

Report on the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation

Called by the Minister of Higher Education and Training,
Dr Blade Nzimande

22-23 April 2010



higher education
& training

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1. Acronyms

CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
CPUT	Cape Peninsular University of Technology
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DST	Department of Science and Technology
FET	Further Education and Training
FETCs	Further Education and Training Colleges
HDIs	Historically Disadvantaged Institutions
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution (i.e. university)
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications framework
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HRD	Human Resources Development
IFs	Institutional Forums
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NEHAWU	National Education Health and Allied Workers Union
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NRF	National Research Foundation
SAUS	South African Union of Students
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SRC	Student Representative Council
SSC	Summit Steering Committee

2. Executive Summary

The Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation, (which will be noted as HE Summit), was called by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, and held during the 22nd to 23rd April 2010 at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Bellville campus, Cape Town. The Ministry invited a range of stakeholders from the higher education system as well as representatives from the education and training system such as schooling, FET Colleges, SETAs and other government departments, which are interlinked with higher education in the new education landscape.

The Summit Steering Committee (SSC), appointed by the Minister, was ultimately responsible for overseeing the planning of the summit, the programme development, the management of the event and the production of the final report. The SSC included academics, unions and key parastatals based on an understanding by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) of the value that they could add to the planning processes. The SSC was chaired by the Special Advisor to the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Mr John Pampallis, and was attended by the Minister himself and the Director-General of the DHET, Professor Mary Metcalfe, on request. The Centre for Education Policy Development was appointed by the Ministry to organise and manage the summit.

The summit structure included both plenary sessions attended by all participating delegates and commission sessions, where delegates split into groups and participated in a commission of their choice. The primary aims and objectives of the summit were to:

1. Revisit the notion of transformation holistically, focussing on issues of access, equity and quality in relation to the core functions of higher education;
2. Examine the role of higher education in national development;
3. Identify key objectives for the higher education sector;
4. Discuss the need, feasibility and possible modalities for more systematic and structured communication between the sector and the Minister of Higher Education and Training, (HE Summit Concept Document, 2010).

The big issues that were presented and debated at the summit were multi-fold. Primarily, the debates centred on the need for a broader understanding of transformation and a better fit between transformation policy and practice, at the institutional level, with appropriate levels of accountability. The issue of increasing access and success within higher education remained pertinent, as was how best to match graduate skills with those demanded by the economy. Curriculum—related matters debated at the HE Summit included making the curriculum more socially relevant, re-thinking the three year degree structure and developing African languages as academic languages. Student-specific issues tackled were improving student support services such as accommodation and catering and the need to re-centre the student within a more caring university environment. Systemic issues discussed included the re-aligning of policies (specifically the funding formula) in recognition of a differentiated and differentiating higher education system and putting in place systems and structures to enable better monitoring of the transformation agenda at both an institutional and national level. In addition, the debates focussed on dealing with the realities created through the corporatisation of universities globally. A revitalisation of the academic profession was central to staffing matters debated as was improving leadership and governance capacity across the higher education system. What emerged throughout the HE Summit

deliberations was the importance of intra and inter-institutional collaboration across the higher education sector.

The big recommendations that emerged from the summit were as follows:

- To broaden the consultative processes within higher education through, inter alia, the establishment of a permanent Higher Education Stakeholder Forum and the convening of an annual Higher Education Summit;
- To strengthen corporate governance structures and processes in institutions of Higher Education;
- To recognise institutional differentiation and develop a framework for defining this and instituting differentiation based on respect for all institutions and functions;
- To re-design the curriculum so that it is more socially relevant and ensure that universities drive the development of African languages through their use as academic languages;
- To boost leadership capacity within institutions particularly with respect to the development of student and institutional leadership;
- To develop mechanisms that promote student-centeredness and create caring universities;
- To revitalise the academic profession and enhance the opportunities for African academics particularly African women;
- To review the working conditions of academic and support staff
- To address infrastructure backlogs at Higher Education Institutions through a recapitalisation plan;
- To strengthen research output and create an environment of knowledge-sharing and collaboration within the higher education sector as a whole.

The summit ended with a summit declaration which indicated a high level of consensus over the key issues which the summit was aiming to impact on.

3. Introduction

The report that follows aims to draw together the big issues and key discussions that led to the Declaration of the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation and begins to chart a way beyond the declaration. The report is not a comprehensive narrative of the Summit.

The structure of the report is as follows: Firstly, it will identify the activities preceding the summit before moving on to outline the key proceedings of the summit. The report will then highlight common themes and differences of opinion manifesting themselves throughout the summit before moving on to discuss the implications for policy and practice of the themes and the emerging issues. Finally a set of recommendations contained in the Declaration as well as reflections and concluding remarks, based on shared values that emerged amongst summit stakeholders, are laid down. The appendices include various speeches and presentations made during the course of the summit, including the speeches by the Deputy President of the South Africa and the Minister of Higher Education and Training.

4. Background

Like all others sectors of South African society, the higher education sector is still plagued by its Apartheid legacy and accompanying characteristics of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. Since 1994, the sector has been through a rigorous process of restructuring at both institutional and national levels. Amongst other things, such reconstructing has involved:

- A reconceptualisation of the role of higher education institutions of learning, accompanied by the development of *White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997)*, that sought to implement a vision for higher education based on a set of democratic and transformative aims and objectives;
- The development of new institutional types as the result of a series of mergers and incorporations of existing higher education institutions (HEIs). The higher education landscape is now a combination on 11 universities (in the 'traditional' sense), 6 universities of technology (the old technikons) and 6 comprehensive universities (combining functions of both traditional universities and universities of technology). Combined, therefore, South Africa has 23 HEIs;
- Increased student enrolments, particularly of black students;
- The establishment of additional institutional structures such as institutional forums (IFs);
- The implementation of a coherent Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) that allows for increased mobility within the sector;
- The adoption of new funding formula based on levels of teaching, learning and research;
- The establishment of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to provide financial aid to poor students that would otherwise have been excluded;
- The development of a national quality assurance system targeted at all higher education qualifications.

