

## On differentiation and diversity and HESA

Revised 2 October 2007

Saleem Badat

1. Post-1994, ‘differentiation’ and ‘diversity’ in South African higher education have been difficult and challenging policy issues.

Historically the apartheid higher education system was differentiated and diversified along lines of ‘race’ and ethnicity, resulting in the advantaging in various ways of the historically white institutions and the disadvantaging of the historically black institutions.

In this context there have been understandable and legitimate concerns among historically black institutions that a policy of differentiation and diversity post-1994 could continue the historical patterns of disadvantaging black institutions and advantaging historically white institutions.

This could especially be the case in the absence of strategies of institutional redress and development for historically black institutions as a way of providing them the capacities and capabilities to take on new social and educational roles.

2. The 1997 *White Paper* made clear that “an important task in planning and managing a single national co-ordinated system is to ensure diversity in its organisational form and in the institutional landscape, and offset pressures for homogenisation”.
3. The 2001 *National Plan* proclaimed its commitments to “achieving diversity in the South African higher education system”, and “to diversify the system in terms of the mix of institutional missions and programmes that will be required to meet national and regional needs in social, cultural and economic development”.

The Department of Education (DoE) set itself the strategic objective of ensuring “diversity in the organisational form and institutional landscape of the higher education system through mission and programme differentiation” which would be “based on the type and range of qualifications offered”.

4. If there is an in-principle opposition to differentiation and diversity and to a South African higher education institutional landscape comprising of differentiated and diverse universities, this would run counter to the thrust of post-1994 higher education policy and will require major policy engagement and negotiations between Higher Education South Africa and the government.
5. The history of apartheid higher education history should not, however, obscure the immense contribution that a differentiated and diverse higher education system can make to the new socio-economic and educational goals and objectives of democratic South Africa.

The economic and social needs of South Africa are highly varied and diverse, and a responsive higher education system requires a diverse spectrum of institutions. There is no virtue in institutional isomorphism where every higher education institution seeks to be the same and do the same thing, and all aspire to be a (‘research’) university.

6. Post-1994 there have been two necessary elements in the creation of a new institutional landscape:
- (a) *Institutional restructuring* through different forms of combination of previous institutions, and
  - (b) *The negotiation of new academic qualification and programme mixes for institutions.*

The creation of a new institutional landscape has, therefore, needed to proceed at two levels simultaneously.

On the one hand, it has required the creation of institutional identities through the development of institutional missions, social and educational roles, academic qualification and programme mixes, and organisational forms, structures and practices as appropriate for different institutions.

On the other hand, the complexity of the restructuring could not end simply with new identities for institutions. It has also needed to confront the historical burden of South African higher education: namely apartheid institutionalised inequities which translated into a 'system' of institutions characterised by educational, financial, material and geographical advantage and disadvantage.

7. No restructuring of the higher education system can succeed unless these issues are taken on seriously and proactively. Taking into account institutional histories as well as envisaged new social and educational roles, it is imperative to create the conditions and opportunities and provide the necessary resources for developmental trajectories for all higher education institutions, and especially the historically disadvantaged.

The capacities, capabilities and institutional natures of higher education institutions are not fixed. All of these can be developed over time to serve vital social needs.

8. It may be the case that on the part of historically black universities there is no in-principle opposition to a policy of differentiation, as much as legitimate concerns regarding the implications of the implementation of such a policy in the absence of clear developmental trajectories. Such anxiety is necessarily heightened by the absence, until very recently, of significant new funds for higher education.
9. Indeed, a major problem post-1994 has been inadequate financial support from government for the creation of effective developmental trajectories for all higher education institutions, and especially the historically black. This is notwithstanding the provision of merger and recapitalisation funding and a new funding formula that introduced aspects of institutional redress funding.

In this context, differentiation and diversity can become a financially a zero-sum situation, with certain clear winners and losers.

10. However, with the acquisition by the DoE of some R 2.0 billion for capital infrastructure and 'efficiency' during 2007/08 -2009/10 and its allocation to universities, as well as additional funds in coming years committed for capital infrastructure, it is evident that differentiation need not be a zero-sum situation.
11. Such new funds have the potential to give effect to differentiation and diversity without any necessary financial disadvantaging of historically black institutions. It is to be recommended that negotiation with the DoE with respect to institutional missions, qualifications and programmes mix and institutional development trajectories be interactive and iterative.

12. It could be argued by historically black universities (and those who view themselves as disadvantaged) that they have no in-principle objection to differentiation; but that until their needs (identified and quantified in terms of their negotiated missions and qualifications and programmes) are met, all new funds for higher education should be allocated to them.
13. In this case, the issue is not differentiation as much as it is about:
- (a) Institutional redress and/or institutional development to serve new goals and needs, or
  - (b) The balance between financial support for institutional development of historically black universities, and support also for developmental trajectories for historically white universities, to the extent that in a differentiated and diverse system the latter also require support if they are to contribute optimally to social equity and redress and economic and social development.
14. In the light of the above, it appears that HESA has to:
- *Openly and seriously debate the issues of 'differentiation' and 'diversity'.* Key questions include
    - ⇒ What, if any, is the value of 'differentiation' and 'diversity' for economy and society
    - ⇒ What, if any, is the value of 'differentiation' and 'diversity' for universities in general
    - ⇒ What, if any, is the value of 'differentiation' and 'diversity' for different sets of universities – universities, universities of technology, comprehensive universities, historically white institutions and historically black institutions?
    - ⇒ Are 'differentiation' and 'diversity' one and the same thing?
    - ⇒ If 'differentiation' and 'diversity' are different, what is the difference?
    - ⇒ Is there a relationship between 'differentiation' and 'diversity'; if so, how are they related?
    - ⇒ Does a policy that seeks to promote the existence of a 'diversity' of institutions necessarily require 'differentiation'?
    - ⇒ Can 'diversity in the organisational form and institutional landscape of the higher education system' only be achieved 'through mission and programme differentiation... based on the type and range of qualifications offered' (*National Plan, 2001*), or are there other ways to achieve diversity?
    - ⇒ What might be other ways to achieve 'diversity'?
  - *Take a position on the policy of the differentiation and diversity of universities*
  - If there is *objection to the policy*, engage with the Ministry on the policy of the differentiation and diversity
  - If there is *support for the policy* of differentiation and diversity, identify whether, in what ways and to what extent HESA is, or is not, in agreement with the implementation of policy
  - If HESA is *in agreement* with the implementation of the policy, there may nonetheless still be issues on which it may wish to engage with the Ministry.
  - If HESA is *not in agreement* with the implementation of the policy, there is a need to identify the substantive and procedural areas of disagreement, and to proactively formulate how the policy could be implemented differently and with what possible benefits and consequences
  - Discuss what the implications of differentiated and diverse institutions are for itself.