |
| Prof Diane Grayson | Director: Institutional Audits | Council on Higher Education |
| Prof Wendy Kilfoil | Director | Department for Education Innovation, University of Pretoria |
| Mariaan Klopper | Manager: Teaching and Learning | Academic Development and Support, Institutional Office, North West University |
| Dr Lis Lange | Senior Director | Department for Institutional Research and Planning, University of the Free State |

| Name | Designation | Organisation |
|---|---|---|
| Prof Brenda Leibowitz | Director | Centre for Teaching Learning, University of Stellenbosch |
| Dr Matete Madiba | Chairperson | HELTASA and Director: Students Affairs, University of Pretoria |
| Khalik Ismail Nabbi | Coordinator: Foundation Programmes | Mangosuthu University of Technology |
| Rajan Naicker | Director | Department of Management Information, Durban University of Technology |
| Marian Neale-Shutte | Institutional Researcher | Office for Institutional Planning, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University |
| Prof Thengani Ngwenya | Director | Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Durban University of Technology |
| Siyanda Nthlabathi | Consultant | Teaching and Learning Centre, University of Fort Hare |
| Dr Diane Parker | Acting Deputy Director-General | Department of Higher Education and Training |
| Dr Birgit Schreiber | Director | Centre for Student Support Services, University of the Western Cape |
| Prof Moloko Sepota | Deputy Director | Facilitation of Learning, University of South Africa, Limpopo |
| Prof Suellen Shay | Dean | Centre for Higher Education Development, University of Cape Town |
| Dr Francois Strydom | Director: Academic | Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of the Free State |
| Reshma Subbaye | Data Analyst | University Teaching and Learning Office, University of KwaZulu Natal |
| Dr Noluthando Toni | Director | Teaching and Learning Centre, University of Fort Hare |
| Joni van Heerden | Consultant | Teaching and Learning Centre, University of Fort Hare |
| Dr At van Schoor | Director | Regional Services, University of South Africa |
| Prof Christine Winberg | Director | Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development, Cape Peninsula University of Technology |

## Annexure 2: Interview questions

1. What is your role and interest in university access and success issues?

2. What are the primary factors, in your institution, affecting the academic performance of students?

3. What are the major types of interventions in your institution in the area of access and success? What constitutes the range of work of your unit? What about size of unit, hierarchy etc?

4. Who carries out these activities and how do the different units work in relation to each other?

5. Has the impact of these programmes been measured? What programmes and/or approaches have been identified as successful and why?

6. Where do the pressures/drivers for your work in access and success come from and how do these affect your work? What, in your view, are the policy constraints affecting Academic Development work? What about university leadership, institutional and national policy, institutional culture, resources?

7. What are the major constraints to your access and success work in your institution?

8. What work would you like to be doing to improve student success? Or what work do you think needs to be done to improve student success? What are the constraints to doing this work?

9. Do you collaborate with other department or sections within your institution, and what is the nature of this? Do you collaborate with people in other universities? If so, what is the nature of the collaboration?

10. What data is used internally to inform planning on student success? What tracking systems do you have in place to monitor student success? Who collects and analyses data for monitoring student achievement and progress? How is data used?

11. Do you and your colleagues engage in access and success research activities? If so, what are the main areas of research interest?