Despite the immense gains made in higher education over the past 15 years, and it must be reiterated that these have been profound gains, the overall transformation of the HE sector remains loaded with challenges. There are numerous areas of concern but these vary in terms of their relevance across the 23 HEIs in South Africa. Overall, a somewhat patchy implementation of transformation policies within the higher education sector needs to be noted. At the system level it is true that, despite the institutional mergers and other reforms, the imprint of apartheid can still be clearly seen in our higher education system. On the one hand, the former whites-only universities - now with a significant increase in the number of black students - continue to thrive and tend to cope relatively well with many of the challenges facing them, notwithstanding the many serious problems identified by the Soudien Report (see below). On the other hand, the historically disadvantaged (i.e. blacks-only) universities in the former bantustan areas struggle financially, administratively and academically; on the whole, they continue to cater for the poorest students and employ less qualified academics.

Across the system - although the problems are more acute at some institutions than others - there are student-related concerns such as the need to improve access to higher education institutions, low student success rates, curriculum relevance, unsuitable student accommodation, a questionable three-year degree structure, the lack of integration between bridging courses and the core

curriculum as well as the negative impact that these courses can have on the students that they hope to assist. Concerns for the academic profession include a failure to identify and retain black, especially female, members of staff, an aging academic population, failure to develop African languages as academic languages and inadequate staff development. Moreover difficulties surrounding leadership and governance capacity at higher education institutions include the failure of many of their councils to provide suitable leadership, inadequate accountability for the implementation of transformation policies and institutional corruption. In addition, there is the need to address institutional differentiation across the higher education sector at both policy and system levels.

The transformation agenda has received increased attention since the release of the report of the *Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions* in 2008 (more familiarly known as the 'Soudien Report'). This report highlights the severity of racial and gender discrimination that continues to persist in all higher education institutions and the steps that need to be taken to combat such discrimination. It calls for a more sophisticated and shared understanding of transformation linked to institutional culture, curricula, pedagogy and national transformation goals. In addition to the 'Soudien Report', the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has acknowledged the growing plea by a multitude of stakeholders in higher education that all is not fine in the HE sector and that various issues, herein, need to be revisited pertaining to transformation more broadly. The Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation is expected to be the first of a number of initiatives by the Minister of Higher Education and Training aimed at, "building a common understanding of higher education and a sense of cohesion between the various stakeholders in the sector," (HE Summit Concept Document: 2010: 2).

5. What was the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation?

Before proceeding to the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation, itself, it is worthwhile reviewing the preparations leading to the HE Summit. Each of the activities listed below impacted on the outcomes of the HE Summit and deserve special attention.

5.1 Preparations leading to the HE Summit

5.1.1 Summit Steering Committee

The organisation of the Summit was overseen by a Steering Committee chaired by an advisor to the Minister of Higher Education and Training and including representatives of all the key higher education stakeholders, including university management, academics, students, non-academic workers, the Council on Higher Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training. Some of the meetings were attended by both the Minister and the Director General of Higher Education and Training.

5.1.2 Online discussion forum & submissions

Prior to the HE Summit, an online discussion forum was set up on the homepage of the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD). These forums provided an e-platform for all stakeholders to engage with higher education issues, specifically those pertaining to transformation. In addition, various stakeholders submitted submissions to the DHET regarding transformation in the higher education sector, more broadly. Such stakeholders included professional bodies, student unions, employee unions, academics, students, university management, higher education associations, statutory bodies, research organisations etc. Although the online forums were not used as widely as anticipated, these and the formal submissions both informed the final submission report. This report is in essence a summary of the key issues and recommendations from these combined inputs and was used to guide the proceedings of the Summit itself. The submission report and other Summit-related documents are available at www.cepd.org.za.

On the basis of the 13 responses received from HEIs to the ‘Soudien Report,’ Higher Education South Africa (HESA) released a preliminary sector position paper. In summary, although mindful of the methodology and epistemological assumptions adopted, the higher education sector welcomes the evidence collected in the ‘Soudien Report’ as a means to force these institutions to engage more seriously with issues of transformation as part of their core functions. A common theme in the sector response is the tension between institutional autonomy and the call for greater accountability. In addition, it raises concern over the adoption of a ‘one-size-fits-all approach’ to addressing transformation challenges. The sector response highlights numerous measures to foster transformation that are already in place across the higher education sector. Some of these measures include: diversity training programmes, institutional charters, the creation of the Anti-Racism Network, the development of African languages materials as well as courses, student leadership training programmes, as well as research mentoring, career advice and salary supplements for staff members. Despite these and other interventions, the higher education sector accepts that more can be done with respect to transformation but that, in reality, this is resource intensive and would necessitate increased support from the Ministry of Higher Education and Training.

5.1.3 Sector Response

A number of meetings were held by various stakeholders at the campus level to prepare for the Summit. In addition, the South African Union of Students (SAUS) organised a meeting of Student Representative Councils from across the country to prepare a common student position on the major issues for discussion at the Summit.

5.1.4 Pre-Summit Seminar

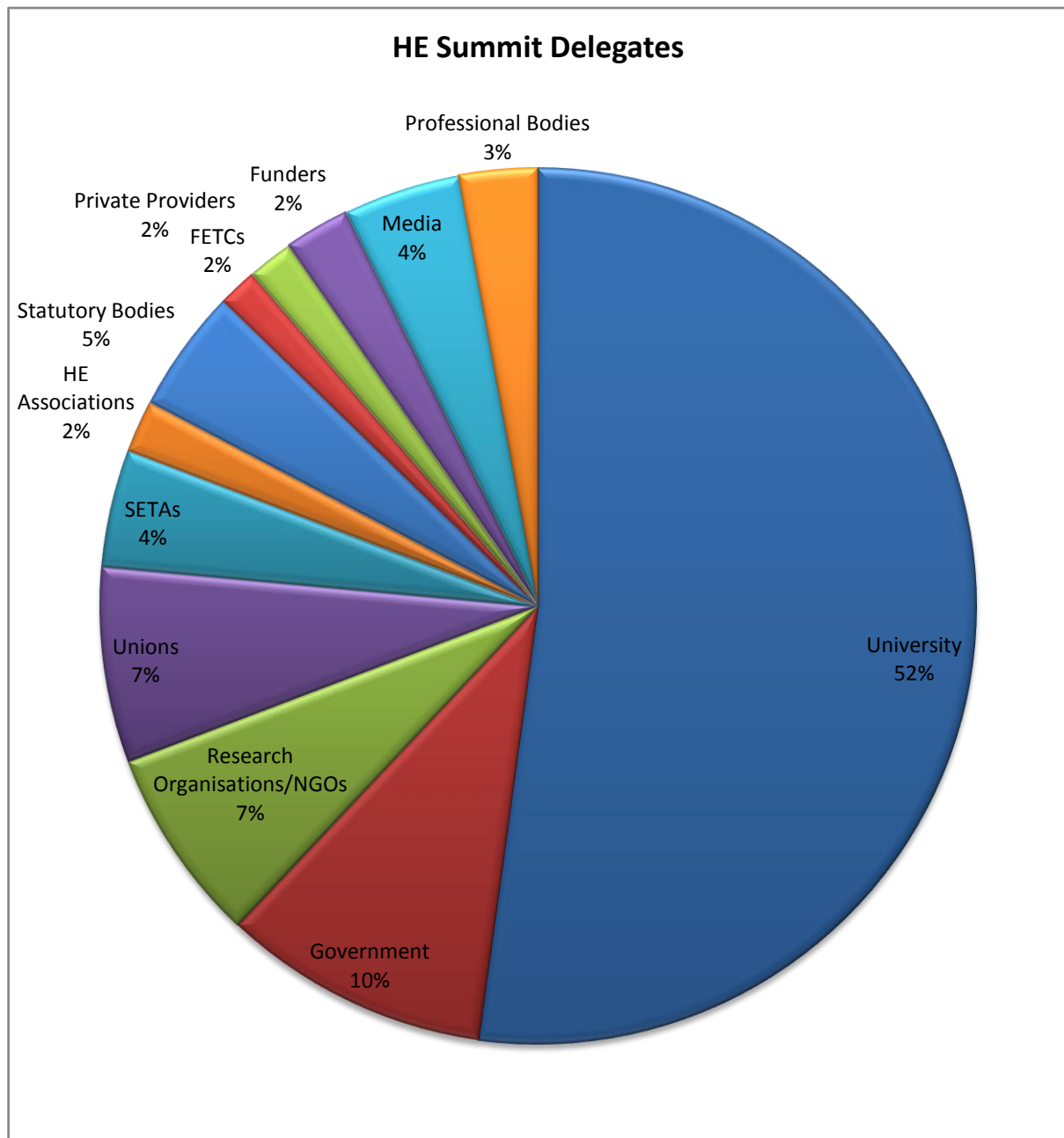
A pre-summit seminar was held at the University of Cape Town, in collaboration with the Mail & Guardian, on the evening of the 21st April 2010. The title of the seminar was “Transformation in post-colonial universities.” The guest speaker at the seminar was Professor Venansius Baryamureeba, the Vice-Chancellor of Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda and the respondent was Professor Catherine Odora Hoppers, DST/NRF South African Research Chair in Development Education at the University of South Africa. The seminar provided a regional perspective on transformation matters concerning universities in other parts of the African continent and highlighted that South Africa is not in a vacuum when it comes to the need to deal with transformation related challenges. Issues relating to access to higher education, equity within higher

education, linking higher education to the national development plan, establishing e-learning opportunities to access global knowledge, a failure to recognise and integrate indigenous knowledge systems into the higher education system, as well as the need for universities to become involved in community development are all facets of institutional transformation similar to that experienced by HEIs in South Africa.

5.1.5 Stakeholder Participants

The Summit brought together a diverse and rich array of stakeholder participants who attended either as part of their respective institutions and organisations or in their individual capacity. All 23 public higher education institutions of learning attended with university delegations comprising SRC presidents, Vice-Chancellors, members of management, Chairs of Council, academics, Institutional Forum Chairs and Transformation Managers. A point worth mentioning is that 21 out of the 23 Vice-Chancellors attended. Other stakeholders included: statutory bodies, higher education associations, NGOs, research organisations, various student and employee unions, SETAs, government officials, members of parliament, representatives from private colleges and universities and representatives from FET colleges.

The chart below illustrates the breakdown of 424 HE Summit delegates who attended.



5.2 Proceedings at the HE Summit

The HE Summit began on the morning of the 22nd April 2010 with a plenary session involving all delegates. The Vice-Chancellor of CPUT, Professor Mazwi-Tanga, officially welcomed the delegates present. This was followed by an address by the Deputy-President of South Africa, The Honourable Kgalema Mothlante.



Photograph taken by CPUT photography student at the HE Summit, 22 April 2010

(From the left: Professor Mazwi-Tanga, Deputy President Kgalema Mothlante and Minister Blade Nzimande)

Keynote Addresses

Both the speeches by the Deputy-President and the Minister of Higher Education and Training were important for framing the discussions at the HE Summit, based on an identification of the big issues facing higher education in South Africa. Extracts from both of these speeches appear below.

The Deputy President, **Kgalema Mothlante** said:

“I wish to applaud the hosts of this summit for hosting the event in a changed education landscape. It is not often that one can put together a programme that seeks a common understanding among academics. I premise this submission on the understanding that the primary role of higher education is to develop capacity and serve the needs of families, and the nation as a whole. The right of each young person to further his or her education is paramount. We will revisit issues of access, equality, national development and the need, feasibility and possible modalities between the sector and the Minister of HET. These critical issues cannot be over-emphasised in our approach to address the human resource development needs of our country – skills levels, knowledge and abilities to improve people’s employability and ultimately their lives, and those of their families. We need high-level skills for effective service delivery. Education, health, rural development, land reform and the fight against crime and corruption are priorities – we should be asking how well we are on track as a nation. The challenges presented by a globalised world means that we should develop proposals that will place our country at the competitive edge. We emphasised the need last year, when the new administration took office, for measurable

outcomes to see that we are meeting our objectives. The challenges of poverty and unemployment are a concern – to underscore my point, I was troubled by a report in the Financial Mail which highlighted alarming statistics about young people that are unemployed, and/or dropping out of the education system.

I find it disheartening that the research output in certain disciplines remain dismally low – research outputs should address the question of who and what informs the research agenda. What is the impact of the private sector's determination of academic success?

The Deputy-President continued by saying that, *"the readiness and willingness of universities to address our teaching and research needs, while addressing transformation at a deeper level, is essential. Transformation at our tertiary institutions remains a challenge – by this we mean a process addressing cumulative disabilities and exclusions throughout our higher education sector. The findings of the Soudien Report need to be constructively engaged with to reach a thorough understanding of the issues that need addressing. The discussions at this summit should lead to concrete suggestions on how we can overcome these problem."* (Extract from the speech made by the Honourable Kgalema Mothlante, Deputy-President of South Africa, HE Summit, 22 April 2010).

Dr Blade Nzimande, the Minister of Higher Education and Training presented the Summit rationale and challenges.

"The term 'transformation' is sometimes used rather narrowly – almost as if it were synonymous with BEE. It is used to refer to the process of overcoming racial division. However, I believe it should be about more than eradicating the racial aspects of apartheid, but about changing society in all areas of life, to serve the interests of all South Africans in a democratic, equitable and prosperous society. It is about confronting deeply interrelated challenges of class, race and gender inequalities, including confronting HIV/AIDS and being an inclusive society for the disabled – addressing the interests of everybody, but especially the youth."

Dr Nzimande went on to explain the structure of the new DHET which is now responsible for all post-school education and training institutions including the SETAs and the National Skills Fund. He described this as, *"a return to the original pre-1994 idea of an integrated education and training system and we now envisage the department's main responsibility as the provision of an integrated and differentiated system of post-school opportunities for youth and adults."*

For Dr Nzimande, *"Universities, as providers of high-level academic education, play a special role in strengthening post-school system and play a central role in national development. We have many dedicated and brilliant academics and leaders, and world leaders in a number of academic fields. South African universities attract almost 70 000 students from countries on all continents and particularly from Africa – contributing to the development of our continent."*

The Minister acknowledged the steps already taken by higher education institutions in response to the legacy of Apartheid. More specifically, he made reference to improvements in the demographic profile of students, particularly in terms of opening access to African and other poor students. *"At present, it is estimated that two-thirds of students are African. This trend still has some way to go to reach the 79% of Africans in the population, but it does show steady and considerable progress since 1994"*.

Dr Nzimande referred to the sector's response to the 'Soudien Report' as demonstrating *"a seriousness among most universities to tackling issues of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination."* However, he continued by saying that, *"I am sure that we all recognise these and other positive developments in the university sector are not enough. The legacy of apartheid is still clearly discernible in higher education as it is in many aspects of SA life."*

For Dr Nzimande, the issue of underprepared students may mean that, *"we have to adapt our curriculum and teaching strategies to suit the student population that we have. We are not likely to get a radically different type of student anytime soon."*

The higher education sector in South Africa may be characterised as both differentiated and differentiating. The Minister acknowledged that policies and in particular the funding formula, *"be tailored to a rational and fair differentiation that leads to the strengthening of the entire system."*

Dr Nzimande urged all universities to take the study of African languages more seriously, especially in view of the fact that African language departments in many of South Africa's leading higher education institutions have become weaker. He reiterated that, *"strengthening them is a central strategy in developing the languages of the majority of our people,"* and suggested that, *"perhaps we should consider making the study of an official African language compulsory (perhaps for a year) in order to obtain a qualification,"* (Extract from the speech by Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training, HE Summit, 22 April 2010).

The Soudien Report

Professor Crain Soudien presented his comments on how to frame the discussions of the Summit. This was based on key issues generated by the 'Soudien Report' as well as the discussions following the report. An overview of the sector response to the 'Soudien Report' was then provided by **Professor Barney Pityana**. The inputs made by Professor Soudien and Professor Pityana are provided in the Appendices section of this report.

A 4-person panel comprised of a representative from Higher Education South Africa (HESA), the South African Union of Students (SAUS), the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) and the academic profession went on to provide delegates with a set of expectations intended for the proceedings of the Summit. The discussion was then opened to the floor.

Commissions

For the remainder of the first day, delegates were involved in focussed discussions as part of one of 4 commissions. The four commissions were as follows:

Commission 1: Student Experiences

Commission 2: Academics Experiences

Commission 3: Experiences of Leadership, management and Governance

Commission 4: Institutional Differentiation

The key issues emerging from the commissions are outlined in Sections 6 and 7 below. In addition, the Commission reports are attached in the Appendices section of the report.

The final day of the HE Summit (23rd April 2010) was spent in plenary sessions. The Chairs and Rapporteurs of each commission presented a report on the discussions in their commissions and the resolutions reached.

Conference visitor's Remarks

These presentations were followed by a presentation by the conference visitor, **Professor Michael Burawoy** (Professor at the University of California, Berkley, and Vice-President of the International Sociological Association).

Professor Burawoy commended the Ministry of Higher Education & Training for having organised a Summit of this nature that brought together such a diverse array of stakeholders to tackle the biggest problems in higher education head on:

"This is a rare endeavor, indeed. I may even say only in South Africa would a Minister call together such a broad range of interests to tackle and discuss, in a no holds barred way, the biggest issues facing higher education. To start the summit with the stakeholders representing their views, to break up into commissions on the academic experience, on the student experience, on differentiation, and on governance and then to have the Commissions report back to the summit turned out to be a stroke of organizational genius. The seriousness with which each set about its work, the heated discussions, the open conflicts and tensions, the desire for considered solutions marked the work of each commission."

He referred to the tension between having to address apartheid legacies on the one hand and pressures of globalisation on the other and cautioned that *"these twin forces become excuses for inaction."*

Professor Burawoy made the following further observations. Firstly, he described higher education in South Africa as the *"jewel of Africa"* and explained that, *"it stands in relation to Africa as Brazil stands in relation to Latin America, relatively well funded public education, both inherited from previously authoritarian regimes – apartheid and military dictatorship."* Secondly, he stated that universities across the globe are all in crisis and that transformation challenges facing the South African higher education sector are not unique to this country. For example, universities internationally are experiencing drastic budget cuts, largely due to their corporatisation and the commercialisation of knowledge. Professor Burawoy spoke about the higher education model emerging in South Africa – and manifested in the Summit – as one of deliberative democracy: *"What I have witnessed these last two days is a reflexive model of higher education – a dialogue that is both internal to higher education between for example managers who point their fingers at academics and academics who point their fingers at the corporatization of administration, but also a dialogue between government and the higher education. What emerges is neither government regulation nor commercialization but one of deliberative democracy, in which the stake holders are participants in a political process. We can call this a model of empowered participatory governance."*

He urged that all higher education stakeholders discard their cynicism surrounding the transformation agenda in South Africa and take advantage of the opportunities provided for debate

and discussion both within and outside of the academy. In conclusion, Professor Burawoy highlighted that, *“the irony is that the university protests that have spread across the Global North – United States, England, France, Germany, Austria and beyond – during the last year are all groping toward a model of deliberative democracy in public education, a model that South Africa almost takes for granted, that it inherits from its past. It’s not perfect, and ultimately it has to deliver reform, but it is an important beginning from which we can all learn.”*



Photograph taken by a CPUT photography student at the HE Summit, 23 April 2010

(From the left: Professor Derrick Swartz & Professor Mary Metcalfe)

Conference Declaration

Professor Mary Metcalfe, Director-General of the Department of Higher Education and Training presented the much awaited Declaration based on the resolutions reached during the course of the Summit. The full text appears under 8.1, below.

The Summit was then officially closed by Professor Metcalfe.

6. Some Common Themes

There were definitive themes emerging throughout the Summit based on common understandings amongst stakeholder participants. The main ones are identified below.

6.1 A broad transformation agenda

A general consensus emerging from the Summit was that any transformation agenda should be multi-layered and encompass a number of factors. In other words a higher participation rate, through improved access to higher education, is not the only measure of transformation in higher education. Transformation is complex and involves a mesh of factors, such as, improving graduate output, revising the curriculum, developing and implementing an institutional culture based of principles of democracy, equity and mutual respect, valuing good teachers, providing decent student accommodation, practising good governance, developing existing staff and, essentially, stamping out all forms of discrimination in the higher education sector. The transformation agenda should be linked to regional social and economic development goals and South Africa's Human Resources Development (HRD) plan. One of the most important outputs of a transformation agenda is the production of socially conscious graduates that will become the thinkers and leaders of tomorrow.

6.2 Access

The expansion of access to higher education in South Africa has already resulted in increased access particularly amongst poor students. The proportion of African students in the system has grown significantly since 1994 and in 2007 made up 63% of the total student population. In addition, female students, in 2007, comprised 55.5% of the student intake. Student bursary funding through NSFAS has also expanded considerably in the past ten years with over R12 billion being distributed to over 600 000 students. In its entirety, higher education access by African, female and poor students, has been greatly improved. Despite these gains, there was overwhelming agreement at the HE Summit that greater expansion in terms of access to public higher education institutions is necessary and that this process must involve better articulation between the schooling system, FET colleges and universities.

6.3 Success

There was common understanding that low success rates of students were a cause for concern but the reasons for this varied. The stance taken by the commission on student experiences was that the existing cohort of students is not necessarily under-prepared and that failure to succeed lies more in systemic weaknesses in higher education. This implies the need for a deeper understanding of who students are, so as to do justice in developing them to their fullest potential. Hence, the transformation agenda should avoid perceptions of students as the "hassle factor" and instead, re-centre the students as individuals with their own identities and potential to thrive. Participants felt strongly that it is the responsibility of universities to ensure a smooth transition for students coming from diverse backgrounds into the institutional culture of these universities. This view was not shared by all, with one commission identifying poor success rates as related to dismal levels of student preparedness as well as limited educational resources (such as libraries, laboratories, books etc) and oversized classes. Notwithstanding this, a view shared by the commissions was that a contributing factor to lower success rates was a de-contextualised curriculum that appeared socially removed from the realities facing the students to which it is directed.

6.4 Alienation

Feelings of alienation were deeply embedded in many of the stakeholder views at the HE Summit. To reiterate, students felt that they were often targeted as the “hassle factor” and that this contributed to their failure to succeed. Specific reference was made to lecturers who at the very beginning of their teaching module, indicated proudly to students that the majority of them in the class were going to fail. For students, this created feelings of despondency that impacted negatively throughout their academic studies. For academics, feelings of alienation were due to a number of factors. Firstly, black academics felt alienated from their white counterparts and referred to their exposure to racial discrimination as well as limited career development and promotion opportunities within their respective institutions. In a similar vein, some white academics felt victimised by a political agenda to Africanise certain institutions. Feelings of despondency also emerged amongst university leadership who felt that their efforts to transform their respective institutions are not always appreciated and that unrealistic demands placed on universities may essentially corrode the core purposes of these institutions. Professor Saleem Badat described the situation well when he referred to universities as “*fragile institutions*” whereby, “*too much ill-considered and frenetic change without continuities can make a university dysfunctional. Equally, no change* (i.e. the absence of change) *can make a university moribund.*” The balancing of such strong feelings of alienation is most certainly a challenge in itself.



Photograph taken by a CPUT photography student at the HE Summit, 23 April 2010

(From the left: Liz Lange, Cheryl de la Rey and Anshu Padayache)

7 Emerging Issues and Policy Implications

7.1 A differentiated and differentiating higher education system

Reference to the issue of differentiation in itself, requires special attention. Commission 4, focussed entirely on differentiation, began with a presentation by Professor Peter Mbatia who provided a delineation of different forms of differentiation, particularly in relation to challenges experienced by rural-based universities. Dr Nico Cloete in contrast defined the current HE system as having 3 specific layers. He used a set of input variables and resultant outputs to inform a series of correlations, as part of a broader statistical analysis. The presentation was controversial with respect to the input variables used and many of the delegates felt that although it was useful in terms of providing an “as is” picture of differentiated universities, it did not explain the historical underpinnings of such differences. A robust discussion followed on the drivers of differentiation as well as how institutions can mobilise such differentiation effectively to inform policy, address transformation and optimise institutional growth.

Differentiation was simply defined as a “process, in which diversity of a system increases.” South Africa’s Apartheid policies created a highly differentiated HE system along the lines of race, gender, language and geographical orientation. Post-1994, the drivers of differentiation included government policy relating to funding (particularly linked to research output); planning (through mergers and the creation of different institutional types); quality assurance (the development of academic programmes); geographical location; the ability of institutions to attract non-state capital; as well as the strategic choices made by these institutions and their resultant growth trajectories. Although the conceptual basis for understanding and analysing differentiation varied, the key questions going forward included how differentiation can be used for:

- Assisting policy making;
- Distributing resources more fairly;
- Addressing Apartheid legacy issues;
- And advancing national development goals.

Globally, arguments in favour of institutional differentiation are that differentiation: improves access for a diversity of students; facilitates student mobility; provides the flexibility that enables higher education institutions to respond effectively to a changing labour market; is more accommodating of different institutional needs and identities; creates an enabling environment for institutional experimentation and innovation and; ultimately boosts institutional effectiveness and efficiencies as the result of a more competitive higher education terrain. The trend worldwide has been that high differentiation contributes to equality and development when combined with high participation rates. Thus, the ability of differentiation to contribute similarly in the South African context is marred by the low levels of participation in the higher education, as well as the undifferentiated funding model and historic differences in resourcing.

Differences of opinion emerged in terms of how to differentiate HEIs. Models for differentiation ranged from hierarchical, to binary to a layered system of either fluid or fixed differentiation. Concerns were raised in relation to South Africa’s poor participation rates in higher education and the fact that there remains a large percentage of youth that are neither in education, employment

or training (“NEET”). The general consensus was a commitment to pursue differentiation by purpose and that planned differentiation should primarily be based on the following principles:

- The funding formula must be revised so as to balance the functions of research and teaching as well as the specific purposes of institutions. There is a need to therefore move away from the hierarchical status accorded to research in the funding formula. It is important to note that the aim in this regard is not to stunt the competitive strengths of research intensive institutions but, to recognise other important functions of higher education institutions, such as teaching, learning and community engagement;
- A differentiated HE system needs to ensure the portability of students, academics and knowledge within the system as a whole;
- A differentiated HE system should not be static and should accommodate evolving institutions and their associated purposes. In addition, differentiation should not be focused on institutional ranking but on institutional purpose;
- A differentiated HE system must be located within the national and regional development trajectory. Rural-based universities occupy a crucial space for access, research and strategic development and must be adequately funded and supported;
- Differentiation should ultimately support the optimal growth paths of all institutions and should take into account their particular contexts, historical legacies, current capacities and realistic prospects;
- Differentiation must be linked to the Government’s long-term Human Resources Development (HRD) plan and its associated 30 year time horizon;
- One of the main goals of any differentiated system should be to demonstrate ways to increase student access and success.

7.2 Student Support Services

The provision of suitable student support services where emphasis is on the total student experience was amplified at the Summit. Such student support services refer to a number of things namely, accommodation in residences, catering services, diversity programmes, health and wellness programmes, counselling etc. For many universities student services are fragmented and are not recognised as part of core business. The following propositions were made regarding a better integration of student support services across the academic and administrative function.

Accommodation in residences: the poor physical quality of existing residences both on and off campus is not acceptable and will be highlighted by the impending audit on student accommodation facilities. Such inadequacies may only be adequately addressed if residential life is integrated into the existing core business of all higher education institutions. In addition, residential life should ideally be an extension of academic life. The establishment of ‘living and learning’ communities with the provision of mentoring and tutoring facilities in the residences is one way of addressing this issue.

Catering: the provision of student meals in residences is predominantly outsourced to catering companies and is again, not regarded as a core function of the higher education institutions. Additional concerns relate to the poor nutritional value of the meals provided and the fact that, in

many cases, the provision of a food allowance to students is not always appropriate where it is spent on goods other than food.

Core trans-disciplinary courses: all HEIs need to purposefully address the issue of social cohesion as part of their transformation agenda. This will largely facilitate the integration of students into their respective institutional environments. One way of addressing this is by introducing compulsory life-skills and diversity courses, in the first year of study, that seek to address issues of racism, race relations, class and other social questions and challenges. This should form part of the broader objectives of HEIs, namely, the development of a socially aware and critical citizenry. These courses must be integrated as part of the core curriculum. It was proposed that higher education institutions should work together to develop a common curriculum in this regard.

Foundation programmes: these programmes are specifically aimed at facilitating the academic transition from school to university for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds that require such assistance. The ability of foundation programmes to successfully bridge the academic divide is often hindered by a failure to integrate these programmes into the core curriculum of the institution as such programmes are simply seen as add-ons. Moreover, the remedial nature of foundation programmes often means that the students who take these courses are marked negatively at a social level as their apparent shortcomings are exposed.

7.3 African Languages

The existing language barrier inherent in all higher education institutions of learning ultimately reduces the possibility of success for the majority of students. There was an overwhelming consensus reached in a number of the commissions that the issue of developing African languages be concretised as part of the formal academic programme, with one approach being that it becomes compulsory for all students to take one African language in their first year of study. Furthermore, a cross-disciplinary approach such as this was seen to be crucial for the development of African languages as academic languages with adequate targeted resourcing, materials and support.

7.4 Revitalising the academic profession

A revitalisation of the academic profession is of paramount importance for the future of higher education in South Africa. Simply put, “there can be no universities without academics.” Any revitalisation should be multi-pronged in its approach and attempt to deal with a number of issues, namely, the decline in the image of the academic profession, rising workload pressures due to increased teaching loads, a diminishing academic voice within the higher education sector associated with a loss of agency, the corporatisation and massification of the sector, an aging academic population, feelings of alienation particularly amongst black academics and, tensions between academic freedom and country-specific needs.

The following resolutions were reached regarding the overall revitalisation of the academic profession:

- Develop a centrally coordinated and funded plan to increase the number of master and doctoral graduates in the system. This should include the efforts to upgrade the qualifications of existing academics and the creation of transparent career pathways and

promotion policies for academics. A possible benchmark to be used comes from Brazil, where the minimum qualification for an academic job is a PhD;

- Review academic salaries and conditions of service (such as retirement age) so as to make the profession more attractive;
- Better organise academics through the development of a more formal, representative body of academics. This is necessary to amplify the academic voice. The setting up of empowered academic forums at institutional, regional and national levels is another avenue for such intervention;
- Although there was much despair over the higher education system having to continuously absorb under-prepared students, there was agreement in terms of the urgent need to deal with the current reality. Improved funding and resourcing, staff training, workload assessment were provided as some of the ways in which this may be done;
- Acknowledge that success rates as they stand are dismal and that this may be indicative of a questionable degree structure and a socially irrelevant curriculum. There were strong propositions made to introduce a four-year degree as well as to identify and address barriers to the process of revitalising the curriculum;
- Create enabling environments for academic work as part of the transformation plan of institutions. This should involve addressing direct and more subtle forms of discrimination targeted at academics, removing barriers to academic development, nurturing academic potential, building a culture of respect and holding institutions (particularly their leadership) accountable for promoting such change;
- Upholding academic freedom is essential for the sustainability of the academic profession although such freedom must be aligned to the broader transformation prerogative of the nation.

7.5 Curricula re-design

Curricula re-design is another area that requires particular attention. There appeared to be consensus that many existing curricula were outdated and de-contextualised from the realities facing students. A diverse array of stakeholders called for the development and implementation of a curriculum orientated toward social relevance, ultimately enhancing the development of socially engaged citizens and leaders. The processes of curricula re-design need to encompass a collaborative effort at both intra and inter-institutional levels and possibly increase the duration of the first degree to four years.

7.6 Leadership and Governance

A review of existing leadership and governance structures is central to any transformation agenda for higher education institutions. There was overwhelming agreement that leadership capacity within the different echelons of the institutional hierarchy was limited and that at a systemic level, the adoption of inclusive, democratic governance processes appeared thin. Participants at the Summit spoke about there being little support for student leadership at most institutions with student leaders in some cases being sidelined by institutional managers. There were several criticisms regarding the existence of a leadership culture based on authoritarianism. Other

participants called for a review of existing incentives for the student leadership. There was overall agreement to review the role and powers of Institutional Forums so as to improve their effectiveness. In lieu of the fact that the composition of university councils are now largely populated by business and political leaders, concerns arose over their understanding of the institutional contexts specific to the universities that they govern. There was a request by some stakeholders for the Department of Higher Education and Training to initiate a process immediately after the Summit to discuss the roles and functioning of university councils. Agreement was reached over the need to strengthen existing governance structures in a manner that promotes public accountability and removes corruption. Furthermore, academic freedom and institutional autonomy remain a necessary feature of the higher education system although inherent to such freedoms is a commitment to transform universities in a manner that makes them more equitable, inclusive and just.

The formation of a leadership institute or academy was presented as a means through which existing leadership capacity may be enhanced at all levels of higher education institutions.

7.7 Corporatisation of higher education

The corporatisation of the higher education sector has largely been tied to the implementation of neo-liberal economic strategies, that is, GEAR. This process was heavily criticised by multiple commissions at the Summit. Such corporatisation is multi-faceted and participants identified various manifestations, including the following:

- The commercialisation of knowledge and the need to convert knowledge into tangible assets that can be sold. This has in turn created a value system based on competitiveness, mobilising external funding, and publishing ‘fancy’ research in distinguished journals as opposed to research based on the needs of local communities;
- A substantial increase in the number of university managers and administrators geared towards implementing cost cutting and efficiency enhancing measures. Some of these cost-cutting measures include: staff retrenchments, the outsourcing of support staff to private contractors and the elimination of so-called non-viable academic programmes. In addition, student fees have risen, often resulting in violent student protests;
- Greater inequality in salary remuneration between the executive management of universities and other employees such as academics and support staff;
- University councils comprise largely of business and political leaders as financial planning increasingly dominates the HEIs;
- Pressures relating to the economic survival of HEIs mean that equity goals may take a back seat. The danger is the production of a small, elite group of black higher education professionals linked to big capital;
- Rising levels of corruption as the result of expanding business interests in the higher education sector.

The following propositions were made with respect to dealing with the above realities:

- Rethink existing management practices based on corporatisation and authoritarianism. Participants argued that South Africa needs to investigate other higher education systems

that are based on a different value system such as countries in Asia that also have much higher throughput rates;

- Review existing upper-end salaries, particularly those of Vice-Chancellors and executive management;
- Request the Department of Higher Education and Training to develop a national retention strategy for staff at HEIs which addresses issues pertaining to equity and remuneration;
- Develop a national framework aimed at responding to issues of student protest and demonstration;
- Review the outsourcing of support work via tender processes and develop a strategy aimed at eliminating corruption in higher education institutions.

7.8 Implementing and monitoring transformation

The success of a higher education transformation agenda is largely based on how well it is implemented and monitored. Successful implementation should be the priority of individual institutions guided by institutional policies and practices and informed by national legislation and targets. The level of monitoring is twofold. The first is institutional monitoring whereby progress of transformation is monitored via organisational structures within these institutions. Such structures include the university council, senate, IFs, Transformation Managers, the SRC and other management structures, with the head of these institutions (that is, the Vice-Chancellor) being accountable for such monitoring. The following propositions were made regarding the monitoring of transformation nationally:

- The holding of an annual Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education;
- The formation of a more permanent Higher Education Stakeholder Council;
- The proceedings of this summit should feed into new higher education policies such as the Green Paper.

8. Recommendations and Conclusions

8.1 The Declaration

The 15 recommendations that were identified and agreed to in the HE Summit Declaration appear below in italics and where necessary, additional information pertaining to these follows.

- Establish a permanent Stakeholder Forum. The department must lead a broad consultative process immediately after the summit to define the role and functions of this forum and a process for it to be established;*
- Convene an annual summit to review progress in the sector (the sector being accountable to itself). Annual summits should keep institutional progress in relation to the recommendations of the Soudien Report on the agenda;*

- iii. *A working group should be urgently convened to take forward the framework for institutional differentiation developed in the Summit and develop recommendations in consultation with the sector;*
- iv. *Develop mechanisms to promote student-centeredness and caring universities.* Such methods may involve improvements in student services such as accommodation and catering as well as the implementation of compulsory life-skills and diversity courses in the first year of study, which address the need for social cohesion at universities;
- v. *Develop a charter on learning and teaching;*
- vi. *Seek a focused recapitalisation of HDIs.* These institutions require additional funding and resources such as libraries; computers etc. and is an acknowledgement of the fact that HDIs are differentiated from their counterparts (historically white institutions) largely due to their apartheid legacy;
- vii. *Strengthen emphasis on post-graduate studies and research.* The sustainability of the academic profession as well as universities in general is dependent on this, as is the ability South African higher education institutions to position themselves globally;
- viii. *Revitalize the academic profession including the development a coordinated plan to increase the number of younger researchers.* The latter is a direct attempt to address an aging academic profession;
- ix. *Ensure stronger intra-institutional capacity-building & knowledge sharing in order to foster inter-institutional sectoral solidarity and collaboration;*
- x. *Ensure commitment to good corporate governance.* This entails stamping out corruption at universities as well as improving accountability structures and systems related to the implementation of transformation policies;
- xi. *Address the decent work requirements of academics and support staff.* This entails a review of: the retirement age of academics, academic salaries and the tender processes followed when recruiting support staff;
- xii. *A national framework for development of student leadership.* Part of this may involve the establishment of a leadership academy or institute with the aim being to build leadership capacity at all levels of the higher education system;
- xiii. *There is a need to develop programmes aimed at improving opportunities for young African academics particularly women.* This may take the form of mentorship programmes, promotion policies and the provision of other career development opportunities;
- xiv. *HEI's must contribute to the development of African languages as academic languages, understanding language development play in development and education. This includes the development of African language based post graduate outputs across disciplinary area.* As part of the broader development plan for African languages, there may be a need to make it compulsory for all students in their first year of study to take an African language;
- xv. *We need a curriculum oriented toward social relevance and which supports students to become socially engaged citizens and leaders.*

9. Reflections beyond the declaration

The HE Summit Declaration is a commitment by the DHET, HEIs and other stakeholders toward meeting a set of agreed upon goals surrounding the transformation of the higher education sector, via the implementation of specific measures. There are a number of actions that individual HEIs can take forward related to the declaration commitments. These include: a review of the institutional curriculum to ensure that it is more socially relevant and that it is not culturally exclusive; the introduction and institutionalisation of African languages as academic languages; improved professional support and opportunities for female and African lecturers with a strengthened emphasis on post-graduate studies and research; improving the working conditions of academics and support staff and repositioning universities as caring environments that are student-centred. A second set of recommendations require inter-HEI co-operation over the development of an association for academics and the promoting of knowledge-sharing, sectoral solidarity and increased collaboration across the HE terrain. Lastly, there is need for the DHET to engage with and lead on some of the recommendations which require national co-ordination and leadership such as the establishment of a national Stakeholder Forum, the convening of annual HE Summits and the setting up of a working group to expand on the institutional differentiation framework developed. DHET collaboration and support is further required for a focussed recapitalisation of HDIs; developing a national plan of action to address the issue of an aging academic population as well; in the establishing a higher education leadership institute to enhance leadership capacity across the HE sector.

The lead time for implementing the declaration recommendations will vary as some are more long term and resource intensive than others. Likewise, some recommendations laid down in the 'Soudien Report' are more easily implementable than others. What is necessary is an agreed upon set of realistic time frames for such implementation, that take into account existing institutional, financial and other resource constraints. This is vital for preventing the destabilization of HEIs that are already stretched in terms of existing resources capacity. A priority should therefore be to make existing intra and inter-institutional structures functional as opposed to a removal of such structures. For example, existing structures such as Institutional Forums and Councils must be improved with regards to their overall effectiveness.

Going forward, policies may be revised and new recommendations determined. What remains crucial is the need to tackle the broader disjuncture between policy, recommendations and, institutional practice and culture. This requires that proper accountability and monitoring measures be adopted. In addition, the higher education sector in South Africa must build on platforms, such as the HE Summit and the national Stakeholder Forum, that are being created for multi-stakeholder debate and dialogue between HEIs, government and civil society, within the larger context of what Michael Burawoy refers to as "*deliberative democracy*."

Higher education must commit itself toward developing a new vision for the sector premised on institutional collaboration, public engagement and accountability. Simply put, universities cannot hide behind the walls of academic freedom and institutional autonomy but must face up to national, regional and global realities. This is paramount to their existence.

10. Appendices

- Deputy-President's speech
http://www.cepd.org.za/files/Deputy_President_HE_Summit.pdf
- Minister's speech
http://www.cepd.org.za/files/Nzimande_speech_HE_summit.pdf
- Prof Crain Soudien's speech
http://www.cepd.org.za/files/Prof_Crain_Soudien.pdf
- HESA Statement, by Prof Barney Pityana
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- Michael Burawoy speech
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- Minister's Closing Remarks
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